<Book Review>

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previously unpublished internal CPP documentation, and 150 interviews. The study is also clearly written, with useful detail and comprehensible conclusions. Among the book's drawbacks are, first, that it traces the historical underpinnings of the CPP's modern-day use of coercion back to the Khmer Rouge era. Actually, coercion was common in Cambodia also under French colonialism as well as the regimes of Norodom Sihanouk and Lon Nol. Second, the author seems driven by a need in every chapter to prioritize coercion over other determinants (e.g., clientelism) of regime making in Cambodia, becoming almost coercion-deterministic. Perhaps some parts of Cambodia were affected more by other determinants. A third drawback is that the book does not grapple with the extent to which Cambodia might have ever considered a limited democracy. Since the author does discuss democracy, it would have been useful to see literature on that subject.

Nevertheless, this study represents a newly published, up-to-date, and important source for understanding the evolution of the Cambodian state and regime. It is highly informative and easy to read. I would recommend it not only for academics and journalists but also for laypeople. It is a useful addition to the literature on contemporary Cambodian and Southeast Asian politics.

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The Apathy of Empire: Cambodia in American Geopolitics

James A. Tyner
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2024.

James A. Tyner's *The Apathy of Empire: Cambodia in American Geopolitics* is a meticulously researched study of Cambodia's importance to US policymakers after World War II. Moving beyond the highly cited cases of Richard Nixon's invasion of Cambodia in 1970 and the "secret" carpet bombings from 1969 to 1973, Tyner's study critically positions US military intervention in Cambodia within the context of the United States' shifting grand strategy and national security interests during the Cold War, as they applied to Vietnam and Indochina more broadly. Framing his project as an exercise in critical geopolitics in general—"making arguments about geopolitical conjunctures and about trying to understand those conjunctures" (p. 23)—and practical geopolitics in particular—the contingent and contextual "domain of policymaking and geopolitical reasoning whereby officials articulate national interests and rationalize concrete diplomatic overtures and military operations" (p. 2)—Tyner articulates how Cambodia as a case study unsettles the seemingly straightforward question of center and periphery that underlies the execution of US grand strategy and the constitution of a spatially conditioned American *nomos*.

Drawing from Peter Feaver and Hal Brands, Tyner defines "grand strategy" as "a plan for applying resources to achieve certain defined objectives" (p. 4) and a "conceptual framework that helps nations determine *where* they want to go and how they ought to get there" (p. 5). Drawing from the legal theorist Carl Schmitt, who defines *nomos* as a "unity of space and law, of order and orientation" (p. 5), Tyner centers a desired spatial order or *nomos* as "both the process and the project of grand strategies" (p. 5). Although by no means predetermined, US geopolitical domination emerged as a new spatial order or American *nomos* in the post-World War II era. Drawing from earlier histories of expansion, American officials "sought to construct a global economy centered on American national interests" (p. 13), a hegemonic spatial order in service of free markets, private property, and US corporate interests. Significant to Indochina in general, and Cambodia in particular, American lawmakers "were also prepared, if need be, to kill for this spatial order" (p. 13). Over the course of six chapters and an epilogue, *The Apathy of Empire* traces the shifting terrain of US foreign policy from Franklin Roosevelt to Richard Nixon in relation to Cambodia's increasing geopolitical importance to the war in Vietnam.

Chapter 1, "Into the Breach," addresses World War II as a turning point for a new American *nomos* and documents the United States' early involvement in Southeast Asia. Despite a US alliance with Ho Chi Minh and his Viet Minh army against the Axis powers and collaborationist regimes like Vichy France during the latter years of World War II, most American officials considered Europe most central to US interests. Subsequently, American president Harry Truman signaled that the United States would not be opposed to French forces mobilizing to reclaim what they continued to see as their colonial possessions. By 1947 the rhetoric of a "Soviet threat" to US interests had taken hold, and it was formally codified in a 1948 National Security Council report warning that the "ultimate objective of Soviet-directed world communism is the domination of the world" (p. 38). Attuned to Communist paranoia in the United States, the French recast their colonial war against the Viet Minh as a global war against Communism and forwarded a proposal to establish a "free" Vietnam in opposition to Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam. From here, the United States' goal became the installation and support of "a pro-Western, non-communist state as a viable alternative" (p. 40), one that would participate in the emergent US-controlled global economy.

Chapter 2, "Bracketing War," addresses US intervention in Southeast Asia under Dwight D. Eisenhower's administration. Emphasizing the significance of the region's raw materials, especially for the United States and its ally Japan, as well as its geostrategic location between East and South Asia, American officials "agreed that Indochina—and by extension, Southeast Asia—was important; left unclear was whether the region was *absolutely* important" (p. 61). With the defeat of France by the Viet Minh guerrilla army in May 1954 and the threat of an Indochina "lost to communism," the US geopolitical calculus experienced a change, and Eisenhower moved to recenter Indochina. The political response to the French defeat moved Southeast Asia geographically from periphery

to main stage of the Cold War. Subscribing to the "domino theory," Eisenhower's administration saw Indochina, and especially Vietnam, as key to Southeast Asia, believing that "if the communists gained Indochina, it was only a question of time until all of Southeast Asia fell, thus imperiling America's western defensive perimeter" (p. 70). The Geneva Accords of 1954 partitioned Vietnam into north and south, pending national elections regarding reunification in 1956. Wanting to construct a pro-Western, anti-Communist ally in Southeast Asia, the United States did not sign the accords but drafted its own proviso, which would establish the legal basis for future actions in violation of the accords. In 1961 John F. Kennedy entered the White House, and his administration heralded a change in US military doctrine. Kennedy centered unconventional military operations and counterinsurgency operations, developing a comprehensive approach to respond to the National Liberation Front's insurgency in South Vietnam, expanding the United States' role in the region. Increasingly "the security of America's vital interests was tied to the physical and territorial security of South Vietnam" (p. 82), with plans formulated to "seal off the borders" between South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. When Lyndon Johnson took over for Kennedy, the United States was committed to its path in Vietnam. Johnson increased covert operations in North Vietnam, increased American presence in South Vietnam, and expanded programs and military operations to seal off Vietnam's borders with Cambodia and Laos through diplomacy or force.

Chapter 3, "Bordering War," details the process through which Cambodia, a sovereign and neutral state, moved from the geopolitical periphery to center stage in the US war in Indochina. Discussing US-Cambodia relations through the fraught political dynamics between Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodia's head of state, and successive American presidents, the chapter illustrates the racial logic that governed US Cold War policy in Southeast Asia, one premised on the idea of Communism as globally monolithic and one that inflexibly partitioned the world into two camps. Dismissing Sihanouk's national security concerns, the United States overrode Cambodia's territorial sovereignty, with Cambodia's border with South Vietnam taking precedence over all other considerations.

Chapter 4, "Aterritorial Wars," addresses the paradoxical character of US foreign policy in South Vietnam and Cambodia. Whereas US military strategy was explicitly territorial in South Vietnam, founded upon containment of Communism, "American objectives in Cambodia were aterritorial, marked by a geopolitical logic not confined to territorial aggrandizement" (p. 136). Tyner argues that US military objectives were never about occupying or securing Cambodian territory but about securing the borders of South Vietnam.

Chapter 5, "A Widening War," and Chapter 6, "The Perfidy of Geopolitics," discuss the expansion of the Vietnam War into Cambodia's interior with the Richard Nixon presidency. In Chapter 5, Tyner's argument addresses the simultaneous process by which Cambodia became central to Nixon's foreign policy in Indochina vis-à-vis Vietnam, while Vietnam in turn paradoxically became peripheral to the United States' spatial order. Shifting the United States' grand strategy

away from the "domino theory," Nixon reframed South Vietnam as important only so far as "U.S. policy and practice in the region demonstrated America's resolve to sustain U.S. global hegemony and credibility" (p. 169). Looking to "compel" North Vietnam to accept an agreement most advantageous to US interests, the United States unleashed unrestricted warfare against Cambodia, ostensibly denying Communists sanctuary and disrupting the "Ho Chi Minh Trail" through brutal B-52 carpet bombing campaigns. As Nixon used the sustained bombardment of Cambodia to "buy time," he and Henry Kissinger gradually dissociated the United States from South Vietnam, downplaying the region's significance to national security interests. In Chapter 6, Tyner expands on the relegation of Vietnam to peripheral importance for the American *nomos* as well as the disastrous consequences of the expansion of war into Cambodia. Nixon's bid to "win a just peace" in Vietnam ignited civil war in Cambodia, as the country became more unstable from unrelenting US bombardment. For Kissinger and Nixon, the United States' prestige and credibility took precedence over the lives of men, women, and children in Cambodia, and what this required was the United States providing South Vietnam with "just enough 'breathing space' to not fall immediately . . . [T]o this end, Cambodia remained central to U.S. geopolitics" (p. 239).

The epilogue of *The Apathy of Empire* summarizes the arc of the book, reiterates the book's intervention with regard to Cambodia, and addresses US grand strategy in the post-Vietnam War era. Post-World War II, US grand strategy promoted a US-led spatial global order and capitalist economy. This required containment of what the United States perceived to be "Soviet-led communism." In Indochina, Tyner argues, US intervention "was never about the people of Cambodia, Vietnam, or Laos; the objective was never to 'save' or 'defend' the citizens of Southeast Asia from the harmful 'cancer' of communism" (p. 242). Instead, the US Cold War objectives were "always about geopolitical expansion in the abstract: to protect America's national security interests and to expand American power and prestige through the region" (p. 242). To those ends, the United States adopted a "strategic but apathetic approach to Cambodia" (p. 245). This approach required US disregard for international law and had disastrous consequences for the Cambodian people.

Tyner's *The Apathy of Empire* is an invaluable contribution to the critical study of US-Cambodia relations, Cambodian American histories of violence, and US Cold War interventions in Southeast Asia. The author's impressive inclusion of primary sources, including State Department memos, telegraphs, meeting minutes, telephone transcripts, and more, offers detailed insight into the cultural politics of statecraft and the logics of militarized security. The book could benefit, however, from an expanded engagement with the analysis Tyner leaves us with in the later sections of the book. The first reference to the "apathy" of the book's title comes in the epilogue. Although I understand the significance of Tyner's discussion of US grand strategy in relation to the making of a global spatial order, I would have also appreciated a discussion of the relationship between apathy, as an affective orientation, and the spatial order of empire. What, for instance, is the link between "the apathy of empire" and the spatialization of disposability? How/is apathy racialized

as well as spatialized? How might the militarized rhetoric of "collateral damage" reflect an apathy with the potential to unravel the peripheral/central dichotomy? How might apathy function alongside antipathy in empire's uneven distribution of injury and death? Such additional engagement could contribute to the reckoning Tyner evokes in the Acknowledgments section, a framing of the deployment of US sovereign violence in service to the spatial expansion of corporate interests and finance capital as "war crimes and other crimes against humanity" (p. 261).

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Forging the Nation: Land Struggles in Myanmar's Transition Period

SiuSue Mark
Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2023.

In *Forging the Nation*, SiuSue Mark tackles a dual transformation in Myanmar during the second decade of the twentieth-first century: the fragile democratization process and the trend toward a free-market economy, although both were short-lived. Mark reexamines and analyzes these transformations based on the literature on the political economy and ethnic politics in Myanmar as well as her extensive fieldwork with the stakeholders involved in land (re)allocation and management at the time.

Forging the Nation is organized into seven chapters in addition to an introduction and conclusion. The introduction presents the main argument, which revolves around the political economy of land tenure reform and land politics, since both represent changes in the system of property rights as well as land administration and governance (pp. 3–4). Mark argues that the democratization process did not only allow commoners to participate in the political sphere to some extent but also empowered common people in contestation over the land, as an economic asset, amid the "land rush" driven by global capitalism (pp. 16, 22). The democratization process, in particular, enabled the coexistence of "pacts between a reformist and political elites, and pressure from grassroots mobilization" that reconstituted land institutions (p. 7).

The first four chapters of *Forging the Nation* portray the dynamics of land politics at the national level. In Chapter 1, "The Context of Land Tenure Reform," and Chapter 2, "The State's Quest for Legitimacy Opens Space," Mark describes the history and reform of Myanmar's legal-political institutions and their impacts on the allocation of political power and economic resources. The author notes that Myanmar's legal system was plagued with "stacked laws," which resulted in people having to deal with different types of laws enacted by various regimes throughout the country's