

New US Embargo on Cambodia over Friendship with China

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The United States continues a process of targeting and isolating nations around the globe increasingly choosing to do business with Beijing rather than Washington. The most recent of these is the Southeast Asia nation of Cambodia.

For years Cambodia has incrementally pivoted from once serving US foreign policy objectives in the region, to striking a balance between East and West, to now doubling down on its ties with China in response to increasing levels of coercion not only from the US, but also from America’s European allies.

In early December 2021 the US announced an arms embargo on Cambodia, following [sanctions](#) against Cambodian leaders, for what the US claims is China’s “deepening military influence” in the country, CNBC reported.

In their [article](#), “US orders arms embargo on Cambodia, cites Chinese influence,” CNBC would claim:

The US has ordered an arms embargo on Cambodia, citing deepening Chinese military influence, corruption and human rights abuses by the government and armed forces in the Southeast Asian country.

The article would also note:

A notice in the Federal Register said developments in Cambodia were “contrary to US national security and foreign policy interests.”

Regarding previous US sanctions against Cambodian politicians, CNBC would report:

The latest restrictions follow the Treasury Department’s ordering in November of sanctions against two senior Cambodian military officials for corruption and come amid

increasing concern about Beijing's sway.

CNBC would also point out that the US has imposed similar "controls" on other nations around the globe including Myanmar, China, Russia, and Venezuela.

Indeed, the list of nations the US is attempting to isolate for either not subordinating themselves sufficiently to Washington's "national security and foreign policy interests" or who have chosen to do business instead with Washington's large and growing list of adversaries continues to expand – reflecting a global shift of power from West to East and exposing the overused nature of US sanctions, embargoes, and other threats that are clearly proving unconvincing even for smaller nations like Cambodia.

Cambodia's relationship with the United States for decades could easily be described as a "hostage" situation. In addition to the constant threat of sanctions and embargoes, Cambodia also faced a US-sponsored political opposition Washington sought to eventually install into power.

The now banned Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) is currently based in Washington DC with several of its senior leaders either openly residing in the United States, in other Western countries, or who have admitted to receiving extensive US government backing in their bid to take power in Cambodia.

In a Phnom Penh Post [article](#) titled, "Sokha video producer closes Phnom Penh office in fear," one of these senior CNRP leaders – Kem Sokha – would be quoted as saying:

"...the USA that has assisted me, they asked me to take the model from Yugoslavia, Serbia, where they can change the dictator [Slobodan] Milosevic," he continues, referring to the former Serbian and Yugoslavian leader who resigned amid popular protests following disputed elections, and died while on trial for war crimes.

He would also claim:

"I do not do anything at my own will. There experts, professors at universities in Washington, DC, Montreal, Canada, hired by the Americans in order to advise me on the strategy to change the dictator leader in Cambodia."

The US – as it does in nations around the globe it is targeting for political and economic coercion or even regime change – had also been funding a network of organizations engaged in political interference within Cambodia.

This included US State Department-funded media platforms operating inside Cambodia ranging from Radio Free Asia and Voice of America, to fronts posing as rights groups including [LICADHO](#) and the [Cambodian Center for Independent Media](#) (CCIM).

These US-sponsored organizations together with the CNRP sought to execute the "Yugoslavia model," to overthrow the Cambodian government and install into power the CNRP.

The "Yugoslavia model" itself is, according to the [New York Times](#), based on US interference in Serbia during the late 1990's regarding the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic. Opposition groups including Otpor were admittedly funded to the tune of several million dollars a year by the US government toward this end.

What the US claims is Cambodia carrying out “human rights abuses” and being mired in “corruption” is simply Cambodia uprooting US interference within its internal political affairs and opting instead to do business with nations like China who respect Cambodia’s national sovereignty and are content with simply doing business.

Free of US interference, Cambodia is able to decide on geopolitical matters in terms of what is in the best interests of itself and the region in which it resides.

CNBC and other Western publications reporting on Cambodia decry the nation’s support for China over claims in the South China Sea vis-a-vis Washington’s attempts to undermine them.

Cambodia has also been accused by Washington of preparing to invite China’s navy in to use its ports. It is interesting that the United States – a nation with a global military presence including several ongoing illegal military occupations – is decrying what would be a mutually agreed upon deal between Cambodia and China inside Cambodia’s sovereign territory.

Decades ago the US was able to maintain its global primacy in a way that made it look effortless. Today, these efforts appear clumsy and even desperate – used with growing ineffectiveness against an ever increasing number of “disobedient” nations.

Cambodia, with a population of only 16.7 million people, counts the United States as its largest export market, with over 20% of Cambodian [exports](#) headed to the US versus 6% to China. Almost two-thirds of Cambodia’s exports go to either the US or Europe. And despite this – Cambodia has still found it either necessary or preferable to ignore US and European coercion and embrace China along with the rest of Asia.

Cambodia joins a growing list of nations doing so, aware of what the world will look like in not only the intermediate future – but also in the very near future. And while that future would appear bright for those subscribing to a multipolar world free of Western hegemony, the US is determined to make nations pay a heavy price through sanctions, embargoes, and other forms of coercion for preparing its way.

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