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Yale-UN Oral History Project

Gareth Evans

Jean Krasno, Interviewer

December 10, 1997

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Index: Cambodia

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Jean Krasno: This is an interview with Gareth Evans at Yale University on December 10th 1997, and we will be discussing Australia's role in Cambodia. Mr. Evans, would you, just for the record, give some background on your political career?

Gareth Evans: I became Australia's foreign minister in September 1988. Before that, I had been a minister in three other portfolios from 1983, and in politics since 1978 as a senator. I stayed foreign minister until 1996, when we lost the election to the leader of the opposition. But my background in relation to the Cambodian issue also goes right back, personally, to a visit I made to the country as a student in '68, so I had a fairly intense interest in the situation there. When the opportunity came for me as foreign minister to try and do something to kick-start this peace process, it was something that had some attractions, not only from the professional diplomatic point of view, from an Australian national interest point of view, but also from a personal point of view.

JK: Good, then I think we'll start the questions on Cambodia. You had brought along with you a book by Ken Berry on Cambodia from the Australian point of view. He said that a book has to start somewhere, and an interview has to start somewhere, and it turns out that we've both chosen the same place to start, which was the first Paris Peace Conference in the summer of 1989. So I thought I'd start there.

GE: This was the big attempt by the French to bring things to fruition around the theory of a quadripartite transitional government, which I think had been most people's concept until then, as to how the situation might ultimately be resolved. There were mixed views about whether a political settlement could or should precede a military settlement. But they're all variations on the theme of some kind of power-sharing arrangement, which would recognize the reality of the fairly intimate relationship between the three non-SOC parties, namely, the Khmer Rouge and FUNCINPEC and Son Sann's KPNLF party. Notwithstanding all the previous horror of the genocide, the Vietnamese invasion brought them together, and they were operating as a coalition. There needed to be a solution that reflected the reality of that working cooperation, and also the reality of Hun Sen's SOC government on the ground. It was thought by everyone, me included, that that quadripartite solution was the only way forward, although it was not uncontroversial in terms of our various domestic constituencies, all of whom had the horrors of the prospect of any continuing cooperation with the Khmer Rouge.

But in spite of that approach, the Paris conference did fail, and it failed essentially, when you boil it all down, on the demand of the CGDK, the tripartite coalition, and the various international backers of that coalition, for the inclusion of the Khmer Rouge inany transitional administration. And on the other hand, the absolute unwillingness of Hun Sen, and its international backers, in particular of course, Vietnam and the Soviet Union, to be willing to concede that. And of all the maneuverings and all the detail, essentially that was the dynamic at work there, and that's what brought the

conference to its knees, and that's why it became necessary to think [of] another way through the impasse in the aftermath of that failure.

JK: Were you at the Paris conference [during] that summer of '89, or was Australia represented?

GE: Yes, we were there, and I was one of those who was very disappointed by the outcome of it. I can't pretend that I was a major player at that stage, but nonetheless, we were participants in the process, and it was very disappointing. I had in fact made some suggestions which are documented in the Berry book. This by the way, is an excellent detailed chronology and analysis of the Australian involvement, which I've just been refreshing my memory on, but not sufficiently: I think for the purposes of this interview, when in doubt on a matter of detail, scholars can feel free to rely on the Berry book as an absolutely meticulously accurate and detailed account of the Australian and my own involvements. Anything I say will be simply supplementary impressions to the basic stuff that's in this book.

JK: Right, okay. After the failure of that first conference, as I understand it, Australia, Indonesia, France, and others made an intensive effort to restart the talks. How was Australia involved in that, and what happened?

GE: Well, this was the period of the most intense and most significant involvement of Australia—the period after the Paris conference. I think it all really began with the

conversation that I had with Stephen Solarz at the time of the General Assembly session in October 1989. I had a discussion with him—we were old friends—in the Australian Ambassador's residence in Beekman Place. It was myself, Solarz, and in fact another Australian diplomat—three of us talking through this. This was the occasion when Stephen raised with me an idea that had been knocking around in his mind for some months, and which he'd canvassed with various people in the US Administration, but not with any reaction of a positive or useful kind.

That was for essentially a UN role as the circuit-breaker in the Cambodian peace process, the idea being that something could be done on the basis of the Namibian example, but on a rather more extended scale, with the UN actually playing the role of an interim government, in which they wouldn't merely supervise or monitor an election process, but would actually organize that election process, and have a critical role in the administration of the country during the period leading up to the election—a much more hands-on role than had previously been contemplated. This was an idea which I thought immediately had some attractions, in that it was a completely different idea to variations on the quadripartite proposal, which had been around for a long time and which seemed to be going nowhere; and one that had the potential, if it could only attract the support of Vietnam and SOC in the first instance, who obviously stood to lose from anything which pushed them out of their central governing role during the transitional period; and if it could also win the support of China, because of course anything involving any major role for the UN had to contend immediately with China's role as a member of the Permanent Five, and its patronage of the Khmer Rouge and its unwillingness to do anything which would put the Khmer Rouge's status at risk. It seemed to me that there was, however,

potentially something in it for everyone, in terms of there being a face-saving context in which the Chinese could withdraw; a way [for] the SOC and the Vietnamese giving up governing authority without conceding directly to the Khmer Rouge in whole or part; and equally having attractions for the odds and ends and other Cambodian factions, as a way, simply, of moving the whole game forward—not necessarily on quite as favorable terms as might have been involved in the quadripartite model, but nonetheless, not going backwards. So the idea immediately, to me, had quite a lot of resonance, and I expressed a great deal of interest to Solarz.

It was extremely undeveloped, it was simply an idea. It also bore some resemblance to an idea that Sihanouk had himself raised a couple of years earlier for a UN trusteeship role, but which had never been fleshed out: Pit certainly had some resonance to that. I in fact said to the Australian diplomat who will remain unnamed, "Gee, that was interesting, I think we might have the bones of something that could actually work here." And the diplomat in question said, "Do you really think so, I mean, it sounds like just a great waste of everyone's time." I said, "Well, on the contrary, I think we should do some hard work following that up." We did just that.

I spent some time talking it through with senior officials when I got back to Australia, just developing the concept a little more, and made, then, a public announcement in the Australian parliament on the 24th of November '89, just outlining what seemed to me a way of breaking through the impasse, just laying out the concept of it, not in much detail. But we got quite a degree of publicity, and we also shared it widely around all the other Paris conference players. And the initial reactions from all of them were interested enough to make me make the judgment that it really did justify a

fairly substantial diplomatic effort on our part to test and refine the idea further, which we then did with a very detailed exercise. Senior Australian official Michael Costello, then the deputy head of my department, subsequently the secretary of it, led this diplomacy. And he went to some thirty major meetings with key players in thirteen different countries over a twenty-one day period from the 12th of December '89 through the 19th of January 1990. This is all documented in the Berry book. But this, I think, was the crucial break-through in the sense of picking up an idea and then really getting out and testing it and refining it. He and I spoke constantly over the telephone and exchanged cables, and the idea got more and more refined as the odyssey proceeded.

JK: Okay. I wanted to ask you something about that, because that kind of diplomacy is key in developing these kinds of issues, in building support. Was there initially resistance to the idea of the UN taking such a major role? And then how did you overcome that, if you did meet with resistance?

GE: It was thought intriguing, the notion that the UN might be the vehicle for breaking the impasse. Remember, this is the end of '89, it's the tumultuous year with the end of the Cold War; it's at a period when there's just a recognition that the ice flows were breaking up all over the place; it was possible to think in a new and creative way about all sorts of things happening internationally, in particular, a better role for the UN. We weren't quite, at this stage, at the height of the enthusiasm, which existed for an all-too-short period, for the UN to get involved in just about everything under the sun, [?]But it was coming off the back of what had been a successful operation in Namibia, and that

was the example I think most present in people's mind—how that example might be picked up and played with. But I mean, as always with this kind of diplomacy, what it's all about is finding formulae which meet people's perceived national interests, and provide the face-savers retreats where necessary, and the necessary degree of cover if people are not getting their optimal outcomes, or at least decently sub-optimal ones. The whole point about this was that I saw almost immediately that this had the potential, when you looked at it from every single perspective, of meeting those criteria. Remember that this is probably the most complex single problem —not the biggest international problem there was, but certainly one of the most complex -- because you had your three layers of players. You had the factions, with a long and bloody internecine history within the country itself; you had the immediate regional patrons, Vietnam in the case of SOC, and ASEAN in the case of the CGDK; you had the superpower patrons standing behind them, China in the case of the Khmer Rouge, Russia in the case of SOC, and the United States and France in the case of Sihanouk and the non-communist members of the CGDK coalition. You really did have an extraordinary number of players with different interests, all of whom had to be satisfied.

So the search was on, that's what all this diplomacy was about, to test the reaction of every single one of them, beginning with the Vietnamese and the Chinese, and Hun Sen himself. Those were the first three calls that Costello made, because unless they were potentially interested, on the face of having the most to lose, this wasn't going anywhere. The Khmer Rouge always had the most to lose of all, but the judgment was made very early on that the Khmer Rouge, without the support of the Chinese, would not be able to be a decisive player, I think as it proved to be. And so it was a matter really of

positioning all the other players to see what was possible. Anyway, the short point is that by the end of that dialogue process, I had a sufficiently clear story to tell to Ali Alatas, who was a good friend and colleague of mine. We'd become foreign ministers almost at the same time in September '88, we'd been through the trauma of the Paris Peace Conference together, we'd been through the trauma of patching up Australia and Indonesia's bilateral relations, which is a long saga (I'll tell you that on another occasion), we'd had the ordeal by fire of dealing with the East Timor problem, which is a constantly recurring theme in Australia and Indonesia relations, and we had a very, very good, close professional working relationship. He, as co-chairman of the Paris Conference process, I saw as being an absolutely critical player in all of this, and all of my efforts were devoted towards getting some ideas together which I saw him as being the key player to push.

So in that context, we spent a lot of time keeping Indonesia up to speed with what we were up to, and in particular, encouraging the Indonesians to have a meeting sooner rather than later in Jakarta to explore this idea. Alatas agreed with that, and in February of 1990, what I think was probably the critical meeting in terms of what subsequently followed, was in fact held in Jakarta. Indonesia asked Australia to work behind the scenes as a resource delegation for that meeting, and in that context we put a huge effort into preparing the famous Red Book, which was a set of six working papers, which were a refinement and a development over 160-odd pages of the ideas that had first emerged and were refined in the diplomacy process. But then we made a major effort to turn that into the working bones of an operational plan covering all the different dimensions—civil administration, election organization, military security, plus the conceptual issues

involved in terms of sovereignty, structure of government, and options and possibilities. We even went so far as to cost what the UN operation might look like, and it's quite remarkable that the figure we came up of $1.3 billion (US), for what we conceptualized as an 18-month operation, in fact was as close as it was to the final actual cost of the UN operation, which was $1.7 billion for a two-year operation.

JK: That's remarkable.

GE: There were a number of differences in the way in which the missions turned out to be finally structured. But I think if you trace the whole course of what happened, an enormous amount comes right back to the Australian proposal as it was refined and developed in this very short period, and as it was conceptualized in operational outline, and even in budgetary outline, in those working papers for the February 1990 meeting.

JK: On the Red Book, the working papers, were they developed as a part of the meeting in Jakarta, or immediately following that meeting?

GE: No, they were developed very deliberately as a resource document for the meeting in Jakarta, and they were the documents, in fact—much to the chagrin of the French, who throughout were very cautious about an Australian role, if I can put it gently—they were the documents that actually mattered. We made it clear, and Alatas made it clear that they were there as resource documents to be taken or left as the mood of the JIM (Jakarta Informal Meeting) headed. But in fact, it was the document around which everything

revolved. We went to the trouble of actually translating key chunks of it into Khmer, which made a huge impact on all the Cambodian players. Nobody had ever done them the courtesy, or taken the time or trouble to do that. We didn't try to do it for every last page of the thing, but key concepts, which were absolutely critical to convey on the key balances that we were trying to strike. We thought it was absolutely critical that they be communicated in the language with which all the players were absolutely familiar rather than to work in English or French.

JK: And you had all four parties there? You had the four parties as well as the international players there?

GE: There wasn't all the Paris cast; it was essentially a regional meeting the Indonesians had convened. And it was for that reason a meeting that could not have been decisive in moving things forward, because you would have had to put the proceeds of it back into the Paris conference format, and that's of course eventually what happened. But it certainly had the key players there, including the French as joint chair, but it was a deliberate exercise in convening, as I recall, at the regional [level]. It was a deliberate attempt to just have a regional input, rather than to try and develop momentum from that.

In the event, of course, the Jakarta meeting did fail. The sticking points were pretty much the same as those which caused the Paris conference to fail. The power-sharing issue, which just couldn't be finally resolved. The device we had of course, just interpolating brackets here, which subsequently became the SNC, the Supreme National Council, as the concept developed, was a formal organization embodying the sovereignty

of the country in which the four factions would be represented. The difference from the former quadripartite power-sharing model, however, being that particular body would not be exercising formal executive authority as the "government" of the country; it was there as a sort of repository of sovereignty, it was there as the potential holder of [a] UN seat. But the difference was that it wouldn't be "the government." Nonetheless, from the parties' point of view, a lot of the same issues arose about what the balance was between the different factions on this supreme body would be, whether it would be an equal sharing arrangement, or some weighted formula, and who would be chairman of it, and so on. And so there was a lot of pushing and shoving and maneuvering on that. But the other issue which came into play, as it had in Paris, but even more starkly in Jakarta, was whether or not there would be reference to genocide in the role of documents -- with the Khmer Rouge of course resisting that, and the SOC insisting upon it.

Nonetheless, even though the conference failed, I think the significance of it was that the idea of the UN role was absolutely alive and well, and a huge number of issues had in fact been agreed upon. This is summarized in the Berry book. Some of the Paris principles had been adopted and reapplied, the principle of occupying the Cambodian seat at the UN with this so-called Supreme National Council, the need for a whole series of arrangements about the return of refugees and treatment of prisoners, and reconstruction issues, were all endorsed. And the general principle of a UN role in the civil administration of the country and the organization of elections—the critical elements of the Australian peace plan—were basically endorsed. So everyone came away feeling sort of exhausted and frustrated that we were so near and yet so far. But looking back, that was the pivotal meeting, bringing the [factions] together. And really,

when you look at the next two years of this endlessly protracted process before it all came finally together again at the Paris Peace Conference at the end of ’91, really everything that’s in that final settlement can be traced back to material that was on the table, issues that were on the table, concepts that were on the table in the Jakarta meeting, and which just simply took a long time to untangle and finally resolve. But really it was all there.

JK: By September of 1990, the Security Council had adopted the framework that had evolved out of the Jakarta meeting. Were there refinements that were made in between those two dates, when the Jakarta meeting ended and when the Security Council then adopted the framework?

GE: The P-5 did take it upon itself to pick up the pieces after the Jakarta meeting, and really that’s where—you talk about the Security Council, but really it was the P-5 that was running this, and had an endless series of meetings. Quite a lot of which Australia played a major role in, although not very much acknowledged in the official documentation -- it was more behind the scenes. For example, at one stage we developed the single negotiating text, the famous SNT, as another way of moving the whole thing forward, as it was getting stymied in various directions, and it was a way of bringing together in a single document the issues which all the competing teams were trading off against each other. That was an Australian contribution. I forget when, I can find it in the Berry book—but I remember another critical way of moving the game forward was another Australian suggestion that we deal with the genocide issue by moving forward rather than backwards, by talking about putting in place arrangements which would avoid

the possibility of genocide ever occurring. This got the "G" word in, but in a way that didn't directly attribute responsibility for all the genocide in the past. That became an important element. There was also another development on the reconstruction side. There was a conference in Tokyo, in which Australia again played a fairly major role that arose out of, and was a further development of one of the working committees in the original Paris conference in '89, which further developed what was necessary to put together as part of the reconstruction package.

So there was a whole series of strands that were running, that were flying around, a lot of them the reinvention of the wheel, going back to basics and then laboriously reconstructing the things which ended up being pretty much back where we started out in 1990. And really my memory is very hazy of who precisely did or said what to whom over that entire period between February 1990 and when it all finally came together in 1991. It's, as I say, meticulously documented in the Berry book. But I just remember it as a period of endless circling, sniffing like dogs beside a lamppost, and of the breaking up and reforming of little groups and alliances, and neuroses of one kind or another. It's very difficult to identify the really major peaks and valleys in that process. It was really just laborious and difficult. A lot had to do with the personalities of the key players, and I think, the key breakthrough eventually came when at their famous Pattaya meeting in Thailand, Sihanouk and Hun Sen basically agreed, as I recall, on the structure and shape of the Supreme National Council, and that was a pretty critical breakthrough in resolving that part of it and helping to move the game forward. But throughout the process, I think the Chinese played a pretty constructive role, and they were critical, always critical, as to the ultimate success of this, but it did finally come together.

JK: How did the Chinese change their position over that time period that they began to facilitate the solution?

GE: The Chinese were always helpful and cooperative players. I have no complaint personally of the role that the Chinese played. They wanted to get the basic deal, in a sense, for their clients, the Khmer Rouge. But I think they realized that they were not exactly a winner as far as international public opinion in terms of that relationship. What they had wanted to do through their support of the Khmer Rouge, namely to deny Vietnam uncontested hegemony over all of Indo-China, at that aspiration they had largely succeeded. They weren't going to get much more out of this in terms of regional real politik. The best thing they could get out of it was the effective neutralization of the other Indo-Chinese countries, and thus the significance of those formally neutral and non-aligned with Cambodia, which was part of the whole Paris process. They did want to, they played fairly hard for all of the references to genocide and so on, in terms of taking positions. But I saw them throughout as a country which had basically made the decision that it wanted out of the whole agreement; wanted out on terms that were face-saving for it; wanted out on terms that didn't leave Vietnam in obviously uncontested control of Cambodia, neither directly or through its proxy on the ground; wanted out in circumstances where it didn't imbalance some kind of political process. But all the rest was detail, I mean once they made up their mind, and they made up their mind very early on that the Australian-UN proposal was the vehicle for achieving this. Really, I think

what you saw from the Chinese was what you saw from everyone else. It was simply the maneuvering that was involved in getting that outcome with the basic concept in mind.

JK: So when Michael Costello went to meet with them before the Jakarta meeting and after the first Paris conference, his reaction from them was fairly positive to your proposal?

GE: Yes, it was. It was certainly sufficiently encouraging to justify us continuing. That was the key that was the criteria we were applying. If there had been a big fat "no," a big rock in the path, obviously it would not have been worth pursuing because the UN concept could not have gone anywhere without that. The first thing that was done was to test the water; the Vietnamese and Hun Sen were absolutely critical. In fact, the Russians got tucked in between because the Russian deputy foreign minister happened to be in Tokyo, where Costello was transited between Phnom Penh and Beijing, which was a very useful reinforcement of the basic Vietnam-Soviet Union-Hun Sen position. Costello had all of that firmly in his mind when he went to talk to the Chinese. The Chinese were actually very interested in the whole thing, they were absolutely critical.

JK: And so his meeting with Hun Sen was also fairly positive?

GE: Yes, all of those initial meetings were really more positive than anticipated.

JK: Was the timing right, is that why that was...

GE: Yes, exactly. You never get anywhere in these sorts of things unless the idea is ripe, is right, and the time is right, and I think that's exactly the combination that we had. There was this enormous frustration with the failure of the Paris conference; there was recognition that the quadripartite model was just not going anywhere. [?] Moreover, publics were getting more restless in the Western populaces with the quadripartite proposal The mood was there, the mood was receptive, for a new idea coming on the scene, which would actually show a way through the impasse. But I think the third critical element in the equation—and I know it sounds like an awful drumbeat, Australia—but the third critical element was the energy and the commitment with which this idea was pursued. If it had just been another idea... The idea was in a sense around. Solarz had been talking to people about it, but he said, "I can't get anyone really very interested." [?]He said, "What it needs is a government, which is in good shape, and which would be listened to as a government—not just an individual, but a government—to pick this up and run with it, to get it into the key meetings and to really push it." He said that he thought Australia was as well equipped as anyone to do this, because we're in pretty good standing with all the key players. At the same time, this is the classic little-player diplomacy line, we wouldn't [?] frighten the horses anywhere, we were big enough to be competent and efficient and well-resourced, and to have a voice that would be listened to, but we were not so big that we carried all the baggage that the major powers and the super-powers do.

JK: Yes, so the United States could not have really launched that kind of initiative?

GE: No, I frankly don't think they could've, and the US, Dirk Solomons and so on, were very quick to recognize that and to begin to put their weight and muscle essentially behind the Australian proposal. There's a bit of background, too, that needs to be unobscured. The history of Australia's involvement in this does go back really quite a long way, but in particular what I'm thinking of is an initiative that was taken by my predecessor, Bill Hayden in 1984, which at the time really got right up the Asian noses. It was a proposal basically to send Pol Pot off to an international war crimes tribunal, and to if not actually recognize SOC, at least to try to move the weight that way.

What I'm thinking of was when Australia, back in October '83, withdrew from co-sponsorship of the Asian resolution on Cambodia. We felt it was too one-sided, that Korea and Vietnam took insufficient account of Pol Pot's genocide, and so on, which made Asia very displeased with us. Then in early '84, there was a sort of peace proposal put forward by Australia, I've forgotten the detailed content of it, it was variations on a power-sharing model, but it also contained this element of sending Pol Pot off to a war crimes tribunal, which was not very practical, then or now, but it was the sort of thing, again, calculated to get up Asian noses. Now in the end things were patched up with the Asians, but what needs to be brought into mind is that this little exercise stood us in terrifically good standing with the Vietnamese, and the SOC, because we had this track record of showing the new Labor government coming in to power in '83, after a long period of Conservative rule. The Conservatives of course had been in government and taken us into the Vietnam conflict, and it was the Labor party's government that had taken us out of Vietnam and had been very critical of involvement. At the same time, our

basic relationships with the Asian countries were very strong, and after that little fissure in ’83-’84, it got patched up again. But it also served, that little exercise of ours, to distance ourselves from the United States position, which was fiercely hostile to Vietnam throughout—MIAs, POWs, all that stuff was still alive and well in this period. So all of those things were pretty important in giving Australia the kind of credentials to do this. [It was] a good idea, right time, a country with the right credentials to pursue this kind of thing because of our access to credibility with all the players at all the different levels we’re talking about, except the Khmer Rouge, we didn’t have credentials with them. But the whole point of the exercise was to put the Khmer Rouge in a corner, from which they couldn’t come out. And finally, pursuing it with the energy and the detail that, frankly, startled all sorts of people, including some hands-on involvement that I had. Berry reminds me in a footnote here in his book that takes my mind back to the extraordinary period when we worked for days on end, it was an eight-day drafting session conducted basically in my ministerial office. We worked with a team of officials for eighteen-hour days, drafting this 154-page series of working papers that became the “Red Book” We sent a mission, military and other, up to Cambodia to make a judgment of what was operational. It was a technical mission in Cambodia. If you’re talking about civil administration, we were working on a model for the UN. Whether it was going to be a complete replacement model, or decapitation model, or just slice the top off and remove those officials, or whether it was to be a monitoring and supervision model—somebody had to know what the hell was actually going on in terms of the structure of the government, and possibly make some judgments with a military team about what would be necessary to secure the demobilization and disarmament of the armed forces. So we

thought through all of that, plus we had another ten working on cost and liaison with the UN on finally getting some broad estimates. We had X number of personnel doing Y sort of tasks, and it was just a huge effort and I think anyone who looks back on the history of the period, and goes back to the documents, will be quite startled by the scale and intensity. The whole point of that, of course, was to demonstrate that the thing could be done. If we had just lifted it to the level of high conceptual involvement, and high conceptual framework stuff, an awful lot of people would have said, "That's very interesting, but is it practical, is it workable?" and would have just gone off arguing endlessly about the structures of the power-sharing model and about whether genocide should be... Those arguments still took place, they were still showstoppers at the time, but the ground had shifted underneath, and what had shifted was the perception that, hey, this is actually doable, this is affordable.

JK: And you demonstrated that, you showed that.

GE: We demonstrated that, and I think that was absolutely our major contribution. Again, everything that happened thereafter, we played an ongoing role, we nagged and stimulated and prodded, and we came up with single texts here and formally there, and reconstruction models here, and something else and something else. We were pushing and poking all the way along, but the basic job was that very first effort right at the beginning.

JK: You did a very thorough job, because you did all the research to base it on.

GE: Sure, it wasn't just top-of-the-head stuff. It is quite remarkable, I think, and you know that was based on consultations at UN headquarters. One of the things in Costello's original shuttle diplomacy was a long session of a couple of days at the UN headquarters with Rafi Ahmed and these sorts of guys, just talking through what would be involved in any UN exercise of this kind.

JK: There were also consultations going on with the UN.

GE: That was right at the beginning in the January '89 period before the Jakarta meeting. So that's what I really want to emphasize, that we began to be successful with these kinds of things that just required so many things to come together. An idea by itself is critical, but just by itself [it is not enough].

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JK: Australia and you personally put in tremendous amounts of effort in preparing this initiative. What were the interests of Australia? What was driving you to try to resolve this issue?

GE: Number one, it was the major regional problem in terms of dividing Asia from Vietnam, and involving also, as I've already described, the major regional players and the superpowers in a highly divisive and potentially continuing destabilizing way. As a

country whose own security future is bound up with the security of our own region to our north, we had an immediate tie and security interest in helping resolve it. So that was problem number one, or motivation number one.

Motivation number two was, as part of a larger exercise in regional engagement, I mean Australia has lived for decades with the perception of us being very much an outsider in the region, much reinforced by the racist immigration policy which continued to the mid-'60s and indeed, early '70s, by the time it was formally knocked on the head. And of course, the general perception of us as being an acolyte first of Britain and then of the United States, of being not a serious member of the region. And we made the judgment, the government through the '80s, that Australia's future was wholly bound up not only in security terms, but in economic terms with the region, and that it was critical for us to establish a status as an insider rather than an outsider, as a player, participant, and partner. As I often used to say at the time, rather than being like the urchin outside the tart shop, nose pressed against the window, looking in from the outside. And I think that object, that motivation, was achieved absolutely in spades with the role that we played here, being seen as a really big, intricate force. I can't remember which one of the endless swirling meetings in Jakarta this was at, it might have been the original one in February '90, or it might have been one of the later ones, but it was a real emotional turning point, because it was one of those situations where there was a coffee break and the corridors were swarming during the break between sessions, and swarming people, and there was just a general ebb and flow of humanity as these international conferences tend to be. I just pushed open the door of a room, I thought it was something else, and I saw the six Asian foreign ministers in a huddle around a coffee table, and I said, "I'm

sorry, I didn't mean to intrude on your discussion." And they all just looked up in a very friendly fashion and one of them said, "Oh, come in here, you're one of us, we're all on the same side, we're in this together. Get a cup of coffee and come on in." I thought that was exactly what I'd been hoping to get out of it.

The third thing is just obviously the particular character of the Cambodian issue as not just another diplomatic problem to be resolved, but a problem of a peculiarly horrifying kind. The Cambodian genocide remains just one of the ugliest episodes of the twentieth century. The sense of the West having some responsibility for it, not Australia, but the West, it is amply documented in the Shawcross book, "Sideshow: Nixon, Kissinger, and the destruction of Cambodia," by William Shawcross, which is really the seminal account I think of how the whole Cambodian tragedy needn't have happened, could've been avoided. I was very moved personally by that. I began by saying an hour or so ago that I had visited Cambodia as a student, backpacking or cardboard-suitcasing my way to Europe and a bit in Phnom Penh, and up the middle of the country and I'd been very deeply touched by the country itself, by the people, I found them gentle and delightful in the extreme. When the genocide happened in the aftermath of that visit I made in '68, when the genocide occurred soon after that I was very deeply moved personally by that and I suppose felt something of a personal mission or crusade to do something about it. It was as if my generation owed, had some moral responsibility to fix things up. Had it been our generation that had done the killing and participated in the war, we mightn't have made the decision—that was the generation before us—but certainly my generation

had been up there creating some of the havoc, generating this unhappy chain of events, and I guess we had a responsibility to try and fix it. So these are the three things that...

JK: Was there domestic pressure within Australia to try to do something?

GE: Some, to the extent that it was an issue. The notion that successive Australian governments had been playing footsie with the Khmer Rouge, in particular in the context of giving support to this quadripartite model, had been generating quite a lot of media attention, ...[?] That was certainly a motivation for me to try and find a way out of the Cambodia impasse that did not involve a role for the Khmer Rouge in the government, which made all sorts of sense essentially diplomatically, but just was a very hard sell with domestic constituencies everywhere. And this is one of the things motivating Solarz to find a solution to this, because he was passionately antagonistic to the Khmer Rouge, hated the whole idea of the quadripartite model, and was himself opposed to that. So that was a consideration. The whole story of Australian diplomacy for the last ten years or so has been the story of engagement with Asia and repositioning ourselves and particularly with the end of the Cold War, and the need for everyone to rethink the foundations of their security and economic future, who can be relied upon to do what, and were you going to be totally self-sufficient, and the whole move also towards regional relationships and regional architecture. All this is happening around the same time. The Asia forum, the security dialogue body which came along a couple of years later, was all a part of this repositioning process.

All of that's going backward at the moment because the Conservative government has been in power since '96. One classic way of describing the difference is that the new Prime Minister is very fond of saying that Australia does not have to choose between its history and its geography; that we can work with both. The history of cultural relationships to kin, identification with Europe and the United States; and geography being the Asians. That's his perspective, but my perspective is that you *do* have to choose. The history is too much white, patronizing and racist. The impression is a reality. So you've got to really understand that's why I emphasize the regional security, and the ticket for Australia's engagement in dimensions of the Cambodian initiative in the way that I did, because you've got to understand that in the context of the whole repositioning of Australian foreign policy that was going on at the same time.

JK: In terms of bringing the US along with your initiative and an increased role for the UN, how did that work, and was there a difference in the fact that George Bush had become President in '89, and there was a change of administration in the US?

GE: Dirk Solomons was the key US player. Baker had never become very hands-on involved. The difficult ones to bring along were the French, particularly because they just had so much historical baggage, butt was a combination of reasons.

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