

### 17.9 Should Cambodia Repay this “Debt”?

**Do Now:** The photograph on the right (*New York Times*, April 3, 2017) shows Cambodian refugees fleeing United States bombing raids in 1975. During the war the United States lent the Cambodian government \$274 million to feed and clothe refugees arriving in the national capital. At the time the Cambodian government was an ally of the United States and kept in power by U.S. support. Cambodia still refuses to repay the debt which is now half a billion dollars.

1. Describe the photograph. Pay particular attention to the people and their surroundings.
2. In a carefully written paragraph explain your views on whether the current Cambodian government is *obligated* (responsible) to repay this debt.

**Instructions:** Working in teams, examine the excerpts from the article and answer questions 1-5. Select a team member to present your team’s position on question five. At the end of the lesson, each student will answer question 5 as an exit ticket.



### Questions

1. Why did Cambodians flee from the countryside to the nation’s capital?
2. According to section B, why did the United States increase the bombings in Cambodia?
3. What is meant by the term *illegitimate* in section E?
4. What is the disagreement between the government of the United States and the government of Cambodia?
5. Should Cambodia repay this debt? Explain your views and support your position with evidence from the text.

### “Cambodia Appeals to Trump to Forgive War-Era Debt” by Julia Wallace, *NY Times*, April 3, 2017, p. A4

- A) During the Vietnam War, the United States lent hundreds of millions of dollars to Cambodia’s to flailing [failing] government to feed and clothe refugees — even as American B-52s drove many of those same people from their villages by carpet-bombing the countryside. Now the United States wants that money back — with interest. For decades, Cambodia has refused to repay the debt, which has grown to more than half a billion dollars. It says the United States, if anything, owes Cambodia a moral debt for the devastation it caused. Washington says a loan is a loan.
- B) The bombardment started covertly [secretly] as part of an effort to cut off supply routes used by the Viet Cong. In 1969, under President Richard M. Nixon, it expanded into full-fledged carpet-bombing, meant to buy time for United States troops to pull out of South Vietnam, while halting the advance of the ultra-Communist Khmer Rouge rebels fighting the Cambodian government.
- C) Rice farmers fled the fighting and the bombs in large numbers, abandoning their fields for Phnom Penh, the capital. As a food shortage ensued, the United States — which was backing the anti-Communist government led by Lon Nol — lent the country \$274 million to buy American rice, wheat, oil and cotton . . . In April 1975, the Americans pulled out of Cambodia just before the Khmer Rouge seized power.
- D) In the 1990s, as Cambodia began to emerge from decades of war, the United States said the money was still owed, with interest and late fees, though it offered rescheduling on favorable terms. Since then the debt has swelled to \$506 million.
- E) Cambodia argues that the loan is invalid because the government of Lon Nol was *illegitimate*. But the State Department says the international financial system will fall apart if governments cannot be held responsible for their predecessors’ debts.