US Propaganda Reorganises in Cambodia

US State Department-funded and directed Voice of America recently noted that its networks in the Southeast Asian country of Cambodia are reorganising, though no in such straightforward terms.

VOA's article, "Journalists Form A New Press Association, Plan to Protect At Risk Reporters," claims:

The development comes amid an ongoing press crackdown by the government that has seen the shuttering of independent news organizations and radio stations in the country.

The article then obliquely mentions that the "at risk reporters" include Radio Free Asia employees; Radio Free Asia being part of the US State Department's media presence inside Cambodia and across the rest of Asia.

Only until the very last paragraph of the article does VOA admit who the founding members of the new association, The Cambodian Journalists Alliance (CamboJa), are, admitting:

CamboJA's fifteen founding members consist of current or former journalists from six news outlets, including Voice of Democracy, The Cambodia Daily, Radio Free Asia and Voice of America, as well as freelance journalists.

In other words, CamboJa is merely the US State Department reorganising its interference within Cambodia under the pretense of upholding media freedom.

US-Funded and Directed Media Augments US-Backed Opposition

Far from impartially and objectively reporting any actual news, the members of CamboJa serve merely as the public relations arm of Cambodia’s US-backed opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP).

CNRP's senior leadership includes Kem Sokha who himself openly admitted he served as a proxy for US interests who ran his opposition party practically from top to bottom.

The Phnom Penh Post in an article titled, "Kem Sokha video producer closes Phnom Penh office in fear," would go over the many admissions made by Kem Sokha:

Sokha says he has visited the US at the government’s request every year since 1993 to learn about the "democratisation process" and that “they decided” he should step aside from politics to create change in Cambodia. “They said if we want to change the leadership, we cannot fight the top. Before changing the top level, we need to uproot the lower one. We need to change the lower level first. It is a political strategy in a democratic country,” he said.

Regarding US assistance, Kem Sokha would reveal:

“And, the USA that has assisted me, they asked me to take the model from Yugoslavia, Serbia, where they can changed 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. “You know Milosevic had a huge numbers of tanks. But they changed things by using this strategy, and they take this experience for me to implement in Cambodia. But no one knew about this.” “However, since we are now reaching at this stage, today I must tell you about this strategy. We will have more to continue and we will succeed.”

Kem Sokha would elaborate even further, claiming:

“I do not do anything at my own will. Their 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.”

Kem Sokha's daughter, Kem Monovithya, has also openly worked with the US to seek the overthrow of the Cambodian government.

When Cambodia began its crackdown on both CNRP and the US-funded organisations supporting it, the US threatened sanctions and other punitive measures. Kem Monovithya would play a central role in promoting these punitive measures in Washington.

The Phonom Post in a December 2017 article titled, "US says more sanctions on table in response to political crackdown," would claim:

...in Washington, a panel of “witnesses” convened by the House Foreign Affairs Committee – including Kem Sokha's daughter, Kem Monovithya – called for additional action in response to the political crackdown. In a statement, Monovithya urged targeted financial sanctions against government officials responsible for undermining democracy. She also called on the US to suspend “any and all assistance for the central Cambodian Government”, while “continuing democracy assistance programs for civil society, particularly those engaged in election-related matters”.

Like her farther, Kem Monovithya's collaboration with the US government goes back much further. The Washington Post in a 2006 article titled, "While in U.S., Cambodians Get a Lesson on Rights From Home," would first admit:

Kem Sokha, a former Cambodian senator and official, heads the Cambodian Center for Human Rights, which is supported by U.S. government funds. The center has held public forums to hear complaints about conditions in Cambodia.

Regarding Kem Monovithya herself, the Washington Post would note:

Monovitha Kem, a business school graduate and aspiring lawyer, said she would lobby U.S. and international institutions to fight Hun Sen's decision. “I would like to see the charges dropped not just for my father, but for all other activists," she said in an interview Monday. “I hope they will amend the defamation law.” Monovitha Kem has met with officials at the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the International Republican Institute, the U.S. Agency for International Development and major human rights groups.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI) are both subsidiaries of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) which, together with the US government itself, have supported myriad subversive activities within Cambodia for years.

This includes a number of organisations cited in a May 2018 Washington Post article attempting to deny claims of US meddling by citing almost exclusively US-funded fronts operating in Cambodia.

This includes Licadho, which is funded by both the UK government and the US via USAID. It also includes Radio Free Asia and Voice of America, both of which are funded by the US government and overseen by the Broadcasting Board of Governors chaired by US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo himself. There is also the Cambodian Center for Independent Media, funded by NED subsidiaries Freedom House and IRI as well as the British Embassy and convicted financial criminal George Soros' Open Society Foundation.

For years the US has interfered in Cambodia's internal political affairs doing so under the guise of promoting
democracy and protecting freedom of the press while in actuality undermining the foundations of both.

A democracy by definition includes the process of self-determination. Cambodia's opposition represents an agenda determined an ocean away in Washington. Nothing the Cambodian opposition or the US-funded media that augments its efforts can be described as "democratic."

**US Interference is Aimed at Cambodia's Ties with China**

Attempts by the US to assist Cambodia's opposition in creating instability in Cambodia is rooted in Cambodia's current government's growing relationship with Beijing and its obstinate refusal to heed US demands regarding Washington's various agendas in Asia including sanctions aimed at Chinese firms and US efforts to create conflict over the South China Sea.

The US hopes to either remove the current government from power or exert enough pressure on it to exact concessions from it regarding Washington's struggle with Beijing for power and influence across Asia.

Understanding the true motivations driving Washington's interference in Cambodia and that they are merely hidden behind pretexts such as "democracy promotion" and protecting a "free press," helps disarm Washington of still potent political tools used to menace nations around the globe. Exposing and foiling US interference in Cambodia today will help blunt the effectiveness of similar US tactics when it targets others tomorrow.

*Joseph Thomas is chief editor of Thailand-based geopolitical journal, The New Atlas and contributor to the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.*