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Cambodia at a Crossroads? Democracy and Development on the 30th Anniversary of the Paris Peace Agreements

Conveners:

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Abstract

October 2021 marks the 30-year anniversary of Cambodia's Paris Peace Agreements. Signed in 1991, the historic accords marked the end of Cambodia's protracted civil conflict and wield global significance as the first major multilateral peace accord to follow the end of the Cold War. Steeled and sealed in an era of heady (neo)liberal optimism, the Paris treaties ushered the era of UNTAC, a United Nations peacekeeping force, tasked with a threefold mission: to steer Cambodia from war to peace, from authoritarianism to democracy, and from a command to free market economy. Through the 90s and 00s, rapid rates of economic growth shored Cambodia's reputation as the poster-boy of post-war transitions. But against the promises of the end-of-history idealists, growth, democracy and development have not come hand-in-hand. Thirty-years on, Cambodia presents a de facto one-party state, under the 35-year reign of an aging autocrat, whose stability is secured through violent repression of conflict over extraction of resources and profit. Labour and human rights abuses have led the EU to enforce trade sanctions, as the US considers following suit. Has the poster-boy become a pariah? And yet, as relations with the West cool, Cambodia's ties with China's growing global influence tighten. Amid the turbulence, a cultural renaissance and popular struggles quietly flourish. At this timely juncture, we invite critical reflections on the legacy of the Paris Peace Accords and the trajectory of Cambodia's transition: past, present and prospect.

Double session