

The Resolution of the Cambodian Conflict: Assessing the Explanatory Value of Zartman's 'Ripeness Theory'*

RAMSES AMER

Department of Political Science, Umeå University

This study is an analysis of the explanatory value of I. William Zartman's 'ripeness theory' in the resolution of the Cambodian conflict. This is done through the identification and testing of the core concepts in Zartman's theoretical approach to the study of conflict resolution in studies ranging from the late 1980s to the early 2000s. The identified core concepts are 'hurting stalemate', 'ripe moment' and 'ripe for resolution'. The development of the conflict in Cambodia is outlined from its background in the 1970s through the different phases of the conflict, from Vietnam's military intervention, launched in late 1978, to the formal resolution of the conflict in 1991. The empirical developments of the Cambodian conflict show that it has to be analysed at three different levels – the internal Cambodian level, the regional level and the global level. The main finding of the study is that Zartman's theoretical approach may have some explanatory value in the case of the resolution of the conflict situation at the internal Cambodian level. No explanatory value is identified at the regional and global levels of the conflict. Thus, if all three levels of the conflict situation are taken into account, no overall explanatory value of Zartman's theoretical approach has been established.

Purpose and Structure

The purpose of this study is to analyse the explanatory value of I. William Zartman's 'ripeness theory' in the resolution of the Cambodian conflict.¹ Analysing the Cambodian conflict in relation to Zartman's theoretical approach will contribute to the

assessment of the explanatory value of his approach for an understanding of the resolution of individual cases of conflict. The study and the testing do not aim to engage in the scholarly debate on the general relevance of Zartman's theoretical approach. However, the findings of the study can be of relevance to that debate.²

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¹ Elements of Zartman's theoretical approach to conflict resolution have been analysed in relation to the resolution of the Cambodian conflict in two earlier studies. The one by Wallensteen (1996: 140–162) is devoted to the Cambodian

conflict and conflict resolution theory and is of relevance in the context of this study. The other study is by Singh, who, in his analysis of conflict resolution in the case of Cambodia, brings in the work of 'conflict theorists', prominently among them Zartman. Singh argues that there is a 'bias among conflict theorists who focus on the negotiating process and outcomes'. This observation relating to 'conflict theorists' is of interest. However, since Singh's article is geared towards the analysis of the Cambodian conflict from the 'milieu perspective' and not towards conflict resolution theory per se, his study is of less relevance in the context of the present study (Singh, 1999: 41–59).

The structure of the study is as follows. First, the core elements of Zartman's theoretical approach are identified. Second, the empirical developments relating to the Cambodian conflict are outlined. Third, the explanatory value of Zartman's theoretical approach is evaluated through an analysis of the empirical developments leading to the resolution of the Cambodian conflict. Fourth, a summary of the findings of the study is presented and conclusions are drawn.

Theoretical Approach

The theoretical approach is drawn from I. William Zartman's publications on conflict resolution from the late 1980s to the early 2000s. The starting point is Zartman's book *Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa* (Zartman, 1989), where key concepts in his theoretical framework are identified. Then follows an overview of how he defines the same concepts in later studies. This aims at establishing the degree of continuity or possible change in Zartman's use of his key concepts.

In the Preface of Zartman's book on conflict and intervention in Africa, he writes that the study is concerned with local sources of conflict in the Third World, notably Africa. It seeks to show that such conflicts find their origins in the politics and relations of the countries involved. The study is also concerned with the possibility of positive intervention by external powers for the resolution of conflicts and seeks to develop some guidelines for such intervention, including the

² Zartman's theoretical approach, centred on 'ripeness', has been the subject of attention in relation to individual cases of conflict – in particular, the Israel–Palestinian conflict – see, for example, Dowty (2006: 5–29), Lieberfeld (1999: 63–82) and Pruitt (1997: 237–250). Lieberfeld also includes the case of South Africa in his study. Furthermore, Pruitt specially assessed ripeness theory in his study. Zartman's theoretical approach has also been assessed from a more general perspective by Kleiboer (1994: 109–116). More recently, ripeness theory has been assessed by Pruitt (2005).

notion of the 'ripe moment', which is considered central to its success (Zartman, 1989: ix).

Zartman discusses the dynamics of a crisis in terms of 'ripe moments'. The 'ripe moment' is viewed in relation to escalation of a crisis or to critical shifts in its intensity. He defines the 'ripe moment' of a crisis in three overlapping ways:

- (1) as mutual, painful stalemates marked by a recent or impending catastrophe; (2) as a time when both parties' efforts at unilateral solutions or 'tracks' are blocked and bilateral solutions or 'tracks' are conceivable; and or (3) as a place on a long slope where the 'ins' start to slip and the 'outs' start to surge. (Zartman, 1989: 10)

He also argues that three dimensions determine the suitability of the moment for conflict resolution: 'One is the vertical dimension of *intensity*, often referred to as *escalation*; the second, the horizontal dimension of *alternatives*, often discussed here as *policy tracks*; and the third, the *power relations*' (Zartman, 1989: 266).

After discussing some examples of escalation and de-escalation in the African cases, Zartman (1989: 267) poses the question: 'What makes for ripeness in these patterns of escalation?' His answer is that the point when a conflict is 'ripe for resolution' is associated with two different sorts of intensity which he calls 'plateaus' and 'precipice', which produce different sorts of pressure, referred to as 'deadlocks' and 'deadlines' (Zartman, 1989: 267).

According to Zartman, a 'plateau' and its 'deadlock' are reached when one side is unable to achieve its aims. The process is completed when the other side arrives at a similar perception. Zartman (1989: 268) states that 'Each party must begin to feel uncomfortable in the costly dead-end into which it has gotten itself'. He further argues that conflict resolution plays on perceptions of an intolerable situation. If the parties to a conflict lack this perception, it is the role of the mediator to persuade them that escalation to break out of the deadlock is not possible. The parties to a conflict have to recognize the strength of the opponent and

their respective inability to overcome that strength (Zartman, 1989: 268).

Turning his attention to the 'precipice', Zartman (1989: 268) says that it is the conceptual opposite of a plateau. The 'precipice' is a realization by the parties to a conflict situation that matters will 'swiftly' get worse and that such a development threatens the mutual check that they have imposed on each other. In Zartman's words, 'a precipice can be an impending catastrophe' (1989: 268).

Zartman sums up his analysis by arguing that

the success of mediation is tied to the perception and creation of a ripe moment in the conflict – either when the parties are locked in a mutual, hurting stalemate marked by a recent or impending catastrophe;... or when the 'ups' and 'downs' start to shift their relative power positions. (Zartman, 1989: 272)

Thus, Zartman identifies a linkage between the 'ripe moment' and a 'hurting stalemate' that is mutual to the parties involved in a conflict situation.

He then elaborates on the difficulties in defining, identifying and seizing the 'ripe moment' in a given conflict situation. This can be exemplified by the following:

Conceptually, the moment stands out, but in reality it is buried in the rubble of events. Even when clearly defined, it may be recognized only after it has passed, but by the same token, it cannot be recognized at all if not clearly defined. (Zartman, 1989: 273)

Zartman's study is framed specifically in terms of Africa, but this does not necessarily imply that the relevance of his approach is limited to that continent. In fact, he argues that 'The same problems and the same methods are relevant for much of the Third World, specifically the Mideast and Asia' (Zartman, 1989: 255–256).

In the overview above, some key concepts in Zartman's theoretical approach to conflict resolution have been identified, namely, 'hurting stalemate', 'ripe moment' and 'ripe for resolution'. In the following, studies published

since 1991 will be examined in order to follow how Zartman utilizes these key concepts.

In a study from 1991 on conflict resolution, Zartman's analyses the 'ripe moment' and its linkage to a 'hurting stalemate' that is mutual to the parties involved in a conflict situation. This is most clearly displayed in the following:

The basic component of a ripe moment is a deadlock that keeps both parties from achieving their goals. But deadlock alone is not enough; it must be a particular kind of stalemate that hurts both parties enough to make them feel uncomfortable and unable to break out by an escalation with acceptable costs. But a mutually hurting stalemate is not enough either; in order to be effective, it generally needs to be riveted to the parties' perception through a recent or looming catastrophe that acts as a deadline or is remembered as a warning. (Zartman, 1991a: 16)

In a study from 1995 on the dynamics and constraints in negotiations in internal conflicts, Zartman elaborates on the concept of 'hurting stalemate' and on its crucial relevance in defining when a conflict situation is 'ripe for resolution'. He makes the observation that

Numerous studies have shown that a mutually hurting stalemate defines the moment as ripe for resolution: both sides are locked in a situation from which they cannot escalate the conflict with their available means and at an acceptable cost. (Zartman, 1995: 8)

In a study on bargaining and conflict resolution from 1996, Zartman discusses 'ripeness', and in this context he argues that

When both parties reach the point where they can no longer escalate their way to victory and the sunk costs plus the countering efforts of the other side make for a costly deadlock, the point of a *mutually hurting stalemate* has arrived. When this realization has taken hold, the situation is ripe for resolution. (Zartman, 1996: 276)

In a study on preventive diplomacy published in 2001, Zartman refers to the 'ripeness theory', which is said to indicate

that conflicts are managed best (and it appears, only) when they are at the level of a mutually

hurting stalemate.... Although such mutual perceptions of pain can come at any level in a conflict, they are generally associated with relatively intense conflictual behaviour. (Zartman, 2001: 4)

Zartman (2001: 4) also states that the 'mutually hurting stalemate' 'occurs when the parties perceive that they are suffering in their current deadlock'. Furthermore, according to Zartman (2001: 4), the parties involved in conflict realize that they 'cannot ignore the conflict and cannot escalate their way unilaterally to victory at an acceptable cost'.

The role of mediation is one of Zartman's areas of interest. In this context, an issue to address is if third-party intervention is an integral part of the ripeness theory. In his study from 2001, Zartman discusses negotiation when analysing preventive diplomacy, and he states that

Negotiation can be carried out directly by the parties themselves, by a third party through mediated negotiation, or in multilateral settings, by a mixture of the two, with some parties serving as mediators among the others. (Zartman, 2001: 6)

In other words, according to Zartman, third-party mediation is not a prerequisite. In fact, negotiations undertaken by the parties to a conflict situation represent one way of conflict resolution.³ Thus, Zartman does not treat third-party mediation as a component or aspect of the ripeness theory per se.

Through this overview of Zartman's theoretical approach to conflict resolution, three core concepts have been identified: 'hurting stalemate', 'ripe moment' and 'ripe for resolution'. The fact that Zartman is referring to the ripeness theory indicates that in his opinion he has formulated a theory. The content of the ripeness theory is, in short, that when the parties to a conflict perceive that the conflict has reached a mutually 'hurting stalemate', the conditions are con-

ducive for resolution of the conflict. In other words, the conflict is 'ripe for resolution'. In the following, the explanatory value of this theoretical approach will be assessed in relation to the Cambodian conflict.

The Cambodian Conflict

Introduction

The Cambodian conflict is relevant to study in the context of assessing the explanatory value of Zartman's theoretical approach. It took place in a geographical area that has not been the focus of the studies carried out by Zartman. Furthermore, the Cambodian conflict was a militarized conflict and recognized as such by the parties involved. Third, the Cambodian conflict is formally resolved and the conflict resolution process has been completed.

The following empirical overview of the developments relating to the Cambodian conflict starts with the emergence of the conflict, background and developments during the second half of the 1970s. This is followed by an overview of the developments following the conflict formation process. Finally, the conflict resolution process is presented.

Background

In 1970, Prince Norodom Sihanouk was overthrown in a military coup led by pro-USA officers. Prince Sihanouk went into exile and later opted to enter into an alliance with the Cambodian⁴ Communist Party. The new leadership in Cambodia received its main foreign support from the USA, while both China and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam supported Sihanouk and his alliance. The ensuing military conflict lasted up to April 1975 when Communist forces seized the capital Phnom Penh and established a new government.⁵

⁴ The terms 'Cambodia' and 'Cambodian' will be used throughout this study except when referring to political parties and to the two competing Cambodian governments from 1979 to 1991.

⁵ For more details concerning the political evolution between 1970 and 1975, see Chandler (1991: 192-235).

³ Zartman (1991b: 311) states that 'it is not clear which conflicts need mediation and which do not'.

The new government carried out radical social and economic changes that resulted in a high number of casualties from diseases and malnourishment. Several hundred thousand people were executed by the government.⁶ On the foreign policy front, military clashes occurred along the common border between Cambodia and Vietnam as early as May and June 1975. This situation was settled and remained relatively stable during the second half of 1975 and throughout 1976. In early 1977, Cambodia embarked on a more active course to emphasize its claims on certain border areas that were under Vietnamese control. Cambodia began patrolling such areas and later escalated its military activities to attacks and shelling against Vietnam. Eventually, Vietnam responded with attacks into Cambodia, and by the end of 1977 the relations between the two countries had reached a state of war. This situation continued to prevail during 1978 until Vietnam launched its military intervention on 25 December 1978. The roots of the conflict between the two countries were both ideological and nationalistic. Vietnam's military intervention led to the overthrow of the Cambodian government, but the ousted leadership was not captured. In early January 1979, Cambodians who had earlier taken refuge in Vietnam formed a new government in Phnom Penh. On 10 January 1979, the country was officially renamed People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) (Amer, 1994a: 38–40, 194–201).

The new administration – the PRK, with Vietnamese support – gained control of the major populated areas, but the overthrown government remained militarily active in rural areas, particularly along the Thai–Cambodia border. The armed opposition against the PRK was made up of Democratic Kampuchea (DK), that is, the overthrown government, also known as the

Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK), and two smaller non-communist groups, the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), led by Son Sann, and the Front uni national pour un Cambodge indépendant, neutre, pacifique et coopératif (FUNCINPEC), led by Prince Sihanouk.

The PRK was fairly successful in consolidating itself within the country and in meeting the basic needs of the population after a severe food shortage in the early years of its existence.⁷ Internationally, the PRK relied on support from Vietnam, Laos, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and countries pursuing a pro-Soviet foreign policy, but it failed to get international recognition from other countries. It also failed to be recognized by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which continued to allow the overthrown government to represent Cambodia. This implied that the PRK was denied much-needed development assistance from the United Nations.⁸

International reactions to the Vietnamese military intervention were generally negative, with the only support for Vietnam's action coming from the pro-Soviet countries. The member-states of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN)⁹ were unanimous in their condemnation. China, Japan and the USA, as well as all member-states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), also condemned the action. This broad coalition assured that the General Assembly, with a growing majority from 1979 and throughout the 1980s, condemned

⁷ The most extensive studies of the PRK years are Vickery (1986a, 1990: 435–465) and Curtis (1990). For the early years, see also Kiernan (1982: 167–195).

⁸ For a detailed analysis of the United Nations decisions with regard to Cambodia's representation, see Amer (1994a: 89–108). For an analysis of the implications of these decisions, see Amer (1990: 52–60). See also Porter (1980), Leifer (1982: 47–59) and Warbrick (1981: 234–246).

⁹ In 1979, ASEAN had five member-states – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam joined ASEAN in 1984.

⁶ The most expert study of the years 1975 to 1978 is Vickery (1984).

the intervention and called for an immediate withdrawal of foreign forces from Cambodia.¹⁰

*Developments Following the Conflict Formation Process, 1981–89*¹¹

Confrontation Phase, 1981–85 In July 1981, the United Nations convened the International Conference on Kampuchea (ICK). The ICK failed to gather all concerned countries, owing to the fact that countries supporting Vietnam's position of non-recognition of DK and opposition to the General Assembly resolutions on Cambodia refused to attend.¹² In June 1982, the PDK, the KPNLF and FUNCINPEC formed the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). The CGDK could rely on support from the broad international coalition that opposed the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia.

During the first half of the 1980s, there was a sharp polarization of positions with regard to the situation in Cambodia, both at the regional and at the global level, and no signs of compromise or rapprochement. The military situation in Cambodia was characterized by offensives by the PRK backed by Vietnamese troops during the yearly dry seasons. The most important of these military offensives took place during the dry season of 1994–95, when all camps of the CGDK on Cambodian territory were overrun. This meant that the forces of the CGDK had to launch all operations from bases in Thailand.

Dialogue Phase, 1986–89 The second half of the 1980s saw important changes in the interaction among the Cambodian parties, among the regional actors in Southeast Asia and among the major powers. At the regional level, the early steps were bilateral discussions between Indonesia and Vietnam. At the national level, Prince Sihanouk met with Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the PRK, in Paris in late 1987. It was the first high-level meeting between representatives of the two Cambodian governments. The regional dialogue brought about an unprecedented meeting in Indonesia in July 1988, known as the first Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM1), with the participation of the member-states of ASEAN, Laos, Vietnam and the four Cambodian parties. JIM2 was held in February 1989, and JIM3 was held in February 1990. At the international level, a Paris Conference on Cambodia (PCC) was convened for a month beginning 30 July 1989.¹³ However, none of these meetings resulted in any agreement on the appropriate model for resolving the Cambodian conflict. Despite the impasse on the diplomatic front, Vietnam went ahead with the declared intention of withdrawing the last of its troops from Cambodia in late September 1989.

*Conflict Resolution Process, 1990–91*¹⁴

During 1990, the focus of attention shifted from regional initiatives to the work of the five permanent members of the Security Council (P-5),¹⁵ aiming at formulating a common stand in regard to the conflict in Cambodia. On 28

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of the General Assembly resolutions and related voting, see Amer (1994a: 124–146, 302–306).

¹¹ This section is based on information derived from Amer (1996a: 13–19, 1996b: 120–124). For studies of various aspects of the situation in and around Cambodia during this period, see among others Frost (1991: 134–140), Saravanamuttu (1996: 37–53) and Vickery (1986a,b, 1987: 292–331, 1990: 435–465).

¹² For details about the ICK, see UN (1981).

¹³ For more details concerning the 1989 Paris Conference on Cambodia, see Acharya, Lizée & Peou (1991) and Haas (1991: 42–53).

¹⁴ This section is based on information derived from Amer (1991: 16–26) and from Amer (1996a: 19–34). Other studies on this problem are Frost (1991: 142–143), Goy (1992: 120–121), Iosart (1990: 292–297, 1993: 653–654) and Kiernan (1992: 13–19).

¹⁵ The P-5 in 1990 were China, France, the USSR, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) and the USA.

August, the P-5 had reached an understanding and they presented a document entitled 'Framework for a comprehensive political settlement of the Cambodia conflict', which included, among other things, provisions for the creation of a United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). UNTAC would be given powers to implement a comprehensive settlement. In order to ensure a neutral political environment, conducive to the holding of free and fair elections, Cambodian administrative units that could influence the outcome of elections would be placed under direct United Nations supervision. In this context, special attention was to be given to foreign affairs, national defence, finance, public security and information. UNTAC would supervise a ceasefire between the Cambodian parties and verify the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country. UNTAC would also be responsible for the organization and conduct of free and fair elections in Cambodia. The P-5 also urged the Cambodian parties to create a Supreme National Council (SNC) to act as the legitimate body and source of authority in Cambodia and to represent Cambodia in international organizations (A/45/472-S/21689).

The Cambodian parties responded positively to the 'Framework' and accepted it as a basis for a comprehensive settlement of the Cambodian conflict at a meeting in Jakarta on 9–10 September. They also decided to create a SNC that would have twelve members, six from the State of Cambodia (SOC)¹⁶ and two from each of the three parties of the National Government of Cambodia (NGC).¹⁷

Subsequently, the Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution that endorsed the Framework as a basis for a comprehensive settlement of the Cambodian conflict (S/RES/668, 1990). The General Assembly also unanimously adopted a resolution that

welcomed the Security Council's resolution and the Framework (A/RES/45/3).

Despite these positive developments, the conflict resolution process did not progress further during the closing months of 1990. This was primarily due to two factors. First, the Cambodian parties failed to agree on the role that Prince Sihanouk should play in the SNC, since he was not one of the original members. This led to a situation where the SNC could not fulfil its envisaged duties. Second, the P-5 presented a more detailed blueprint for a comprehensive settlement of the Cambodian conflict on 26 November 1990. When this proposal was formally presented to the members of the SNC, at a meeting in Paris on 21–23 December, they failed to agree on all parts of it (A/46/61-S/22059). Later, it became evident that the SOC had expressed displeasure about certain provisions in the draft. The main complaints were that the proposal would lead to a *de facto* dismantling of the SOC administration and that it would facilitate a return to power of the PDK. Furthermore, there were no references to the 'genocide' carried out by the PDK while in power. The other three Cambodian parties accepted the November blueprint. The situation remained deadlocked during the first five months of 1991, with the only notable progress being a ceasefire, implemented in May, following a call from the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Cambodian parties.

In an attempt to break the deadlock, a meeting attended by the four Cambodian parties was arranged in Jakarta on 2–4 June 1991. The meeting ended on an inconclusive note, due mainly to the fact that the PDK opposed some compromises that were agreeable to the other three parties. However, following this meeting, a dramatic change in the relationship between the Cambodian parties took place. At a series of meetings from late June to September, the Cambodian

¹⁶ The PRK changed its official name to the SOC in April 1989.

¹⁷ The CGDK officially changed its name to the NGC in February 1990.

parties reached agreements on the major disputed points. First, the SOC and the NGC would be preserved and continue to function in the zones which they controlled, pending the general elections. Second, the SNC would set up its headquarters in Phnom Penh and represent Cambodia at the United Nations. Furthermore, Prince Sihanouk was chosen as Chairman of the SNC. Third, the parties agreed to stop receiving foreign military assistance. Fourth, they agreed to cut their military forces by 70% (i.e. to demobilize them) and that the remaining 30% would hand over their weapons to United Nations supervisors and enter cantonments. This would take place when the proposed UNTAC had been established in Cambodia. Finally, the electoral system was to be proportional within each of Cambodia's provinces but not at the national level.

It was also decided that the PCC would be reconvened in late October 1991. During this second session of the PCC held on 23 October 1991, the 'Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict' (A/46/608-S/23177) and the 'Agreement Concerning the Sovereignty, Independence, Territorial Integrity and Inviolability, Neutrality and National Unity of Cambodia' (A/46/608-S/23177) were signed by the following participating states: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia,¹⁸ Canada, China, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the USSR, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK), the USA, Vietnam and Yugoslavia.¹⁹ The signing of these agreements brought about a formal resolution to the Cambodian conflict.

¹⁸ Cambodia was represented by the SNC under the leadership of its President – Prince Sihanouk (A/46/608-S/23177).

¹⁹ Yugoslavia represented the Non-Aligned Movement (A/46/608-S/23177).

Assessing Zartman's Theoretical Approach

Having examined the empirical developments relating to the Cambodian conflict, the next step in the study will be to assess the explanatory value of Zartman's theoretical approach and its three key concepts: 'hurting stalemate', 'ripe moment' and 'ripe for resolution'. Within the pattern of negotiations that took place, the role of third-party mediation will also be examined.

The conflict situation in and around Cambodia began during the second half of the 1970s as a bilateral interstate conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam. It was then transformed into a conflict at three levels and dimensions. First, the internal Cambodian level pitted the PRK (later SOC) against the PDK and two other opposition parties, which formed the CGDK in 1982 (later the NGC). Second, the regional level pitted Vietnam against ASEAN. Third, the international/global level had non-Southeast Asian countries supporting each of the two sides of the conflict. The USSR supported the PRK and Vietnam, and China and the USA supported the CGDK. The United Nations became the stage for a struggle for international support by the two Cambodian parties that was won by the PDK on its own from 1979 to 1981 and from 1982 through the CGDK.

Following the final withdrawal of Vietnamese troops in September 1989, the military situation developed into a stalemate. The opposition forces made some progress on the battlefield, but not to the extent of threatening the survival of the SOC or its control over the major parts of the country. It was also evident that the SOC was not in a position to militarily defeat the opposition forces, and, consequently, their existence was not threatened. In other words, a stalemate existed on the battlefield but not a 'hurting stalemate';

that is, neither side was threatened by outright military defeat, nor was the situation for either side unbearable.²⁰

If a potential threat of a possibly emerging 'hurting stalemate' may be identified in the Cambodian conflict, it was the threat of a termination of external support. China and Vietnam, respectively, played crucial roles as external supporters of the Cambodian parties. China supported the NGC, and Vietnam supported the SOC.²¹ With the improvement of relations between China and Vietnam and the indications that they were making progress in the process of achieving full normalization of relations, in the summer of 1991, the need to support the respective sides in the Cambodian conflict was diminishing. China's policy had been to support groups opposed to Vietnam in Cambodia, and, with relations normalized with Vietnam, this would no longer be in China's interest. From the Vietnamese perspective, with a cessation of Chinese backing of anti-Vietnamese groups in Cambodia, there would not be the same need for Vietnam to support the SOC. Furthermore, a resolution of the Cambodian conflict was a necessary prerequisite for the official full normalization of relations between China and Vietnam, as this was one precondition stated by China. With China and Vietnam wanting to fully normalize their relations, increased pressure was put on the Cambodian parties to find a negotiated settlement.²²

²⁰ In his study of the Cambodian conflict and conflict resolution theory, Wallensteen (1996: 159) reaches a similar conclusion; that is, there was a 'stalemate' and it was 'hurting' but 'only in indirect sense'. He says that the stalemate was 'uncomfortable' but not 'threatening the survival of either side'.

²¹ Wallensteen (1996:159) does not consider this aspect in his analysis. In the same book, Amer (1996a: 33–34) takes into consideration the impact of the China–Vietnam rapprochement on the Cambodian parties but not in relation to Zartman's theoretical approach.

²² For a discussion relating to the linkages between the two conflict situations and their conflict resolutions processes, see Amer (2002: 19–21). For details on the relations between China and Vietnam from the mid-1970s to 1991, see Amer (1994b: 357–383, 1999: 68–74, 98–108, 2004: 320–328).

Was such a cessation of support to the respective side in the Cambodian conflict on the cards in the summer of 1991, and did China and Vietnam put increased diplomatic pressure on the Cambodian parties? China and Vietnam may have been contemplating the possibility of reducing and even ending their support, once relations between the two countries had been fully normalized, but such normalization was formally achieved only in November 1991, after the Paris Agreements on Cambodia. As for diplomatic pressure, it is likely that China and Vietnam, respectively, tried to influence the Cambodian parties to compromise, since a resolution of the Cambodian conflict was a prerequisite for full normalization between the two countries. More important than the behaviour of China and Vietnam was the way in which the Cambodian parties perceived the rapprochement between the two countries. There are indications that the Cambodian parties perceived a cessation of support as potentially forthcoming. If this line of argumentation is pursued, the negotiations and compromises between the Cambodian parties from late June to September 1991, following months of no progress, can possibly be linked to the looming threat of cessation of the crucial foreign support from China and Vietnam, respectively. Without such support, the two Cambodian sides would be weakened. This scenario may have been perceived as so threatening as to compel the Cambodian parties to start compromising in order to reach agreements on their disputed issues. This eventually led to the signing of the Paris Agreements on Cambodia and the formal resolution of the conflict. Thus, the potential threat of an emerging situation that could possibly lead to a mutually 'hurting stalemate' can be construed in the case of the Cambodian conflict.

However, it is important to be careful when assessing the patterns of interpretation

and perception of the Cambodian parties, since it is difficult to ascertain that they have been correctly understood. Furthermore, since the line of argumentation pursued above is based on possible perceptions of a potential situation that would lead to a 'hurting stalemate' among the Cambodian parties, the conclusion drawn on the explanatory value of a 'hurting stalemate' must reflect this uncertainty.

If there was a potentially emerging situation in which a mutually 'hurting stalemate' could occur in the Cambodian conflict, it would seem logical to assume that it was in connection with this 'hurting stalemate' that the 'ripe moment' emerged and that the conflict situation became 'ripe for resolution'. This might be the case at one level of the Cambodian conflict, namely, the intra-Cambodian one – that is, the conflict among the Cambodian parties. However, at regional and global levels of the conflict, consensus had been achieved in the Security Council, in September 1990, and the General Assembly of the United Nations, in October 1990. It can well be argued that, at the regional and global levels, there had been a 'ripe moment' earlier and that the conflict was 'ripe for resolution' in September 1990. However, the full resolution of the Cambodian conflict could be achieved only when the Cambodian parties resolved their fundamental differences, and this did not take place until 1991.

Also of relevance is the fact that the external parties, that is, the regional actors, China, the USSR and the USA, did not seek an understanding and a common stand because of any 'hurting stalemate' affecting or involving them, but, rather, wanted to remove the Cambodian conflict from the regional and global agendas at a time of improved relations between the superpowers and between the regional powers. Thus, shifting strategic interests and a desire to improve and expand relations motivated the external

powers to seek a compromise in order to settle their differences over Cambodia.

What role did third-party mediation play in the resolution of the Cambodian conflict? During the second half of the 1980s, countries like Indonesia, Australia and France attempted to mediate. Indonesia initiated a dialogue with Vietnam, and this paved the way for the JIM-process, which brought together the regional actors (ASEAN, Vietnam and Laos) and the Cambodian parties for three meetings in 1988, 1989 and 1990, respectively. The PCC was convened for a month beginning in late July 1989. Then, in 1990, the P-5 began a series of meetings leading to a consensus among them and the adoption of a peace plan for Cambodia.²³ This paved the way for the adoption of a unanimous resolution on the agenda item 'The Situation in Cambodia' in the General Assembly in October. However, the impact on the Cambodian parties was limited to the formation of the SNC in September 1990 and to positive responses, albeit with reservations, to the plan formulated by the P-5. Further attempts to stimulate momentum in the Cambodian peace process, that is, among the Cambodian parties, in late 1990 did not succeed. As displayed earlier, it was not until the period June to September 1991 that progress was achieved on that front, leading up to the formal resolution of the Cambodian conflict at the reconvened PCC in October 1991. The progress in 1991 was not brought about by third-party mediations but rather through the impact of the Sino-Vietnamese normalization process. Thus, third-party mediation or initiatives

²³ The role of the USA in this process is subject to debate. Solomon, who was then part of the US administration, argues that the USA played a leading role, not only in getting the P-5 together for talks, but also in moving the process ahead (Solomon, 2000: 5, 19, 40–48), whereas Clymer, although noting that the 'Bush administration was helpful in urging serious collaboration among the Perm 5', does not argue that the USA assumed the leading role in this process (Clymer, 2004: 152–157).

worked well at the regional and global levels of the Cambodian conflict, but they were not sufficient to bring about a solution to the intra-Cambodian level of the conflict, unless the Chinese and Vietnamese pressure should be interpreted as mediation. The latter is debatable.

Concluding Remarks

In the context of this study, some of the complexities involved in understanding and explaining the resolution of the Cambodian conflict have been highlighted, and the theoretical approach formulated by Zartman has been evaluated in relation to the conflict.

The analysis has displayed that, in this case, there was possibly a perceived threat of an emerging situation that could potentially lead to a mutually 'hurting stalemate' from the perspective of the Cambodian parties. This situation was brought about by developments in the Sino-Vietnamese relationship that potentially threatened the important external support to both sides of the intra-Cambodian conflict. Furthermore, as a resolution of the Cambodian conflict was a precondition for full normalization of relations between China and Vietnam, these two countries applied pressure on the Cambodian parties to settle their differences and pave the way for a settlement of the Cambodian conflict. When did the perception of a potentially impending mutually 'hurting stalemate' emerge? Judging from the diplomatic activities and agreements reached among the Cambodian parties between June and September 1991, this would have been the period when it emerged.

Since the Cambodian conflict also existed at a regional level and a global level, these two levels must be taken into consideration. The above analysis has displayed that no 'hurting stalemate' can be identified among the actors at these two levels. Their decisions to compromise in 1990 seem to have been influenced

and motivated by changing geostrategic considerations and not by any perceived 'hurting stalemate'. Changing priorities allowed the regional and global powers to move beyond their earlier confrontation and their remaining divergent views on the situation in Cambodia.

Having argued that there was possibly a perceived threat of a potentially emerging mutually 'hurting stalemate' in the Cambodian conflict at the internal Cambodian level, one would presume that the 'ripe moment' and the conflict becoming 'ripe for resolution' would coincide with the compromises reached by the Cambodian parties from late June to September 1991. The analysis has displayed that this fits well into the pattern of negotiations and compromises at the intra-Cambodian level of the conflict, that is, among the Cambodian parties. However, at the regional and global levels of the conflict, compromises and mutual understanding had already been made and achieved in 1990, through unanimous decisions in the Security Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations, respectively. This indicates that, at these two levels, a 'ripe moment' occurred earlier than at the intra-Cambodian level.

A number of countries were involved as third-party mediators at different stages of the conflict during the 1980s and into the early 1990s, among them Indonesia, Australia and France. In 1990, initiative shifted to the P-5 of the Security Council. Eventually, the Cambodian parties were, as noted above, more influenced by developments in the Sino-Vietnamese relationship. Whether this should be seen as third-party mediation or simply as external pressure can be debated.

As noted in the section devoted to the assessment of the explanatory value of Zartman's theoretical approach, the ripeness theory may have some explanatory value in the case of the resolution of the Cambodian conflict at the intra-Cambodian level. But no explanatory value has been identified at the regional and

global levels. Given the fact that all three levels need to be taken into account in the context of the conflict resolution process, no overall explanatory value of Zartman's theoretical approach has been established in this case.

The case of Cambodia displays the complexities in resolving conflicts that involve not only parties and actors from within one country but also regional and global actors. These complexities make it all the more difficult to identify when a 'hurting stalemate' or a 'ripe moment' occurred and when the whole conflict situation became 'ripe for resolution'. They may occur at different stages of the conflict for the different levels: national, regional and global.

The concepts of 'hurting stalemate', 'ripe moment' and 'ripe for resolution' are relevant to studying the context of conflict resolution in the Cambodian case, but, as observed above, their explanatory value is, at best, limited to the national level, and no explanatory value has been found at the regional and global levels. Since the case of Cambodia is not unique (i.e. other cases of conflict also involve national, regional and global dimensions), it is important that theoretical approaches to conflict resolution take into account such complexities and their impact on a conflict resolution process. Zartman's theoretical approach would benefit from further development taking such complexities into account.

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RAMSES AMER, b. 1961, PhD in Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University (1992); Associate Professor in Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University (1997); Research Associate, Department of Peace and Conflict Research; Uppsala University (1992–2004); Senior Lecturer in Peace and Conflict Studies, Department of Political Science, Umeå University (2004–). Major areas of research: security issues and conflict resolution in Southeast Asia; and the role of the United Nations in the international system. Most recent book: *Vietnamese Foreign Policy in Transition* (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies; New York: St Martin's, 1999), co-edited with Carlyle A. Thayer.