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DATE SUB-CAT.
1978 GEN

OAD-CR-155

Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program

The Khmer Republic at War and The Final Collapse

By

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and last Chief of State of the Khmer Republic**

Prepared For:

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12th and Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20314*

20 November 1978

Contract No. MDA 903-76-C-0172

**GENERAL
RESEARCH**



CORPORATION

WESTGATE RESEARCH PARK, McLEAN, VIRGINIA 22101

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Preface

On the chessboard that is the world of today, the geographical position of a country plays an all-important role. Whether rich or poor, at war or at peace, a country will be taken seriously only by its neighbors or by those with whom the country has dominating political and economic interests. By the rest of the world, such a country should expect nothing more than to be forgotten, misunderstood, or treated with indifference. Cambodia (the Khmer Republic from 1970 to 1975), immersed for five years in the conflict known in that region as the Indochina War, was in the category of a forgotten country. The war we carried on during that period has been violently criticized by our enemies, ignored by some, and poorly understood by our friends. It is my hope that this monograph will serve to put these events into better perspective and to make clearer the Khmer point of view.

As Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, as Chief of the General Staff, FANK, as Ambassador, and as the last Chief of State of the Khmer Republic, I participated in making many of the major decisions of that country and was a witness to still others. In addition to my personal involvement, I have relied on documents in my possession and numerous conversations with the Khmer military community now in this country.

In the preparation of this monograph, I am particularly indebted to Colonel Harry O. Amos, U.S. Army Retired, twice a Military Attache in Phnom Penh and long-time friend of Cambodia, for his help in translating and editing my original draft. My thanks go as well to Ms. Pham Thi Bong, a former Captain in the Republic of Vietnam Armed

Forces and also a former member of the Vietnamese Embassy staff, who spent long and arduous hours, in typing and editing, and in the administrative requirements for putting my manuscript into final form.

McLean, Virginia
20 November 1978

Sak Sutsakhan
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Contents

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
<i>The Sihanouk Era</i>	1
<i>The Political Strategy of Neutrality</i>	6
<i>Neutrality of the Left</i>	9
<i>The Origins of the Khmer Republic</i>	12
II. CAMBODIA AND THE COMMUNISTS	18
<i>Vietnamese Communist Use of Khmer Territory</i>	18
<i>Khmer Communist Political Origins</i>	22
<i>Khmer Communist Military Development</i>	26
III. THE ARMED FORCES OF THE KHMER REPUBLIC	32
<i>Origins</i>	32
<i>The Initial Expansion After March 18, 1970</i>	38
<i>Military Organization</i>	46
<i>The U.S. Military Assistance Program</i>	50
<i>The Khmer Krom Units</i>	55
IV. THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF THE WAR	59
<i>The Initial Communist Attacks</i>	59
<i>The Evacuation of the Ratanakiri Garrison</i>	63
<i>FANK Strategy</i>	67
<i>CHENLA I</i>	69
<i>CHENLA II</i>	72
<i>Cooperation and Coordination with the RVNAF and the U.S.</i>	80
V. THE POLITICO/MILITARY SITUATION IN CAMBODIA, 1972-1974	87
<i>The Political Situation</i>	87
<i>Enemy Strategy</i>	90
<i>General Mobilization -- The Plan for the Countryside</i>	91
<i>Condition of the FANK</i>	94
<i>The End of U.S. Bombing</i>	96

Chapter	Page
VI. MAJOR MILITARY OPERATIONS, 1972 THROUGH 1974	99
<i>Operations in Military Regions 1 and 2, and Against Phnom Penh, March-June 1972</i>	101
<i>FANK Efforts to Keep Lines of Communications Open, July-December 1972</i>	106
<i>The Enemy Dry-Season Offensive, January-July 1973</i>	114
<i>The First Months Without U.S. Air Support, August-December 1973</i>	122
<i>Dry Season Operations, January-July 1974</i>	125
<i>The Wet Season, August-December 1974</i>	140
VII. CLOSING MONTHS, JANUARY-APRIL 1975	149
<i>Peace Initiatives</i>	150
<i>Enemy Strategy</i>	153
<i>FANK Change of Command</i>	154
<i>Military Operations</i>	155
<i>The Departure of Lon Nol</i>	158
VIII. THE FINAL DAYS OF THE KHMER REPUBLIC	162
<i>Departure of the U.S. Embassy</i>	162
<i>The Last Government</i>	164
<i>One More Effort to Negotiate</i>	167
<i>The 17th of April 1975</i>	168
IX. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS	172
 <i>Appendix</i>	
A. The Delegations to the Summit Conference of the Indochinese Peoples, April 25, 1970.	177
B. The Members of FUNK and GRUNK	179
C. Major Items of U.S.-Furnished Equipment in FANK	182
D. FANK Order of the Day, 5 October 1971	184
GLOSSARY	186

Charts

No.	1. FANK General Staff Organization After 1972	47
	2. FANK Organization After 1972	51

Maps

<i>No.</i>	<i>Page</i>
1. Cambodia and its Southeast Asian Neighbors	4
2. Cambodian Government Information on Locations of Principal NVA/VC Base Areas in Cambodia in 1969	19
3. FANK Information as to Deployment of VC/NVA in Cambodia, 1970	29
4. Locations of Principal FANK Ground Units Prior to 18 March 1970	34
5. Locations of Principal FANK Infantry Units on 1 May 1970	44
6. The Military Regions of the Khmer Armed Forces in 1971	49
7. Initial Communist Attacks, March-April 1970	62
8. FANK-Held Areas in Cambodia in August 1970	64
9. Area of FARK OPERATION TEST VC/NVA, November 1969	65
10. FANK Strategic Concepts for Defense of the Khmer Republic	68
11. OPERATION CHENLA I and Area of Operations	70
12. Concept for OPERATION CHENLA II and Area of Operations	73
13. Enemy Attacks Against OPERATION CHENLA II Column, 26-31 October 1971	76
14. Locations of FANK Operations ANGKOR CHEY and PREK TA	100
15. Areas of Operations, March-June 1972	102
16. Points of Military Interest in Phnom Penh	104
17. Objective Area, OPERATION SORYA, July-August 1972	108
18. Area of Operation Along Route 2, July-December 1972	109
19. Angkor Wat/Angkor Thom Temple and Ruins Complex	110
20. Areas of the Mekong Controlled by the Enemy, February-April 1973	117
21. Combat Areas Near Phnom Penh, July 1973	121
22. Defense Sectors for Phnom Penh, January 1974	126
23. Oudong Area of Operations, March 1974	131
24. The Battle for Kampot, March-April 1974	135
25. Operations Along the Bassac River, April-July 1974	137
26. Operations in the Bassac-Mekong Corridor, September-December 1974	145
27. Final Assault on Neak Luong and Closing of the Mekong, March 1975	157
28. The Battle for Phnom Penh, April 1975	159

Illustrations

Destruction in Tonle Bet (on Mekong Opposite Kompong Cham) Following Communist Attacks in April 1970	31
Ceremony at Phnom Penh in 1971 to Mark Return of FANK Special Forces Detachments from Training in Thailand	57
Khmer Krom Unit, Newly Arrived from South Vietnam and Armed with the U.S. M-16 Rifle, Salutes 1st Military Region Commander During a Visit to Tonle Bet, November 1970	58
A Planning Session for OPERATION CHENLA II	84
Brigadier General Fan Muong, Commander 1st Military Region, Inspects a Squad in Kompong Cham Armed with the U.S. M-1 Carbine, November 1970	85

FANK Recruits Move to the OPERATION CHENLA I Area on a Requisitioned Civilian Truck, Armed with the Communist Assault Rifle, AK-47, November 1970	86
Marshal Lon Nol, President of the Khmer Republic, April 1972 . .	98

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Sihanouk Era

Cambodia's participation—or to put it more accurately its being dragged into the Indochinese conflict—dated rather far back in the political history of Cambodia. The dominant personality of this entire period was unquestionably Prince Norodom Sihanouk who, first as reigning King, and then as Chief of State, held nearly absolute power for more than 30 years in this tiny kingdom which shares over one half of its national boundaries with South Vietnam.

WW II, and its origins, brought the Franco-Japanese conflict to Indochina, and the Japanese occupation from 1940 to 1945, the year of Japanese defeat. This was followed by the reconquest of Indochina by the allied forces, bringing with it the triumphal return of the French to that region.

During the year of 1940 it should be noted that, after the brief struggle between the French protectorate and Thailand, which the latter country had arranged—as usual—to be on the winning side, Cambodia lost its entire province of Battambang and a part of the province of Siem Reap. The Thai occupation in these provinces lasted from 1941 to 1945.

From 1945 to 1954, Cambodia had to face two great problems. The first was the political struggle with France for complete independence, a struggle led, it must be remembered, by Prince Sihanouk who was then King of Cambodia. This struggle against France had the near-total support of all segments of the population. The second problem was the danger from the expansion of the Vietnamese forces known by the name of Viet Minh, who carried out guerrilla operations against the French presence in Vietnam.

The Viet Minh troops in Cambodia continued to expand gradually as the political and military situation of the regime in power deteriorated. Under the pretext of bringing military assistance for independence in Cambodia, these Viet Minh forces established themselves more and more deeply in Cambodia. Their method was to move into certain frontier regions to facilitate taking over particular areas in the interior of Cambodia just before the signing of the Geneva agreements in 1954. These areas of Viet Minh control were then expanded according to the "oil spot" or "leopard spot" concept.

At that time, the warring parties were divided into three camps:

1. The combined Franco-Cambodian or purely Cambodian Forces
2. The Viet Minh forces
3. The *Khmer Issarak* or free Khmer, forces which were both anti-Sihanouk and anti-Viet Minh.

Out of the events described above, there was born a new feeling among the Cambodians, an awakening of belief in nationhood and a fear of the "expansionist" tendencies of its neighbors.

The period from 1954 to 1970 saw three stages in the history of Cambodia, this newly independent state of the 20th Century:

1. Its efforts to recover and consolidate its national institutions.
2. Its struggles against the vicissitudes of national and international politics.
3. Its denouement or unwinding. By denouement I mean the change of the Kingdom of Cambodia into the Khmer Republic and its fall. What happened in Cambodia after 17 April 1975 in "Democratic Kampuchea" (the new name for present-day Cambodia) history itself will have to tell us.

From the international point of view, the problem of the first Indochinese conflict was settled by the Geneva Accords of 1954, and the parties are to be congratulated on the results of that conference whose sessions lasted only from the 26th of April to the 21st of July 1954. The rapidity and efficiency of the effort presaged a durable peace under the triple guaranty of the major power participants, Great Britain, the

Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China. (The U.S. participated but chose not to adhere to the final declaration). An International Control Commission (ICC) consisting of India, Canada, and Poland, was placed in each of the three states of Indochina to ensure respect for the cease-fire.

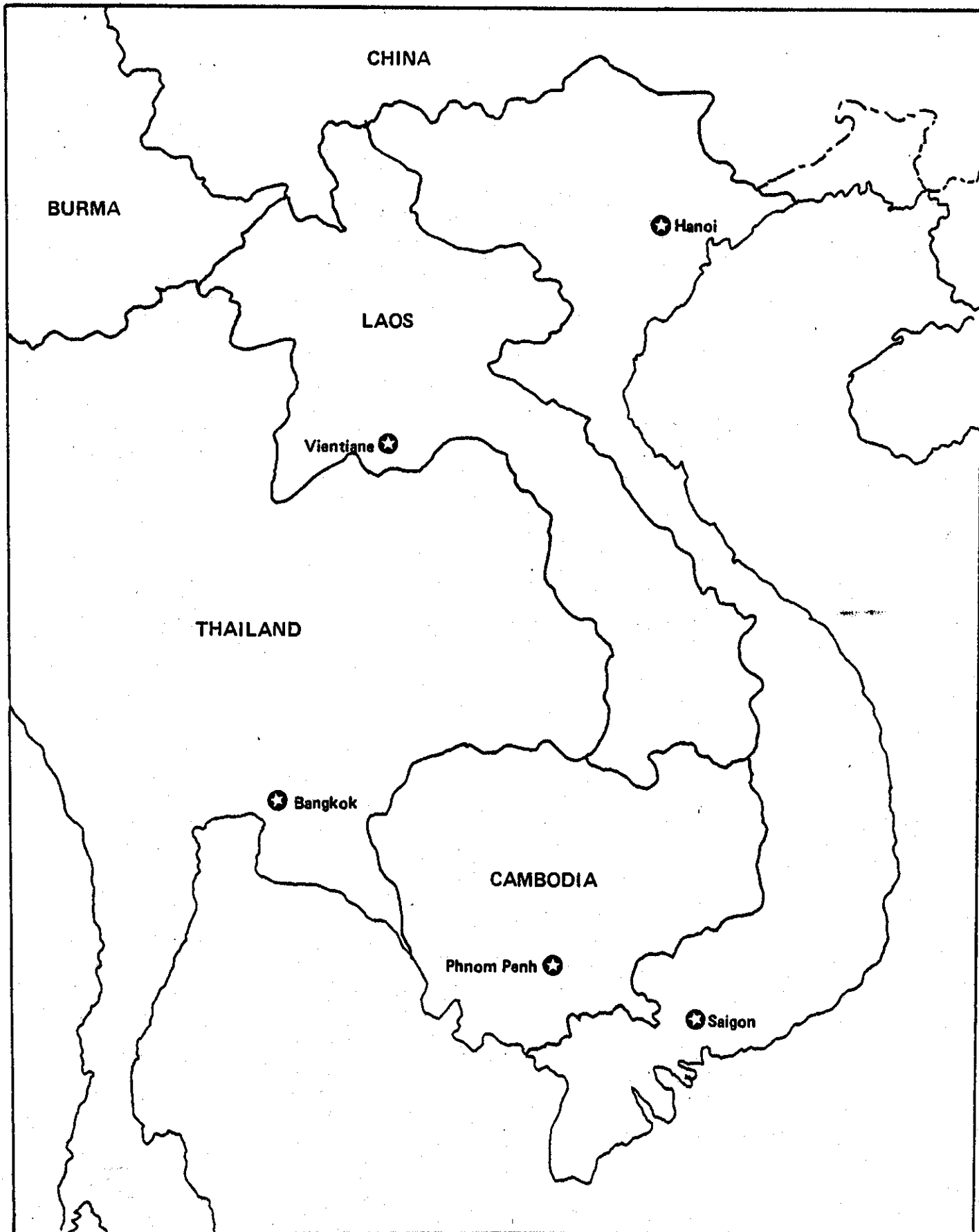
Cambodia lost no time in having the foreign troops evacuated from its territory. French war ships transported them to North Vietnam, and the evacuation was carried out within the time limits set by the accords. Unfortunately, it was realized a little too late that hundreds of Cambodian cadre affiliated with the Viet Minh had also been transported to the same destination. The final count indicated that there were more than three thousand of these Cambodian cadre who had escaped the vigilance of the Cambodian authorities. This was both the start of Communism in Cambodia and the secret establishment of the Khmer Communist Party.

What then was the reaction of the interested countries to this new Indochina problem?

Faced with the Khmer national will, the majority opinion of its own people, and that of the rest of the world, France could not do otherwise than to withdraw from Cambodia and accord independence to a country where she had been the law for almost a century.

One of the countries participating in the Geneva Conference of 1954 was the great People's Republic of China (PRC), well known for its total support of North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao. Beginning in 1955 the PRC began to act. While each of the newly independent countries (Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam) undertook to make friends and worked actively in the political and diplomatic arenas, the inevitable nonetheless came to pass. To no great surprise the world witnessed the birth of two blocs, ideologically opposed: pro-Communist bloc, consisting of North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao; a pro-free world bloc, consisting of Cambodia, South Vietnam and Laos. It is not known what was going on in the Communist camp, but on the side of the free world France and the U.S. no longer concealed their rivalries, which brought them into opposition with each other on political, economic and military questions. Each country courted the three countries of Indochina. (*Map 1*) France, unwilling

Map 1 – Cambodia and its Southeast Asian Neighbors



to accept the loss of everything without a struggle, sought by every means to regain the friendship of its former proteges. However, the U.S., richer and more powerful, held all the trumps. Laos and Vietnam perceived perfectly this difference in strength and wealth and arrayed themselves on the side of the more powerful.

Cambodia, being more shrewd, said neither "yes" nor "no." Not wishing to risk the liberty it had gained with such difficulty, Cambodia preferred to keep its distance while extending the hand of friendship to each of the two rival nations. Thus it was that Cambodia ensured its peace and stability. The experience of South Vietnam and Laos was otherwise; by their sudden movement into the American camp, these two countries had found themselves engaged immediately in a cold war which seemed to have no end. The great China, acting as discreetly as possible, equipped and trained the North Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao and pushed its two allies to wage a struggle without mercy against their own compatriots. Armed movements were created and given the names "Movement for National Liberation" or "Front for National Liberation" (FNL). They urged liberation of their countries from the yoke of imperialism (free world bloc). In time, these movements became better and better organized, spreading their offensive, recruiting new elements, and in the space of several years they passed from the status of simple guerrilla cells to that of regular units (battalion, regiment, division) having either territorial or maneuver capabilities. There was no ignoring their quality and operational capacity.

The Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) profited from its enthusiasm for the free world by consolidating its foundations. The most remarkable was the development of its military institutions, a development so spectacular that it provoked admiration and jealousy. Its armed forces became one of the most powerful in Southeast Asia.

As time passed, the acts of armed rebellion became more and more serious and more widespread. With its well-calculated and perfectly orchestrated system of propaganda and "psychological warfare," the Communists were able to establish "oil spots" throughout the population and among the different segments of society.

Although on good terms with South Vietnam, Cambodia was disquieted nonetheless by the dimensions to which Communism had grown in that country; this was all the more so that within Cambodia itself two currents of opposition to the policies adopted by Sihanouk were beginning to surface. The first accused Sihanouk of being "pro-free world"; the second criticized his dictatorial methods of governing the country. Political stirrings began with the dissolution of the original Democrat Party and the abdication of Sihanouk. The former king had chosen to be only the Chief of the Cambodian National Socialist Party. The Cambodian Communist movement took form in certain parts of the country, and in the 1960's one heard mention for the first time of the "Khmer Serei" or Free Khmer, created under the aegis of Son Ngoc Thanh and supported by the U.S. CIA.

Thus, Cambodia found itself at this time facing two dangers: from the exterior in the form of the Khmer Serei movement and the expansion toward the south of North Vietnamese Communism; the other danger was from the outlawed Khmer Communist party, a movement made up of opponents of Sihanouk, the malcontent, the abused, and the persecuted of the various segments of society from government worker to student.

During all of this troubled period when his antagonists deployed all of their skill and cunning in parallel with the eruption of local Communism, Prince Sihanouk was the only one in power to foresee events, and he seized on the slightest occasion to take the pulse of the two blocs or to measure the gulf which separated them in order to adopt an appropriate policy.

The Political Strategy of Neutrality

The general trends of political events in both Cambodia and its neighboring countries following 1955 pushed Cambodia to adopt the path of "neutrality" or "fair play" as a political strategy for dealing with all sides. It was a policy that Cambodia maintained until 1962. This strategy was calculated to not only calm the political stirrings within the country but also to permit Cambodia to maintain intact the separate

benefits to be drawn from dealing with the two power blocs. The blunders of the western bloc, whether intentional or not (and we will address them later), were among the factors causing the Cambodian ship of state to change course and take another direction.

During the first years of experimenting with neutrality, the fact should be admitted that Cambodia was having numerous and quite serious difficulties with its immediate neighbors, Thailand to the west and South Vietnam to the east. These difficulties stemmed from border disputes that Prince Sihanouk described as "annexationist in design" on the part of our neighbors. Of these many disputes, the affair of Preah Vihear was the best known because the drawn-out legal battle for it was terminated only by a formal decision of the International Court of Justice at The Hague.¹ Relations with the Republic of Vietnam had also known some bad moments caused by many border incidents, themselves the result of pursuit operations carried out by the RVNAF against the VC and NVA.

It should be noted that with each of these incidents, whether on the Thai or RVN border, the Royal Cambodian Government directed representations and protests not only to the government concerned but at the same time to the United States. This latter was done because Cambodia considered that the U.S. could exercise its political influence on Thailand and the RVN to halt the border incidents. Only nothing ever came of the Cambodian protests, and these border incidents, by then becoming more and more frequent, constituted one of the causes for the change in policy adopted by Prince Sihanouk during the years preceding the entry of Cambodia into the Indochina conflict.

Encouraged by the visit to Phnom Penh of Prime Minister Nehru in 1954 and by the conference of Ban Dung in April 1955, where he met Chou

¹Prea Vihear is an ancient Khmer Temple located on the Cambodian-Thai border, almost directly north of Phnom Penh. For a number of years, there was a dispute between the two governments as to whether the temple was, in fact, in Cambodia or Thailand. Submitted to the International Court of Justice, the Court ruled in favor of Cambodia in early 1962. Dean Acheson represented Cambodia.

En Lai, Prince Sihanouk saw, from the Cambodian point of view, indisputable advantages in a policy of strict neutrality, and in order to demonstrate the authenticity of the newly achieved Cambodian independence, a policy dictated by neither France nor the United States, Sihanouk denounced the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Created in 1954, it was seen as a political instrument of the Free World which was anti-Communist not only in political and economic ideology but in deed as well; thus it was that certain members were seen directly engaged in the armed conflict in South Vietnam. Cambodia renounced the protection of the SEATO umbrella and to please the Communists denounced before the world the harmful effects of SEATO on the war in Vietnam and on Cambodia. For example, there was the attempted coup d'etat fomented by Brig. General Dap Chhuon, Commander of the 4th Military Region (Siem Reap) in 1959. The Ambassador of South Vietnam to Cambodia, Mr. Ngo Trong Hieu, was directly implicated, and by association, the U.S. There were also the numerous border incidents between the Cambodian forces on the one hand and the forces of the Khmer Serei, of South Vietnam, and of Thailand on the other.

Cambodia believed itself to be sheltered from all danger by its policy of neutrality. This neutrality, however, ran counter to the interests of the South Vietnamese, the Thai, and the U.S., who sought to tear Cambodia away from its position of "wait and see" and its leaning toward Communism. As for the leaders of the red bloc, they did not remain inactive either; they did not fail to wave in the face of Cambodian authorities the dangerous game plan of the imperialists. Within Cambodia, anti-imperialist sentiment among the masses of poor reached the proportions of a cult and was reflected in the first-ever exchange of gun fire between the Khmer Rouge (Khmer Communists) and Cambodian authorities, this incident occurring in Battambang Province in 1967.

In the eastern part of the country the same sort of confrontations were taking place in the new provinces of Mondolkiri and Ratanakiri where the majority of the population was comprised of the ethnic minorities known as *Meo, Kha, Phnong, Jarai*.

Neutrality of the Left

During the 1962 Geneva Conference on Laos, Prince Sihanouk recommended a neutralized zone made up of Cambodia and Laos. The outcome of this conference left him disappointed, however, because not only was his idea rejected, he also saw Laos partitioned. The prospect of Cambodia turning into another Laos in the future deeply worried him and led him to adopt a new policy line which sought to strike a certain balance between the east and the west in Cambodia.

During this same period, the situation in South Vietnam continued to deteriorate. And when the military coup against Ngo Dinh Diem's regime occurred in November 1963, during which the South Vietnamese president was killed, Prince Sihanouk was faced with a political dilemma of having to choose between two alternatives: Communism or the Free World. He found neither sufficiently reassuring for his regime and Cambodia's future.

Sihanouk had been led to believe in the growing danger of U.S. aid from his visit to Peking in early 1963, during which the Chinese expressed their concern about the increasing American presence in Cambodia on the one hand and the presence of CIA-supported Khmer Serei troops on the other. As a result, at the conclusion of the Special National Congress which he convened on 19 November 1963, Sihanouk renounced U.S. aid altogether, apparently to avoid American interference in Khmer domestic affairs.

Two days later, Prince Sihanouk unsuccessfully tried to initiate a limited international conference—with the participation of the U.S., South Vietnam and all countries directly involved in Cambodia's security—designed to guarantee Cambodia's sovereignty within its current national boundaries. His attempt was dictated by the uncertainty of South Vietnam's future and the more disquieting foreign aid that Vietnamese Communists were receiving.

In his reasoning, Prince Sihanouk had said in effect:

Quite frankly, it is not in our interests to deal with the West, which represents the present but not the future. In 10 years time, there will probably be in Thailand, which always responds to the dominant wind, a pro-Chinese neutralist government, and South Vietnam will certainly be governed by Ho Chi Minh or his successor. Our interests are served by dealing with the camp that one day will dominate the whole of Asia—and by coming to terms before its victory—in order to obtain the best terms possible.²

Despite the fact that Prince Sihanouk saw his real enemies to be the Communists, his change of policy, and especially his derogatory remarks about the U.S., exasperated the U.S. government to the point that one day Secretary Dean Rusk reportedly summoned the Cambodian ambassador to his office and told him, "Mr. Ambassador, you've got to remember that small countries are not the only ones capable of outrage. Big countries can get mad too."

Since the U.S. had not supported a conference such as the one suggested by Sihanouk, the Prince, it was reported, authorized a popular demonstration in March 1964 during which the U.S. and British embassies in Phnom Penh were seriously damaged.

During his visit to Peking in September 1964, Sihanouk met with Pham Van Dong, North Vietnam's prime minister, and asked him to recognize Cambodia's territorial integrity. Dodging the issue, Dong in his turn asked Sihanouk to refer to the National Liberation Front (NLF) which could represent South Vietnam in this matter.

In December 1964, American and Cambodian officials met in New Delhi, through the good offices of the Indian government. Although very cordial, this encounter failed to improve the already tense relations between Cambodia and the U.S.

In early 1965, Great Britain and the U.S. finally decided on an international conference to guarantee Cambodia's national boundaries in an apparent effort to slow Cambodia's slide toward Communism. Unfortunately, this was too late because Sihanouk, who was now firmly on

²Leifer, Michael, Cambodia, The Search for Security, New York, F.A. Praeger, 1967.

Peking's side, insisted that the NLF represent South Vietnam in this conference. Obviously, this was unacceptable to the western powers. And so a further step had been taken, and on 3 May 1965 Sihanouk severed diplomatic relations with Washington.³

In this period of Sihanouk's very active political maneuvering, during which he sought to keep in line with current international trends, in order ultimately to align Cambodia on the Communist side, several military events occurred in this part of Southeast Asia, particularly in South Vietnam, which seemed to justify Sihanouk's attitude if a parallel is drawn between them and the actions he had taken.

By that time, the very famous Ho Chi Minh Trail which crossed the 18th parallel had already been well established along the entire length of Laos. The rights of the Pathet Lao in this country had been recognized since the 1962 Geneva Conference. In South Vietnam, the VC/NVA presence, which had caused serious turmoil and was barely under control by the government, continued to increase and expand its influence in most provinces. All of these events tended to confirm Sihanouk's thesis as to South Vietnam's fate in the first place and by way of Cambodia, that of the Indochinese peninsula in general.

At the same time that the spirit of regional organization and solidarity was growing, the movement of "non-alignment" began to manifest itself on the international scene. The first conference of non-aligned nations opened in Belgrade in 1962. Cambodia was one of the first to identify itself with this movement and soon found itself in numerous company, as the newly independent states of Asia and Africa, the states of Eastern Europe, the underdeveloped states, and the emerging nations joined in. The movement grew in such a way as to admit the countries of the Communist and Socialist blocs. This political leap on the part of

³Sihanouk had broken relations with Thailand in October 1961 and the Republic of Vietnam in August 1963.

the Communists gained points for them everywhere, whether on the local, regional, or international scene. The war in the Republic of Vietnam came to be qualified as "the ordering of Vietnamese internal affairs." The theatre of military operations passed into the hands of the great powers. The two camps began to match each other by providing materiel support for the battlefield with inevitable consequences. Each side paid the heavy price of its sacrifices.

The slide of Cambodia into the Communist side of the international political balance was apparent from 1962 forward; in that year, Sihanouk initiated intense political contacts with the PRC. As a result the PRC agreed to aid Cambodia in all areas, economic, military, etc., without any prior conditions. The PRC asked only that in return Cambodia disassociate itself from the Free World for good, particularly from the U.S., and demonstrate its sympathy for the cause of anti-imperialism.

The Origins of the Khmer Republic

The political leadership of the Cambodia of 1970 clearly had one foot firmly planted in the Communist camp. The policy of "double-dealing" practiced by Prince Sihanouk favored the Vietnamese and Khmer Communists with disastrous results for Cambodia, a fact not lost on Sihanouk who did not fail to vehemently denounce before all the world and on many occasions the continuous infiltrations and subversion of the Communists and the peril for Cambodia which they posed. The divorce of Cambodia from the U.S. and its subsequent marriage with the PRC constituted before the world and within Southeast Asia a new level of Communist penetration into the Indochinese peninsula. It changed significantly the face of the war in South Vietnam and provoked in Cambodia's neighbors a sense of the danger of Communist expansion. Within Cambodia this marriage signified the victory of Communist factions, who began to appear little by little from their hiding, and the defeat of the pro-imperialist factions.

The trickery of the political games played by Sihanouk from 1954 to 1970 earned for him a certain standing on the international scene as

"leader of his country"; but in his own country these tactics met with total defeat. What was unpardonable in Khmer religious and intellectual circles was Sihanouk's practice of abruptly changing loyalties or a policy of "consistent inconsistency" (*politique de constance dans l'inconstance*) an expression used by Lt. General Sisowath Sirik Matak in an open letter to his cousin, Prince Sihanouk, dated August 27, 1973. This gap between reputation at home and abroad widened with time for the situation within Cambodia gave scarcely any reason for satisfaction. Actually, Vietnamese Communist forces had already occupied large portions of Khmer territory in the east, southeast, and south. The Cambodian population of these regions, weary of bearing the violent persecutions and exactions of the invading forces, were forced to abandon everything and seek refuge farther in the interior, away from the Vietnamese Communists.

A silent rage began to spread through the population as the people came to realize the political trickery of Prince Sihanouk, a trickery which led to an aggravation of the situation. That peace of which Cambodia had prided itself on being the sole beneficiary in Southeast Asia was rapidly fading. In vain, Sihanouk publicly and repeatedly denounced the exactions of the Vietnamese Communists. Finally he announced to the nation that he would depart on January 6, 1970 for France to take the cures dictated by his physical condition, following which he would travel to the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China to discuss economic and military aid. In intellectual circles in Cambodia there was general agreement that the two latter visits had no other real purpose than to find some way to resolve the political difficulties caused on the one hand by the Vietnamese Communists and by the activities of the Khmer Communists on the other, activities which were becoming more widespread all the time.

Sihanouk's absence from Cambodia provided the pretext for several demonstrations. On the 8th and 9th of March 1970 there were demonstrations in the capitals of the provinces of Svay Rieng and Prey Veng. Even in Phnom Penh there were frankly violent demonstrations organized by university students against the Embassies of North Vietnam and the PRG and supported among intellectual circles. Mr. Cheng Heng, acting

Chief of State, and General Lon Nol, Chief of Government (Prime Minister), tried in vain to make Prince Sihanouk aware of a situation which was worsening day by day in Cambodia. When the Prince refused to receive the delegation sent to brief him, Lon Nol and Cheng Heng turned to the National Assembly and the Council of the Kingdom.

The two legislative bodies assembled to consider the problem of Sihanouk's conduct and absence. They were the same two bodies which had ten years earlier, in 1960, designated the Prince as Chief of State. On March 18, 1970, after a long and historic debate, the two bodies by unanimous vote withdrew their confidence in Prince Sihanouk and removed him from office. The members accused him, among other things, of having authorized North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops to illegally occupy Khmer territory and establish bases (sanctuaries) during the latter half of the 1960's, an occupation in flagrant violation of Khmer neutrality as provided by the Geneva Accords of 1954. The occupation was characterized as well, as an attack on the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the country.

Following action by the legislative bodies, the Prince Chief of State was tried by the High Court of Justice and condemned to death in absentia for high treason.⁴

Two important events which followed the removal of Sihanouk deserve noting at this point. The first was the meeting on March 16, 1970 between representatives of the Cambodian Government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the General Staff of the Armed Forces) and representatives of the Embassies of North Vietnam and the PRG, a meeting which had as its purpose the securing of Communist agreement to evacuate their forces from Cambodia in accordance with the demand contained in the Cambodian government's official note of March 12, 1970. Unfortunately, the two-hour meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs produced no results. The second event was the initiative of the PRC after having broken

⁴In French: *Condamné à mort par contumace par le Tribunal de la Haute Justice pour haute trahison.*

diplomatic relations with Cambodia on May 5, 1970. Chinese Communist emissaries sent from Peking for the express purpose declared to General Lon Nol, by then head of the government, that the "matter between Sihanouk and the Khmer government was nothing more than an internal problem" and that Peking could overlook personalities involved so long as the Cambodian side accepted the following three conditions:

1. Permit China to continue to use Khmer territory to resupply the NVA/VC with weapons, munitions, and materiel so as to continue the war against South Vietnam.

2. Authorize the NVA/VC to establish their bases in Cambodia as before.

3. Continue to support North Vietnam and the Viet Cong with propaganda.

This demarche by China met with total rejection on the part of the Cambodian government.

In a note dated March 25, 1970 the Khmer invited the North Vietnamese to discuss for a second time the problem of the evacuation of their forces. The meeting was set for the 27th of March. But on the 25th of March the Republic of Poland advised the Khmer officially of the departure from Phnom Penh of the Embassies of North Vietnam and the Viet Cong, to take place on 27 March when the two groups would travel by ICC aircraft to Hanoi.

Immediately after the armed aggression by NVA/VC forces, which was launched against Cambodia from their sanctuaries along the South Vietnamese border, the Khmer Republic government made countless appeals to the United Nations (UN) Security Council for an end to that aggression. Instead of taking action on the Cambodian request, this international organ (the UN Security Council) merely replied that in view of Cambodia's being governed by the 1954 Geneva Accords, the Khmer Republic had better apply to the co-chairmen of the 1954 Geneva Conference (Soviet Union and Great Britain).

On 31 March 1970, therefore, in a memorandum addressed to the ambassadors of the Soviet Union and Great Britain, the Cambodian government expressed its deep concern about increasingly flagrant and repeated

violations of the 1954 Geneva Accords by the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and those of the PRG of South Vietnam. These forces, the memorandum said, not only refused to withdraw from the Cambodian territory, they were now launching overt attacks against Khmer outposts and defense forces within the Khmer national boundaries. The Cambodian government then demanded the reinstatement of the International Control Commission on an urgent basis.

On 6 April 1970, the United Nations Secretariat announced that Secretary General U Thant had decided "to deal with the authorities who effectively controlled the situation in Cambodia"; in other words, with the Phnom Penh government and not with the former Chief of State. This first and only positive response by the UN constituted, in effect, an answer to the claims made by Prince Sihanouk who, in a message addressed to His Excellency U Thant, represented himself as the only legal holder of Cambodian authority.

In addition to the events described above, the chronology of political activities in Cambodia after March 18 can be established as follows:

1. March 26 and 27. Trouble provoked by the Vietnamese Communists in Kompong Cham Province, and particularly in the provincial capital, where two deputies who tried to calm the demonstrators were knifed to death in broad daylight and in the midst of the crowd. The office of the governor was partially burned.

2. March 29. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong Embassies announced the unilateral rupture of diplomatic relations with Cambodia and their refusal to resume discussions concerning the withdrawal of their forces.

3. March 29. Launching of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong aggression in several Cambodian provinces. (The details are covered in the next chapter.)

4. April 11. Popular manifestation called "The March of National Concord" at the National Sports Complex in Phnom Penh as a sign of support for the government of Lon Nol; the manifestation also demanded the establishment of a Republican regime for the country.

5. April 14. Lon Nol appealed to the countries of all world blocs to aid him in the fight against Vietnamese Communism.
6. April 30. American and South Vietnamese troops launched their attacks against NVN and VC sanctuaries located along the frontier in the eastern provinces of Cambodia.
7. May 5. The PRC broke diplomatic relations with Cambodia.
8. May 13. Reestablishment of diplomatic relations with Thailand, which had been broken in 1961.
9. May 16 and 17. Indonesia brought ten nations together at a conference in Djakarta, aimed at finding a way of restoring peace in Cambodia.
10. May 19. Restoration of diplomatic relations with South Korea, broken since 1966.
11. May 27. Restoration of diplomatic relations with the Republic of South Vietnam, broken since 1963.
12. June 25. "General Mobilization" of Cambodia in order to deal with the invasion.
13. June 30. Final date set for ending the cross-border operations of U.S. forces against NVA/VC sanctuaries in Cambodia.
14. August 28. Mr. Spiro Agnew, Vice President of the U.S., made an official visit to Cambodia.
15. September 15. Mr. Emory C. Swank, the first U.S. envoy of ambassadorial rank since resumption of diplomatic relations in 1969, presented his credentials to Mr. Chang Heng, Chief of State. Before that date, the U.S. Mission was presided over by Charge d'Affairs Lloyd M. Rives.
16. October 9. Proclamation of the Khmer Republic.

The above chronology explains in itself the initial reaction of certain nations to the entry of Cambodia into war.

CHAPTER II

Cambodia and the Communists

Vietnamese Communist Use of Khmer Territory

The penetration of Cambodia by Vietnamese Communist forces, complete with their logistic systems, took place along two separate axes. The first was across the Vietnamese borders with Laos and South Vietnam, with the complicity of Khmer communist cells, cadred by the North Vietnamese. The second was by way of the Port of Sihanoukville or Kompong Som.

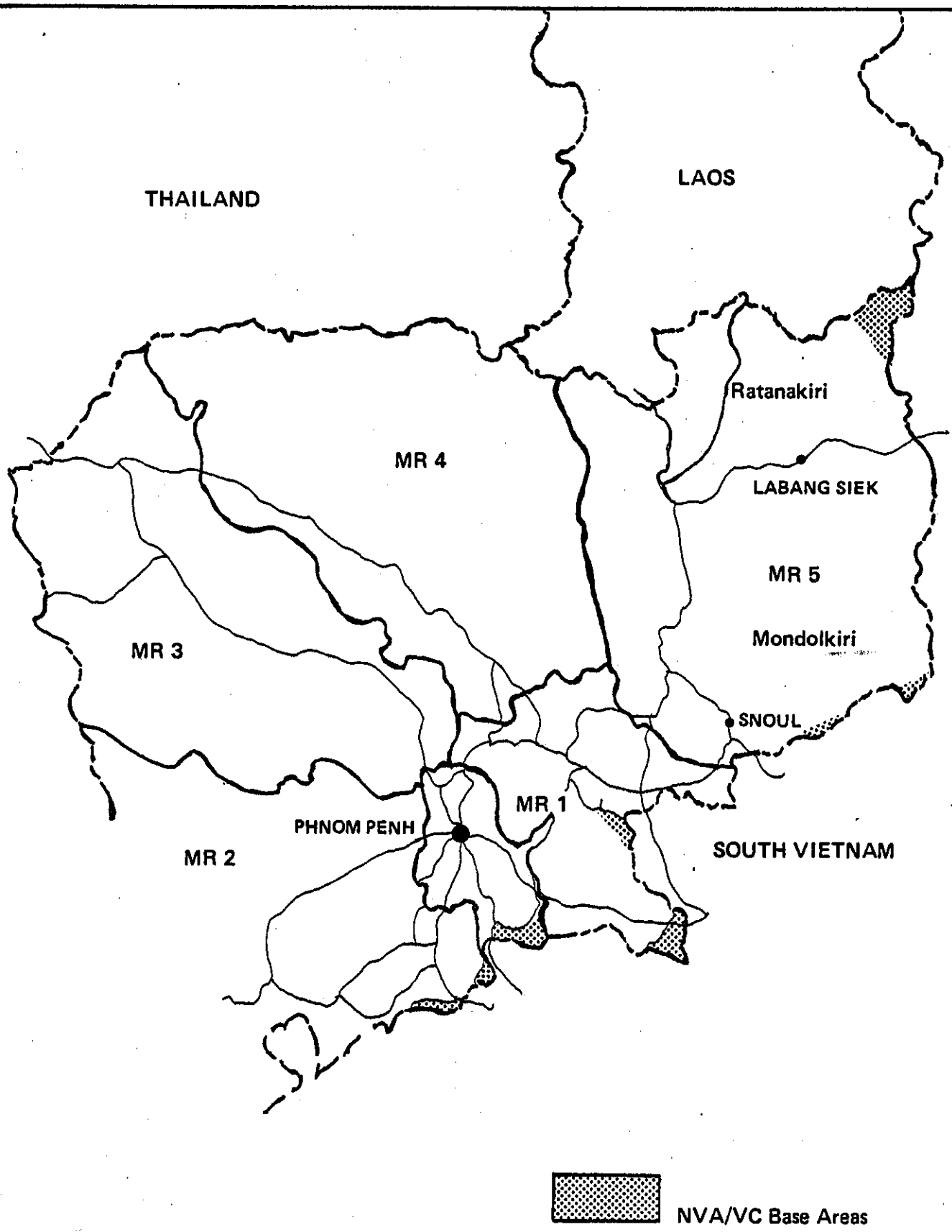
As a matter of fact, communist forces began, as early as 1962, to infiltrate into the northern and eastern border provinces of Cambodia, particularly in Stung Treng, Ratanakiri, Kratie, Prey Veng, Svay Rieng, Takeo and Kampot. By 1969, these infiltrated forces were estimated at 50,000 men installed in "sanctuaries" whose importance varied from a simple transit center to all types of bases, having complete military, logistic, and rest facilities, such as the bases in Ratanakiri, Mondolkiri, and Snoul. (*Map 2*)

Because of his "double dealing," Prince Sihanouk simply omitted, in all of his public statements, references to the existence of these infiltrations, and most particularly, the sanctuaries. He did this apparently to cover up his complicity with North Vietnam and the Viet Cong on the one hand, and to reject the pretext of "enemy pursuit" by U.S. and South Vietnam forces on the other.

The incorporation of Cambodia into the communist supply system kept pace with the development of the flow of VC/NVA infiltration into Cambodia, and the development of political relations between Cambodia and the Provisional Revolutionary (Viet Cong) Government (PRG).

From the communist viewpoint, the Ho Chi Minh Trail constituted in fact the only strategic route leading south. Under constant

Map 2 – Cambodian Government Information on Locations
of Principal NVA/VC Base Areas in Cambodia in 1969



surveillance and continuous bombings by the USAF and VNAF, this route did not lend itself easily to the transportation of the heavy equipment and materiel which were required for NVA troops in the south. If this route were completely interdicted by U.S. and RVN forces, it would be a real disaster for North Vietnam and the Viet Cong. Therefore, it was mandatory for the enemy to find an alternative to this vital lifeline, which would be less vulnerable to USAF/VNAF bombings. This explained why he turned toward Cambodia, or more particularly, toward its seaport of Kompong Som. It was a most propitious time for the enemy's diplomatic maneuvers. Since Sihanouk had repudiated U.S. aid, communist countries, and especially Red China were rushing in to fill this void. It became just a matter of increasing the volume of aid shipments to Cambodia, then routing the surplus to NVA/VC forces; the process passed almost undetected. This alternate route was deemed even more reliable because it was not exposed to the risks of U.S. bombings.

In the meantime, Sihanouk seemed to have serious doubts about the viability of Cambodia and his regime. On the one hand he was harassed by unending border violations, the result of the pursuit of Communist forces from South Vietnam into Cambodia; on the other hand, he was worried by the subversive maneuvers of the NVA/VC and the local Khmer Communists. He launched therefore "an appeal for the recognition and respect of Cambodia's territorial integrity within its present boundaries." To this appeal, only Nguyen Huu Tho, president of the NLF, and Pham Van Dong, North Vietnam's prime minister responded favorably by their letters of 6 and 8 June 1967 respectively. The U.S. took nearly two years to respond, until 15 April 1969. All this resulted in a further consolidation of relations between Cambodia and the enemy which prompted Sihanouk on 13 June 1969 to extend formal recognition to the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) of South Vietnam, created just 12 days earlier.

The first formal cooperation agreement between Cambodia and the PRG was concluded soon after Nguyen Tan Phat, PRG prime minister, paid a 6-day official visit to Phnom Penh on 29 June 1969. Designated "Trade and Payment Agreement," it was signed in Phnom Penh on 25

September 1969. Thus were formalized the illegal activities that Prince Sihanouk had already authorized for several years. The seaport of Kompong Som was now wide open to receive shipments of supplies intended for NVA/VC troops. These supplies were subsequently moved by truck to their destinations via Route 4. Unloading and transportation operations were the exclusive activities of a certain Hak Ly who owned about 200 cargo trucks. From Kompong Som to Kompong Speu or Phnom Penh, the cargos were carried on trucks rented by Hak Ly. Then from these places to final destination, the transportation was provided by Hak Ly's own trucks, which usually unloaded at Snoul and Mimot.

To rid himself of troublesome witnesses, Sihanouk ordered a black-listing of undesirable foreign correspondents, especially those of the free world. Finally, citing financial difficulties and criticizing its inactivity, Sihanouk terminated the mandate of the International Control Commission (ICC) on 6 October 1969. On his official request, all members of this international organization left Cambodia by the end of the year.

Thus it was accomplished that the Communists, by painstaking preparation, took advantage of the political uncertainties in that part of the world, and of the dilemma of Sihanouk. What was the attitude of the Cambodian people toward this political change by Sihanouk? Generally speaking, there were two contrasting schools of thought: the corrupt, who were partisan and enthusiastic; and the uncorrupt, who were disquieted. The first category consisted of courtiers and businessmen to whom this new kind of business had brought substantial and significant profits. The second category was mostly made up of intellectuals who found this new game risky. While the dissidents did not wholly approve of Sihanouk, with regard to his cooperation with North Vietnam and the Viet Cong, their manifestations were not vocal either, and one might think that they were indifferent. But on examination it could be seen that their silence was justified by the facts described below.

In the first place, Cambodia was the least endowed country in terms of materiel assets and particularly military equipment, as compared to its eastern or western neighbors. This was perhaps a result of its desire to stay away from either sphere of influence. Because of its

neutral stance, Cambodia did not have much attraction for rich and powerful countries, especially since its only resources came from agricultural products. Elsewhere in the world, industrial powers seemed always attracted by countries with rich underground resources. Cambodia, therefore, had been forsaken for a long time; it was almost completely ignored.

Although Cambodia had received some foreign aid from certain friendly countries of the west since 1954, this aid was only dispensed at a trickling rate and after lengthy and complicated procedures. With the exception of rubber production, a French concession which was rather obsolescent, industry was non-existent, being at the level of handicraft and cottage enterprise.

From his relations with the Communists, Sihanouk was therefore able to obtain at least something with which to equip his country, such as the Khmer-Russian Hospital, the Institute of Technology, cement, paper, glass and plywood production plants and some military equipment as well. With regard to military aid, Cambodia usually received a quota which was allotted in each cargo shipment unloaded at Kompong Som.

All this largely explained the passivity and silence of dissident intellectuals.

Khmer Communist Political Origins

After the event of 18 March, Prince Sihanouk took refuge in Peking, where his activities led to the creation of FUNK (*Front Uni National du Kampuchea*) and the formation of GRUNK (*Government Royal d'Union National du Kampuchea*) as well as the Indochina summit meeting in Canton in April 1970.¹ For the pro-communist Khmer, these events offered them the opportunity to pursue their goals more actively and more openly. With the

¹FUNK, Front of National Union of Kampuchea. GRUNK, Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea. Kampuchea is a French rendering of an ancient name for Cambodia. The acronyms FUNK and GRUNK will be used throughout this monograph to designate these two entities.

help of the NVA/VC they were able to extend their influence and to develop rapidly, both politically and militarily.

The political movement of the Khmer pro-Communists passed through several stages, marked by parallel transformations:

1. 1945-1954. During this period, there was development of the movement of Khmer Issarak in Cambodia, the Lao-Issarak in Laos and the Viet Minh in Vietnam, movements all affiliated with the Indo-chinese Communist Party, directed by Ho Chi Minh.

2. 1950. This year marked the beginning of the disintegration of the Khmer Issarak movement as certain of the leaders rallied to Prince Sihanouk, then King of Cambodia. Certain other elements of the Khmer Issarak, however, remained true to their communist ideology, and under the leadership of Son Ngoc Minh, then in North Vietnam, went underground and continued their activities in Cambodia.

3. 1951 saw the dissolution of the Khmer Issarak movement and the formation of the "Prachea Chon Party" or Party of the People.²

4. In 1954, at the time of the conclusion of the Geneva Accords in 1954, it was the Prachea Chon Party that decided to send some 5,000 communist sympathizers to North Vietnam for political indoctrination and military training.

²According to the article by R. P. Paringaux, published 31 March 1978 by the French newspaper Le Monde (weekly selection) this movement took the name of *Parti Revolutionnaire du Peuple Cambodgien* (Revolutionary Party of the Cambodian People).

5. In 1960, the Prachea Chon Party changed its name to "Workers Party" and constituted a central committee for the party at the conclusion of its first plenary session.³

6. The second plenary session of the Worker's Party in 1963 continued in effect the decisions taken during the first plenary session in 1960.

7. In 1965, Son Ngoc Minh decided to profit from the difficult relations between the U.S. and Cambodia, following rupture of diplomatic relations in May of that year, by bringing about the return to Cambodia of a certain number of the Khmer Viet Minh who had been trained and indoctrinated in Hanoi. This corresponded with the sharp increase in Communist subversive activity noted during that period. These activities were brutally repressed by Prince Sihanouk, and this repression, carried out systematically, forced several dozen of these Khmer Communists and their sympathizers to go underground.

8. In 1966, the principal red leaders, Khieu Sampaan, Hu Nim and Hou Yuon, disappeared from Phnom Penh; they had been involved, with the help of the Khmer Viet Minh cadres from Hanoi, in carrying out subversive activities in Prey Veng and Kompong Cham. During the same year, there was a proposal to change the name of the Workers Party to "Communist Party of Kampuchea" and to adopt the basic political line

³In order to better understand this evolution, note the following footnote to the article by Mr. Parengaux already cited:

"According to Radio Phnom Penh of 20 March 1978, Mr. Pol Pot told a group of Yugoslavia journalists that he had become the secretary of the Khmer Communist Party par interim in 1962, after" ...the secretary had been assassinated by the enemy: and that he had been confirmed in the position of secretary by the second party congress in 1963. Mr. Pol Pot added that he belonged to the anti-French underground from 1953 to 1954. Furthermore, according to official statements in Phnom Penh, the Khmer Communist Party was founded not in 1961, but on 30 September 1960.

of the Marxists-Leninists.⁴ These proposals were destined to be approved during the 3d Plenary Assembly which would take place before 1970.

A study of the enemy would be incomplete without analysis of the various groups or tendencies among the enemy shortly after March 18, 1970.

Within the FUNK there existed three such tendencies:

1. Those Khmer Communists and Khmer Viet Minh who had gone underground before March 18, 1970, and who were decided on a war of long duration. This extremist group opposed the nomination of Sihanouk as President of FUNK and also opposed to the continued practice of Buddhism.

2. The group known as the *Khmer Romdas*, who were loyal to Sihanouk.

3. A moderate group within the Khmer revolutionary movement directed by intellectuals under the leadership of Khieu Samphan, Hu Nim, and Hou Yuon.

There was little harmony among the three tendencies, especially as it concerned political tactics. The Khmer Rouge and the Khmer Viet Minh called for all-out war until final victory, and for absolute non-cooperation with Sihanouk and his partisans. Even though they were in agreement on this point, there was some misunderstanding between the two groups. In general, the Khmer Viet Minh had a superiority complex vis-a-vis the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Viet Minh were proud to have been educated abroad in a socialist country, and they underestimated the purely local Khmer Rouge, and the strategic and tactical competence of the latter for making revolutionary war.

The Khmer revolutionaries of Khieu Samphan et al, for their part, sided with Sihanouk on strategy shortly after the creation of FUNK and GRUNK, and were given key posts in these two entities. Khieu Samphan, Hu Yuon, and Hu Nim expected to make use of Sihanouk as they had done

⁴Note how this contradicts the statements attributed to Pol Pot in the Le Monde article cited above.

before; they organized behind him, reinforced themselves, and even called for his return to power for a period of transition. This would have given them the time to prepare the final phase of their revolution, that is the overthrow of Sihanouk, and the taking of power by their party. One could notice that the first pro-Sihanouk movement created at the start of the conflict, lost its influence little by little, and was eclipsed by the progressive expansion of the Revolutionary Movement.

Khmer Communist Military Development

Before 18 March 1970, there were two general periods in the development of Khmer communist military units and institutions. Between 1945 and 1954, the presence of the Viet Minh in Cambodia contributed to the formation of an auxiliary Khmer-Viet Minh force estimated at several thousand. After the Geneva conference of 1954, this force was disbanded. One part, along with certain sympathizers, moved to Hanoi, while the rest either returned to a more or less normal life or went underground. Between 1965 and 1967, several dozen intellectuals, mostly teachers and discontented students from the Sihanoukist regime went underground. Together with former elements of the Khmer-Viet Minh, these intellectuals constituted an embryo force which began to confront the established order by force of arms. The zones of action of these elements were found in the provinces of Battambang, Kampot, Prey Veng and in the frontier zone from Kompong Cham to Kompong Thom.

The concept for the organization of Khmer Communist forces after 18 March 1970, was established at the Indochinese summit, held in Canton in April 1970. There plans were made for a force of 50,000 regulars, including three divisions, all to be equipped by Communist China. They would be modeled after the Viet Cong and the Pathet Lao as follows:

1. Popular forces and auto-defense groups at village (*Phum*) and city (*Khum*) levels.
2. Regular forces with a territorial mission, organized at the levels of county or district (*Srok*) and province (*Khet*).
3. Regular forces, having no territorial responsibility, and functioning under the orders of the general military command. The above

forces were expected to undertake military tasks under the same conditions as units of the Viet Cong or Pathet Lao, with the support of North Vietnam.

In practice, the first FUNK units were made up of: ex-Khmer-Viet Minh elements; some who had been Khmer Rouge prior to 18 March 1970; and certain individuals who deserted the FANK and the Provincial Guard immediately following the 18th of March. Because these cadre were of uneven military capability, the VC/NVA established special training centers for them and for new recruits, and located them throughout the regions they controlled in Cambodia and lower Laos. On leaving these training centers, the Khmer elements were incorporated into various VC/NVA units who trained them further in practical combat. As they became more accomplished, the Khmer elements participated more and more actively along side the VC/NVA in actions against the FANK. As the Khmer Communist infrastructure developed, autonomous FUNK units began to appear on the battlefield; these had been judged competent by the VC/NVA command and freed to operate more or less independently. The total strength of the FUNK was estimated at 12,000 to 15,000 by about the end of 1970; between 18 and 25,000 in November 1971; and between 35 and 40,000 in 1972.

The development of Khmer Communist forces took place in three discernible phases. 1970 to 1972 was a period of organization, recruitment and training, leading to the fielding of small units and cells acting in the capacity of auxiliaries to Vietnamese Communist units. The period from 1972 to mid-1974 saw the formation and deployment of the Khmer Rouge units of battalion and regimental size, cadred by VC/NVA personnel, and operating in their assigned sectors according to orders received from COSVN. The Khmer units received support (operational, logistic and politico/military) from regular VC/NVA units. During this same phase, specialized Khmer sabotage and suicide units were also trained and deployed. The final phase, from mid-1974 to 1975 saw the appearance of Khmer Rouge Divisions. Each of the divisions and regiments was assigned to zones and sectors corresponding essentially to the Military Regions and Military Sub-divisions, of the Khmer Republic.

Considering the phases discussed above, it was to be expected that the major Communist military activities in Cambodia would be carried out initially by the VC/NVA using their central military command activity, COSVN, which was actually located in Cambodia, in the eastern part of Kratie Province. From the outset of hostilities, the following major Vietnamese Communist units were identified:

1. The 1st NVA Division, operating in the area south and southeast of Phnom Penh.

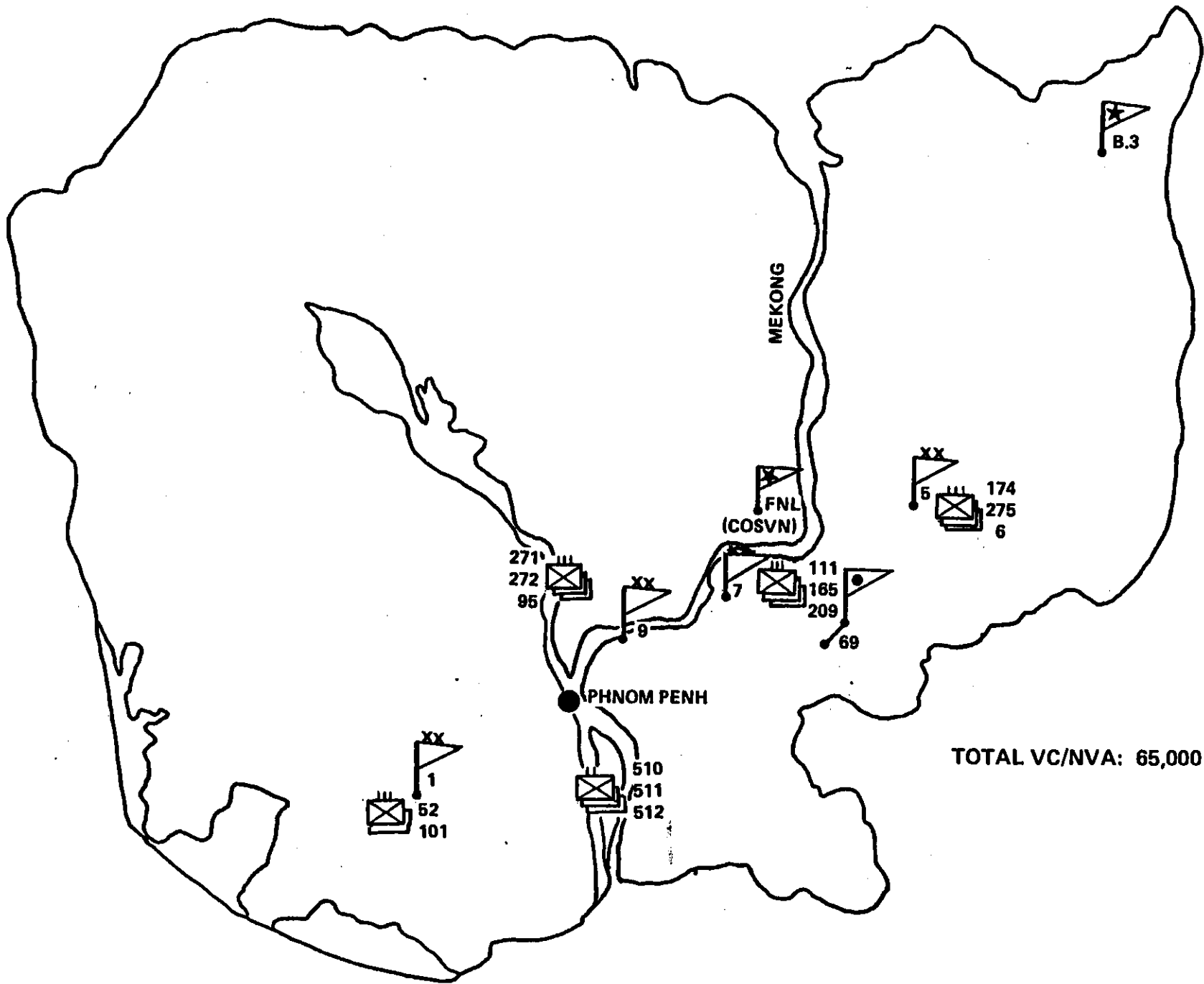
2. The 5th, 7th, and 9th NVA Divisions, located east of the Mekong, in areas north and east known as their sanctuaries. Note that the 9th Division often placed its units west of the Mekong for certain periods.

3. An additional division of VC/NVA forces, called the C40 Division, operating in the area north and northwest of the Tonle Sap Lake.

4. A large base known as the B3 Base, established in the tri-border region of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. (*Map 3*) The territory occupied by the Vietnamese units at the start of hostilities in Cambodia was turned over for administrative purposes to FUNK authorities, who, with the help of VC/NVA regional units designated FUNK regional units to ensure their defense and to see to the organization of the population. During this first phase, from March 1970 to 1972, an increase in the strength and proficiency of the FUNK forces was apparent. However, their actions were still limited, even incoherent, due probably to the absence of a military high command and an overall strategy. During this same period, specialized training centers were opened in various parts of Cambodia (Kompong Thom, Kompong Speu, Siem Reap, Kompong Cham, Kratie and Kampot) with a view toward perfecting the specialized training of the elements of FUNK. The year 1972 thus marked the beginning of the so-called "Khmerization" of the war in Cambodia.

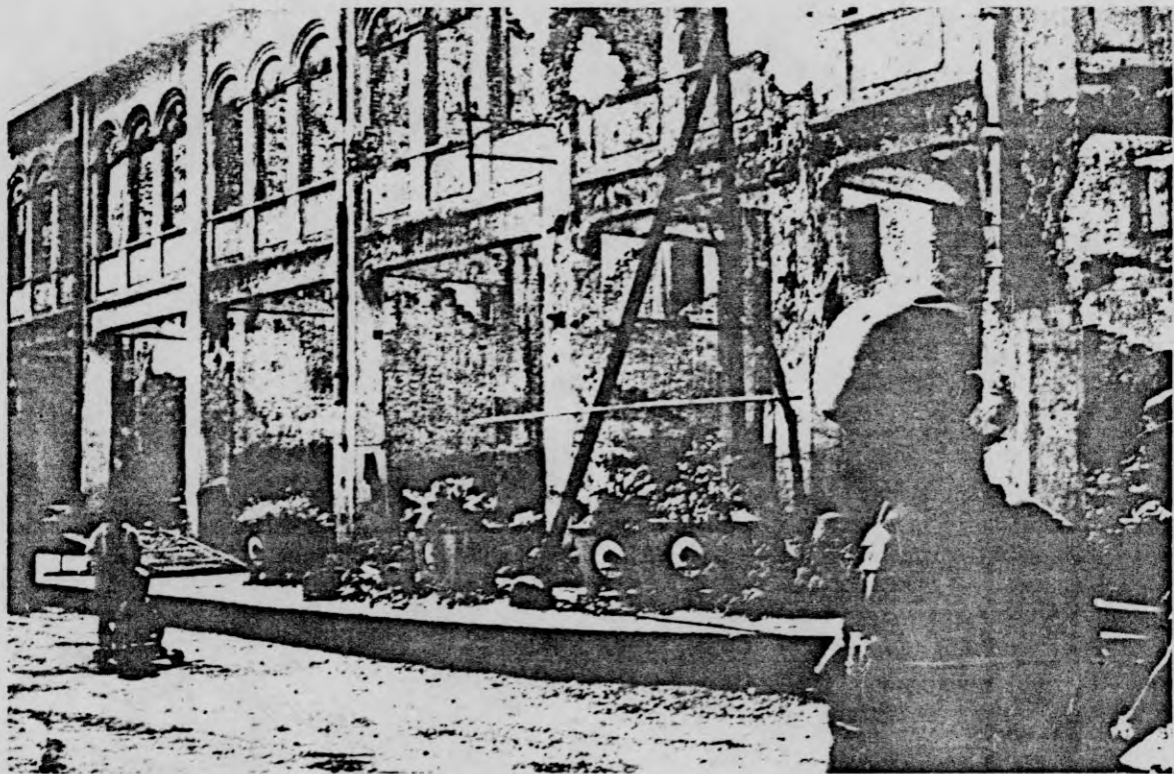
Throughout the war, the Khmer Communist struggle was as much political as military. Among the various Khmer communist units the leaders struggled to gain influence among themselves and among the masses of the population located in the zones under their control. In this regard, despite a strong position among the key posts of FUNK, the Sihanoukist persuasion was distinctly under-represented in the lower echelons, where

Map 3 - FANK Information as to Deployment of VC/NVA in Cambodia, 1970



the majority of the positions were occupied by Khmer from the Khmer Rouge-North Vietnamese persuasion. For their part, Khmer revolutionaries, who had previously called for strategic and tactical cooperation with Sihanouk, actively undertook the task of unifying these dissident factions within FUNK. Their efforts seem to have made progress, because during the years 1974 and 1975 there was observed the disappearance from circulation of tracts and other printed matter originated by the various factions, and in their place the appearance of a single overall FUNK line, both in written and spoken propaganda, a development which became more and more intense and widespread.

Against the Government of the Khmer Republic (GKR), then in power, the political activities of FUNK were aimed particularly at bringing about a gradual diminution in the support of the population for the GKR. To achieve this end, the FUNK did not hesitate to use the following methods: the development of anti-governmental propaganda, both written and spoken; cutting the economic supply routes in order to create a climate of crisis and insecurity and to provoke divisions in the population, as manifested by the exodus from communist control toward the zones controlled by the GKR; carrying out of acts of sabotage, terrorism and assassination in those zones where the majority of the population remained loyal to the GKR.



Destruction in Tonle Bet (on Mekong Opposite Kompong Cham)
Following Communist Attacks in April 1970.
Photographed in November 1970

CHAPTER III

The Armed Forces of the Khmer Republic

Origins

Prior to the political event of March 1970, the Royal Khmer Armed Forces (Forces Armées Royales Khmères—FARK) were just a small military organization whose strength did not even reach the authorized ceiling of 35,000 men. They were distributed among three services—the Royal Khmer Army, the Royal Khmer Air Force, and the Royal Khmer Navy—all under the command of a Commander-in-Chief.

The following review shows that at that time the FARK were insignificant as compared to NVA and VC forces, and there were several reasons for this.

Prior to the Geneva Accords of 1954, Cambodia received military aid from France. During that period, therefore, the FARK were equipped with French materiel. The French also provided training for all FARK cadres, most of whom were even sent to France for advanced course. In addition, under the guidance of French advisers, the FARK were structurally similar to a miniature French Army. France, which at that time had just emerged from the First Indochina war, did not have enough resources to make the FARK a strong and modern military force. This French policy was also partly justified by the fact that according to the 1954 Geneva Accords Cambodia was not supposed to make war. The FARK were thus organized and equipped somewhat in a pre-WWII style, a condition which obtained as late as 1954.

Then came the U.S. and its more diversified aid, which included military assistance. The FARK were now subjected to transformation because, with new American equipment, the Command attempted to change the organization of the armed forces. Unfortunately, the quantity of equipment provided by the U.S. was not enough to allow the modernization

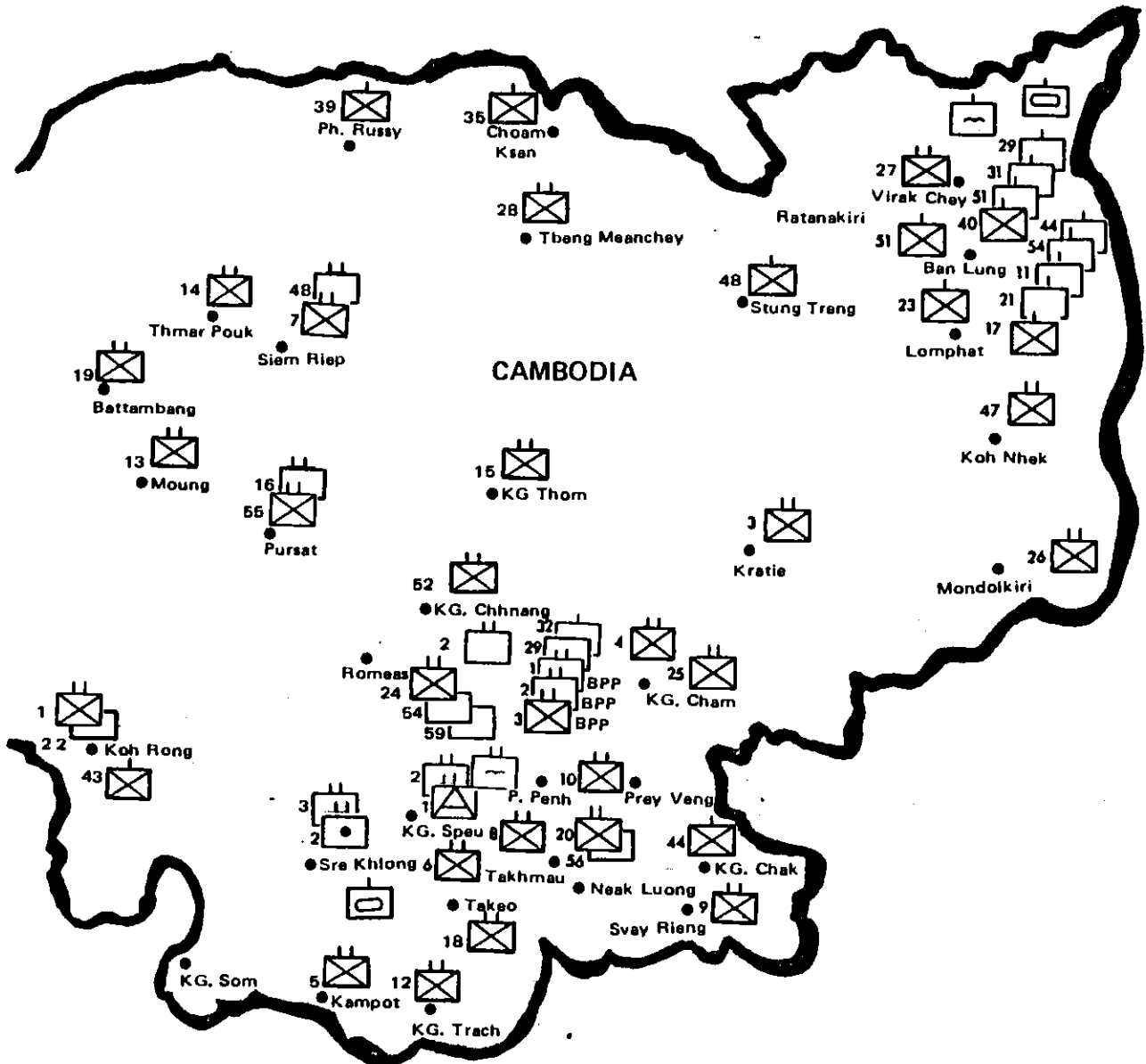
of the FARK. And when Sihanouk renounced U.S. aid in November 1963, the FARK found themselves midway toward modernization. It was then that there surfaced the first difficulties resulting from the disparity of equipment and material in use -- French and American.

After the rupture of relations with the U.S., the only countries that gave Cambodia military assistance were France (which continued to dispense it at a trickle) and, especially, those of the Communist bloc, first the Soviet Union and then China. The net result of this new assistance was a further aggravation of the existing difficulties, for the FARK now had to contend with three different types of materiel and equipment: French, American, and Communist. It goes without saying that the FARK encountered no end of problems. The divergence of its materiel affected the training of combat and technical personnel, maintenance, and especially the supply of spare parts and ammunition.

All this explained why the FARK were never able to achieve the standardization of their units in order to become a strong and modern military force. Consequently, the primary mission of the FARK remained just territorial -- hence static -- defense. The Royal Khmer Army, which was the largest of the three services in terms of personnel and materiel, was thus assigned this responsibility.

The Army consisted of some 30 infantry battalions, 13-15 separate infantry companies, support battalions (signal, transportation, engineer), one armored reconnaissance regiment (1st ARR), one field artillery battery, and one anti-air artillery battery. All these infantry and support units were under the control of the FARK General Staff whose chief was the Commander-in-Chief. As to technical services such as Medical, Ordnance, Quartermaster, Signal, they were the responsibility of the Service Directorates which came under the Ministry of National Defense. Army units were deployed throughout the country with major concentrations in the northeast (Ratanakiri Province) and around Phnom Penh. (Map 4)

General reserve forces consisted only of two light infantry battalions and the combat support battalions (signal, engineer, armor, artillery).



Map 4 — Locations of Principal FARK Ground Units Prior to 18 March 1970

The Royal Air Force had a strength of 1,250 men, composed in great majority of flight crews (pilots, flight engineers, radio operators and flight mechanics) and aviation technicians. Its only airbase at Pochentong was placed under the control of the Commander-in-Chief. Because of its low strength and limited flying assets, the Air Force was far from being able to accomplish its primary mission which was to defend the national airspace. Although there were several airstrips other than Pochentong, they were only used temporarily as emergency landing strips and never as secondary airbases. Therefore, the Air Force was merely considered a combat support arm which provided air transport services to infantry units and occasionally close air support to combat operations.

The Royal Khmer Navy, whose strength was similar to that of the Air Force, had a river base at Chruoy Chang War (Phnom Penh) and a naval base at Ream. As was the case with the Air Force, the Navy did not have very great capability. There was one marine company in the Navy. Most naval activity was confined to the Bassac River, the Mekong, and the Tonle Sap in the vicinity of the Great Lake. As far as naval missions on the high sea were concerned, the Navy was capable only of routine coastal patrols.

Practically speaking, the FARK never had a corps of reserve units as in other armies. Starting about 1955, training was begun of reserve officers from among those high-ranking government officials who volunteered to take a course of basic instruction at the Military Academy or officer school. This school was established in Phnom Penh after the French had accorded the Khmer a certain autonomy, an initial step prior to granting full independence. Instruction at the school was provided by French military personnel. Because of political considerations at the time, there was adopted for the first Khmer reserve officers an accelerated course of practical and theoretical instruction lasting one year. During the period of peace, from 1954 to 1969, this course was extended in length to two years. This was followed by the initiation of training of non-commissioned officers of the reserves, recruited this time from among the mid-level government officials; this course lasted only about six months.

For lack of a precise plan for the development of the armed forces, the reserve officers and non-commissioned officers were simply incorporated into the corps of active duty officers and non-commissioned officers. They were needed for expansion and to take the place of departing French cadre, as was the case of certain reserve officers in the territorial commands. Furthermore, certain civil servants were given military rank without having ever received military training of any sort; also their military grade was based on their civil rank. For example, the governor of a province or the president of a tribunal could become a Lt. Colonel or Colonel. This was done in a number of cases in order that the entire FARK might be Khmerized by the time of Cambodian independence.

Thus, a number of reserve cadre were trained, but there were no reserve units. Many of the reserve cadre, after their short periods of instruction, simply remained in the active armed forces and never returned to their civilian positions in the government.

As the number of reserve cadre grew, the FARK command became more aware of the lack of reserve units; in other words, the need for some mission for the newly trained reserve cadre. From this came the idea to institute compulsory military service for all Khmer of age for such service. Several laws were issued, and several groups of young people were trained in haste; but no reserve units were ever organized and, as in the case of the reserve officers and noncommissioned officers, the newly-trained recruits were used for fillers in the active units. By this time a number of the active forces were reaching the end of their periods of service or were ready for retirement. Now these errors were seen and understood by those in command, and several measures were adopted to fill this gap. Unfortunately, they met insurmountable obstacles, economic and financial, to mention only two. Cambodia could not afford to have a truly modern or "de luxe" armed force. This was the expression used over and over again by Prince Sihanouk, when addressing the nation, he launched for the first time the idea of the ". . . participation of the armed forces in the economic life of the country. . ." an idea called to mind by the picture Sihanouk formed of the "Grand Army"

of Red China during his visits to that country. The general slogan under which the FARK developed was thus, "as for the economy, Cambodia will aid itself."

With this changed situation, the impetus of the FARK toward orthodox military capability was essentially halted, and their efforts were devoted almost one hundred percent to the economy. FARK participated actively in the construction of roads, dykes, dams, etc., and the entire administrative and territorial organization of the country, neglecting for the most part military instruction and training. With the mission of FARK thus divided, their value as a defense force was reduced little by little. A battalion or company having a mission of territorial security in the region of the South Vietnam border (Moudolkiri, Ratankiri, Svay Rieng Provinces, for example) would continue to be devoted to road work and building of model villages rather than looking after the security of the frontier. It was not surprising during this period (1963-1969), described as the time of "The Great Economic Leap of Cambodia," to note the increase of VC/NVA infiltration into the frontier zones of Cambodia and, equally, the construction of Communist base areas to support their war in South Vietnam. Much of the equipment of the FARK was also used to support projects in the economic sector. All vehicles and mechanical equipment received through U.S. and French military assistance were rapidly worn out, and no solution to the problem of their replacement could be found. The same can be said for the condition of materiel in the Navy and Air Force. I remember that in 1963, just prior to the Khmer rejection of U.S. military aid, the French Military Attache and the Chief, U.S. MAAG, Phnom Penh, called on me for the express purpose of registering their dismay and disapproval at the misuse of the equipment which their countries had granted to the FARK.

We have seen how and under what conditions the FARK were conceived, organized, and developed. On the eve of Cambodia's entry into the Indochina conflict, the FARK were armed and equipped in a haphazard way. Training to prepare them for their task had not been pursued. Their cadres (especially the noncommissioned officers) had grown older and older, and the same was true for the private soldiers. In a word, the

FARK of 1970 were a sad lot compared to the VC/NVA, and their first combat against the latter staggered the FARK units despite their real determination to fight to safeguard their country.

The Initial Expansion After March 18, 1970

The sudden attacks launched by the VC/NVA on 29 March 1970 profoundly shocked the units of the FANK (*Forces Armées Nationales Khmères*) involved and dispersed them to the point that by early May 1970 the Cambodian provinces along the RVN border were practically occupied by Vietnamese Communist forces.¹

In these very first hours, the Salvation Government (*Gouvernement de Sauwetage*) led by General Lon Nol called on the entire population -- from whatever sector -- to organize itself for resistance under the direction of the military command in order to meet the aggression. This was the beginning of the general mobilization of the country to fight a new war of independence. The slogan "National Resistance" was adopted, and it must be admitted that there was great enthusiasm, particularly among the students, teachers, and certain intellectual circles for the abolition of the monarchial regime and for its replacement by a republican regime. The appeal by the Lon Nol government did not go unheeded; groups of young men and women volunteered to serve in the armed forces. Faced with this situation, the FANK high command, having named Lon Nol chief, assumed the heavy responsibility of preparing for the expansion of the FANK to

¹The two acronyms used in this monograph to designate the Cambodian armed forces are based on both Cambodian usage and U.S. reporting practices. FARK stands for Forces Armées Royales Khmères, the official French name for Khmer forces during the Sihanouk period. FANK stands for Forces Armées Nationales Khmères, the official French name used by the Cambodians after 18 March 1970. It was standard U.S. reporting procedure, both before and after the departure of Sihanouk, to use FARK or FANK; no acronym based on an English translation (as in the case of RVNAF for Vietnamese forces) was ever developed to refer to the entire armed forces of Cambodia.

make it capable of carrying out the mission of defending the country. In the following paragraphs are described the initial decisions taken as the result of numerous meetings.

In those areas still under the control of the Khmer government, the military and civil authorities were required to recount and verify the number of persons volunteering for military service, to house them, and to begin their military instruction immediately. At the same time, all available civil and military resources available locally were to be used to establish and equip temporary centers of instruction. Also, the personnel of units overrun during the first VC/NVA attacks and who had been able to reach friendly lines were either regrouped for reconditioning or were used as cadre for the training centers. At the same time, the units of the Provincial Guard (an arm of the National Police and under the direct orders of the various provincial governors) were disbanded and their personnel and equipment spread throughout the FANK. This was no simple operation since many of the Provincial Guard units were known to be pro-Sihanouk. Nevertheless, the transformation of these police into military personnel happily took place without any particular incident. Everywhere, there were efforts to create recruiting stations to serve the volunteers, the majority of whom were at this time drawn from the ranks of high school and university students.

The FANK high command was surprised not only by the outbreak of war but it was surprised—even submerged—by the number of problems it had to face in the organization of the national defense. At the same time that the general enthusiasm was growing, the checks and defeats being suffered by certain FANK units increased to the point that by the month of May 1970 the north and northeast part of Cambodia (the provinces of Stung Treng, Ratanakiri, Kratie, and Mondolkiri) found themselves isolated and beyond the effective control of the FANK high command.

The training centers were directed to cut the period of recruit training by 50 percent as a way of accelerating the formation of new units. Another problem concerned equipment and arms for the new soldiers; what stocks were available in unit supply rooms were quickly expended and without concern for uniformity. In a single combat unit were to be seen

an entire range of individual and crew-served weapons. The resupply and logistical support of FANK units as a whole became more burdensome and insoluble as the war developed.

There was another way in which the number of FANK units was increased. This was by means of incorporating directly into the FANK the armed villager forces, which had been in existence since the early days of Sihanouk's patriotic struggle for Cambodian independence from the French (1949-1953).² They had received very little military training because they were essentially the village populations and their principal mission was the defense of their own villages or districts. They were poorly armed with outmoded U.S., French, and English rifles which were not only ready for salvage but for which ammunition was no longer being produced. A third way in which the creation of new units was accelerated was by recalling the reservists to active duty who had not had the opportunity to remain in service after their initial training. It should be noted in passing that during peacetime these reservists, officers, and noncommissioned officers were never called to undergo periods of active duty for training. This situation, which was due to budgetary restrictions or the higher priority of the reservist's government service, caused a degradation of their military effectiveness.

In spite of the many problems encountered, during the first year of the war FANK made progress both in increases in strength and in the honing of its combat skills. Still, the capabilities of the VC/NVA were such that it was not unusual to see one of these new units (company or battalion), made up of 50 percent career cadre and 50 percent young recruits, completely decimated in its first engagement with the enemy. Further, there is no shame in admitting that during the period some of the original FARK units, which had earlier against the Vietminh acquired reputations as the most effective in FANK, were overrun or heavily damaged in their first encounters with the enemy of 1970-1971. The 3d FARK Battalion at Kratie, the 1st FARK Battalion at Takeo, and the 9th FARK Battalion at Svay Rieng are examples. All of this

²In French: *Forces Vives* or *Forces des villageois armées*.
In Khmer: *Chivapol*.

demonstrated the lack of training at every level and the poverty of logistic support.

As part of general mobilization, there was in each military region and military subdivision a recruiting station and a training center. Thus, there were created, day by day, new battalions, regiments, and brigades. The new recruits were given training in individual weapons and tactics for several weeks. The units departed for the battlefield in old requisitioned civilian trucks. In those days they were referred to as "24 hour soldiers."

There was a fourth way in which the strength of FANK was swelled. It was the practice of "unit doubling," whereby one-half the strength (officer and enlisted) was taken to form the framework of a new unit.³ The majority of the personnel of these units were hastily trained recruits. The decentralization of recruiting and the practice of doubling units in the ways described above did result in the organization of new units to support the military regions and military subdivisions which were directly menaced by Communist attacks. And while they were counted as successes by the FANK high command in those early days, the policies which led to their deployment could not avoid results which became more and more unfortunate for the FANK as time passed. These new units were routed, overrun, or completely destroyed by the enemy. The large number of new units not only posed problems of combat effectiveness but greatly taxed the logistic and financial resources of the government.

In step with the increase in strength in the three services of FANK, there appeared the practice of rapid promotion of officers and noncommissioned officers to the point of provoking more and more profound feelings of jealousy within the armed forces; and this says nothing of the inevitable and increasingly serious drain on the budget resulting therefrom. It can be said, however, that the Navy and the Air Force were less affected by these bastardized recruiting practices, as these two services were made up of greater numbers of technicians than the

³In French: *l'Opération de Doublement des Unités.*

ground forces. Nevertheless, their morale was not helped by seeing their Army friends the recipients of unjustifiably rapid promotions. The unfortunate consequences of all these early policies were not lost on the high-ranking military and civilian members of the government and the FANK high command. They made manifest their disapproval and tried more than once to guide military policy back to a more professional basis. Unfortunately, they met with little success.

At the same time that the general reorganization of FANK structure was taking place—and always according to the concepts of General Lon Nol—there was carried out the organization of certain paramilitary units. The mission of these units was to ensure the defense of certain sensitive and strategic points designated by FANK. They were composed for the most part of students, civil servants, and local inhabitants who were not in the armed forces. Employed in this way, they would free the FANK from the static defense mission, ensure rear area security, and protect against an enemy fifth column. It must be granted that the appearance of this defense system, together with the surge of national awakening, gained for Cambodia both the admiration and the sympathy of foreign observers in general; but to the eyes of professional military observers, foreign and Khmer, the difficulties of all sorts which beset the FANK every day were more than clear.

Starting with 35,000, the FANK was expanded to 110,000 by June 1970, a level which was practicable and controllable. For his part, the initial force structure of 210,000 sought by General Lon Nol would have 200,000 for the Army and the remainder divided between the Navy and the Air Force. And he leaned on his own people in the General Staff and in the Military Regions to see that this higher level was reached by August 1970. Speaking now of the ground forces only, there would be two principal forces: the FANK General Reserve and the Territorial Forces. The latter were under the direct command of the military region commanders. At the same time, there were several changes to the organization of units; battalions were grouped into regiments; then the regiment was abolished in favor of a brigade consisting of several battalions. By 1 May 1970, twelve