<Book Review>

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Brothers in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979

ANDREW MERTHA

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Andrew Mertha's book, *Brothers in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979*, not only provides historical insight into the bureaucratic structure of China's aid to its client state, i.e. Democratic Kampuchea (DK) between 1975 and 1979, but also explicates the causal effect of the fragmented Chinese and DK bureaucratic institutions, the variation of which determines the degree of China's ability to assert influence over DK. The main contribution of this book rests on two major breakthroughs. First, Mertha's access to a variety of high-quality archival sources in Cambodia, combined with extensive interviews with former Chinese and Khmer Rouge officials and cadres, illuminates new details on this important subject. Second, his method of structured, focused comparison is rigorous and cutting-edge social science; he meticulously constructs descriptive accounts of and systematically traces the variation of bureaucratic-institutional fragmentation/integrity and its corresponding difference in the outcomes (i.e. China's ability to influence DK). He does through three empirical cases, namely military aid, economic aid, and trade in chapters 4–6.

This book answers the following question: why was a powerful China unable to influence its far weaker and ostensibly dependent and client state Cambodia? Grounded in Graham Allison's "bureaucratic politics" level of analysis of foreign policy decision-making, Mertha focuses on inter-ministerial competition and bureaucratic-institutional infighting and fragmentation in China and DK as the main units of analysis (chapters 2–3). The central argument in this book is that the varied degree of fragmentation of bureaucratic institutions in China and DK as they interacted with each other at the implementation stage of China's aid policy explains the corresponding degree of China's ability to exert influence over DK during the period 1975–79 (p. 9). Before delving into the structured, focused comparison of the three empirical case studies, Mertha asserts that both regimes in Beijing and Phnom Penh share at least three common attributes, namely the Leninist single-party state, significant rural development, and power in the standing committee of the Party. However, he makes the case that the degree of institutional integrity varies significantly because of differences in the ways in which individual bureaucrats navigated the two institutional environments in China and DK. As Mertha summed up, "both countries suffered from subversions of the formal institutional structure, whether fragmented, as in China, or fluid as in DK" (pp. 11–12). Thus, to Mertha, the fragmentation of bureaucratic institutions in both countries is the most important explanatory variable of China's ability to influence the DK during this period. In the three empirical cases (chapters 4–6), the main causal inference from the three case studies can be summarized in the table below:

Table 1 Institutional Strength and Influence

	China's Institutional Integrity	DK's Institutional Integrity	China's Influence over DK
Kraing Leav Airport (military)	Strong	Strong and Assertive	Limited
Kampong Som Petroleum Refinery (economic)	Fragmented	Weak/not a Viable Partner	Limited
DK Foreign Trade Development	Strong	Fragmented but still a Viable Partner	Significant

In the case of Kraing Leav military airport, China's influence was severely limited by a political and military stalemate as the then-DK Defense Minister Son Sen, with strong backing of Pol Pot, was able to push back China's assertion of its influence by dictating its preference for the location and the content of the agreement (pp. 87–89). Although the Chinese Military Attaché at the Chinese Embassy was under a "clear command-and-control" authority structure of the Chinese military (p. 91), it was "unable to influence DK in the implementation of China's military aid policy (p. 97). In the case of the Kampong Som petroleum refinery project, the fragmentation of China's vast network of bureaucratic institutions that oversaw energy and petroleum severely limited China's ability to exert its influence over DK's energy sector which would potentially lock down DK's dependence on China's crude oil in the long term. The Chinese could not shape DK's energy policy even when the relevant DK authority was in disarray (pp. 108–109). However, in the case of the DK's foreign trade development, China was able to assert enormous and lasting influence over DK trade and commerce institutions because the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations, and Ministry of Communications were able to overcome bureaucratic infighting. This, he further argues, is because the DK Ministry of Commerce was "institutionally complex and fragmented" but still a viable partner for Chinese counterparts (pp. 120, 125). Mertha asserts that this is the only area where China was able to exert significant influence over DK in this highly asymmetrical relationship.

This book is not without its shortcomings. I will highlight two issues. First, by privileging the causal role of bureaucratic politics as the key theoretical framework for this study, Mertha brushes aside the role of top decision-makers in shaping policy outcomes (pp. 16–19), and more importantly argues that there was no notable difference between the leftists and pragmatists in Beijing when it came to China's DK policy. Both ignored the "negative externality" of their policy on human suffering in Cambodia and prioritized China's ideological and strategic interests in Cambodia during this period (pp. 17–18). This assumption is somewhat problematic because the change of leadership in Beijing in July 1977 had a significant impact on the direction of China's overall foreign aid policy. When Deng Xiaoping was at the helm in Beijing in late 1977, he immediately began to restore China's economic health, which had been severely damaged by the Cultural Revolution in 1966–76 (Teiwes and Sun 2007). This raises an important question: what did prag-

matists like Deng and his allies in Beijing want from DK after 1977? This leadership change had a significant impact on China's management of foreign aid and Chinese bureaucratic institutions that handled China's aid to the DK. Deng and his economics-minded allies, especially Vice-Premier Li Xiannian, aggressively pushed to manage China's economy in general and in particular, cut down on waste in China's material aid overseas. This was a major shift from Mao Zedong's "give whatever the Vietnamese ally requested" during the Vietnam War, 1965–73. In fact, economics-minded leaders like Vice-Premier Li Xiannian and Foreign Trade Minister Li Qiang were extremely displeased with the mismanagement and waste of Chinese material aid in North Vietnam as early as 1973 (see Path 2011). Hence there was a sobering lesson and strong sense of "generosity" fatigue in Beijing as they moved to aid DK after 1975.

The shift described above most likely had a direct impact on the configuration of China's aid to DK, as discussed in Mertha's three empirical cases covering the period of China's aid to the DK during 1975 and 1978. In the eyes of the pragmatists like Deng Xiaoping, Pol Pot's anti-Vietnamese stance and his war against Vietnam obviously served Deng's desire to stage a punitive war against Vietnam. But the scope of Cambodia's post-1975 nation-building under the Pol Pot genocidal regime (pp. 5–53) also presented a huge economic burden for China (pp. 50–53). To reduce Cambodia's reliance on Chinese aid, Beijing needed to help Cambodia stand on its feet and the development of DK foreign trade and commerce was the next logical step forward. Interestingly, in this book Chinese reports from Phnom Penh back to Beijing in 1977–78 are riddled with a litany of complaints about Cambodia's misuse and waste of equipment and material aid, and the severe lack of skilled workers, professionalism, and capable leadership (for instance, see pp. 104–111 in chapter 5). It is likely that for the pragmatists, the economic cost of propping up a failed state like Cambodia under the Pol Pot regime outweighed the expected gain in terms of political influence. The extent to which a new leader like Deng Xiaoping ordered the bureaucrats to cut down on the misuse and waste of Chinese material aid somewhat undercuts the centrality of Mertha's "bureaucratic politics" argument.

Second, although this book provides new insight into the scope of China's aid to the DK, the exact size of that aid remains unknown. For instance, the figures for economic and military aid documented in this book (pp. 80–82) are "China's pledges of aid" and we still do not how much of that was actually delivered to the Khmer Rouge. In short, the exact scope and size of China's aid to the DK remains a subject for further research. As Mertha suggested, access to Chinese sources on this topic would provide a fuller picture.

This book is the first to provide such insightful details on China's aid to the DK between 1975 and 1978, but certainly not the last one on this subject. To historians, this book is certainly a major breakthrough in the history of China's aid to the DK. But as a political scientist, Mertha's central aim in this book is the generalizability and applicability of the findings in this particular case to China's foreign aid decision-making at present. The last chapter (chapter 7) of this book lays claim

to its important relevance to the bureaucratic-institutional level of analysis of China's foreign aid policy today. This book is a useful resource for students of China's foreign aid policy.

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