Two guards with machine guns who escort tourists to Banteay Srei Temple
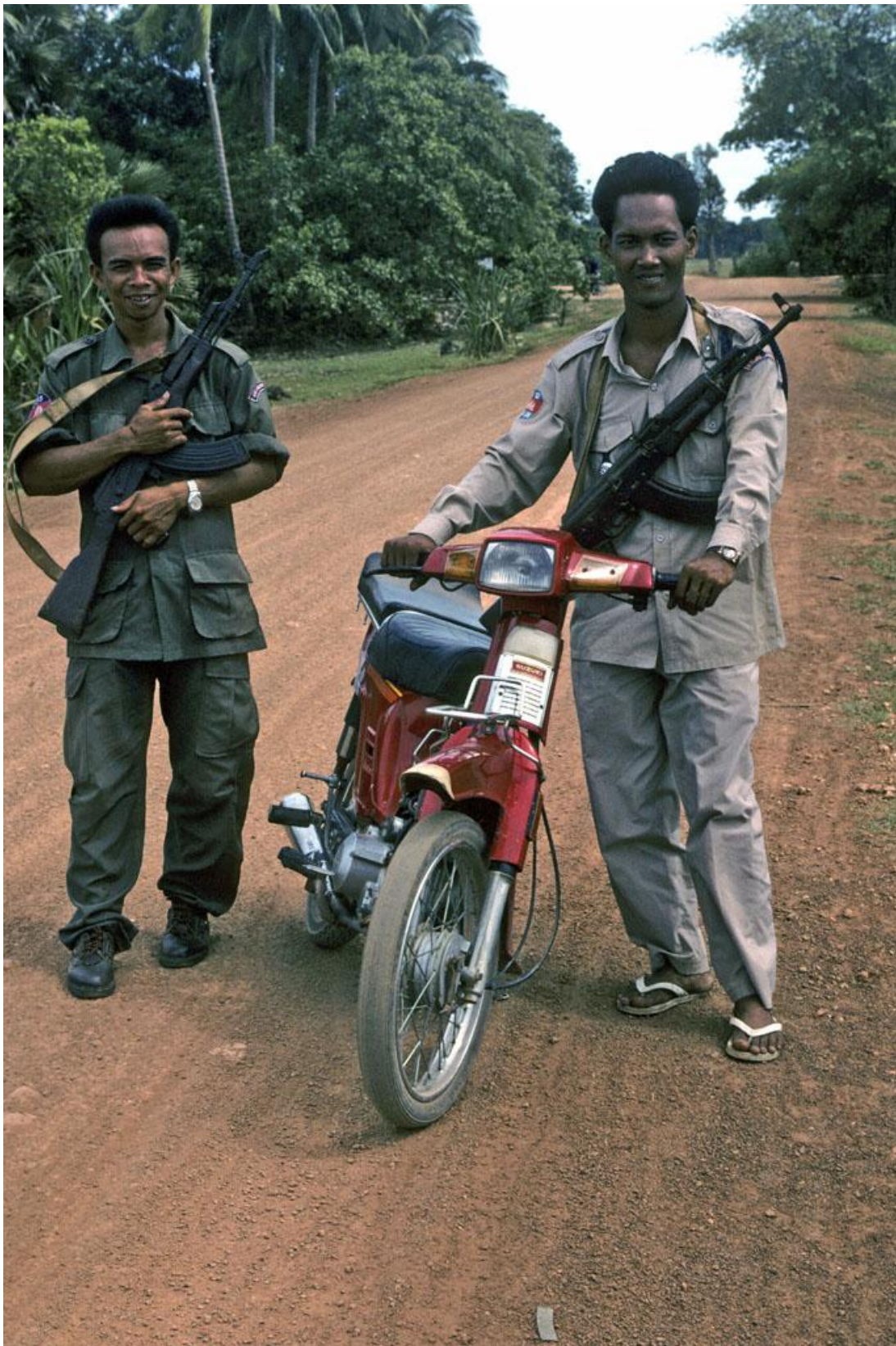
Two uniformed guards with automatic machine guns stand beside their red motorcycle on a dirt road near Siem Reap.

These young men made a living by escorting and protecting foreign tourists who wished to visit Banteay Srei Temple in 1997. Hiring the guards contained elements of bribery as it was designed to prevent anyone, including them, from robbing or harming the foreigners.

Cambodia became awash with weapons and burdened by distrust after its 1970s civil wars, which were linked to the Vietnam War. A brutal Communist regime called the Khmer Rouge ruled between mid-1975 and late 1978, killing and starving millions.

After the wars, the growing population experienced high rates of unemployment and poverty as well as trauma. Many young men turned to security or paramilitary careers where the lines between private protection, crime, and government corruption were very thin.

Recent efforts have been made to increase and improve Cambodia's tourism industry in a joint effort to protect the sites around Angkor, and to improve the nation's standards of governance, sustainable economy sectors, and job opportunities.

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