Since then official communiques and appeals by the leaders were routinely being published by Chinese news media. Some important ones were put out this year immediately before and following the Vietnam ceasefire. On January 28 the three leaders analysed the Vietnam settlement, on February 10 they called upon Buddhist monks to rise against the Lon Nol regime, on February 11 they asked students and intellectuals to redouble vigilance, on February 17 they sent an appeal to "functionaries" in the regions under Lon Nol to step up their struggle.

Interestingly, no appeal is published under the name of any one of the three top leaders. Invariably, all the three names appear together and all appeals are made collectively by them.

Last week some new photographs were released—again in Paris. While the pictures circulated a year ago were in the nature of portraits, the latest show Khieu Samphan and Hou Youn in action—the first holding a strategy session in a jungle camp and the second wading through a marsh with a group of guerrillas. These are relatively good-quality pictures which can presumably be circulated as recently-taken.

It is doubtful, however, whether the latest photographs will remove the ghost character of the three Khmer Rouge leaders any more than last year's pictures did. The conclusive evidence of their being active in the current campaign will be their appearance before, say, a group of pressmen in Peking or at an official function in Hanoi. Last year the veteran Cambodian communist, Ieng Sary, had done just that by suddenly appearing in full view in Peking.

The need for Khieu Samphan to similarly appear in public arises not only from the cause of the resistance demands it. It is all the more necessary because it will show that there is an effective—and Cambodian—leadership to negotiate a settlement in Cambodia. Sihanouk of course fulfils that function at present—but it is not yet known whether that is what the Indochinese communist movement wants.

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THE RETURN OF THE PHANTOM BRIGADES

(By Elizabeth Becker)

Phnom Penh—The route to any of Cambodia's numerous battlefronts wanders through the countryside, past farmers in rice paddies and young boys riding their buffaloes to work in the fields. These youths are the lucky ones, poised on their solid gray beasts with little on their minds beside the planting season. Further down the road many of their brothers are on foot, clutching grenades and waiting for a commander's order to attack.

Cambodian boys as young as 8 have entered the army with simple ambitions: to find excitement, or to supplement or replace a family income depleted by the death of a breadwinner or the loss of a farm bombed during an attack. Once in the military the boys find they cannot meet their goals; they barely earn enough to provide for themselves. Military critics have reported that officers pay these boys less than the official US$20 monthly salary, giving them, instead, "an allowance" and a ration of rice.

One Western diplomat noted that the boys often appear on the payrolls as adults, sometimes as fathers with as many as four dependents. He added that the boys never see these salaries or the dependents' allowance since it goes directly into the pockets of the officers in charge. The boys accept their pay and rank as part of their job. Less prone to complain than their elders, they are noticeably quiet when preparing for battle. They approach the opposing lines with naive determination.

The Cambodian National Armed Forces (FANK) publicly stated that the age of soldiers would be limited to 18 or over. With units below strength, however, younger boys are reportedly still welcomed by most officers, "When we say no they cry," said one officer.

The story of these young soldiers is just part of the larger scandal of an army rent with mismanagement and corruption. Last December Lon Nol's government admitted that FANK padded its payrolls with nearly 100,000 phantom soldiers. Pointing to the FANK reorganisation programme begun by Chief of Staff Maj.-Gen. Sostene Fernandes last summer, the army promised to weed out the offenders and put an end to the worldwide criticism that followed the Government's disclosure. But the phantoms have come alive again, this time on the floor of the United States Senate.
In late February Senator Stuart Symington asked for a re-examination of corruption in the Cambodian Army after learning from an official US army report that American military aid funds continue to pay phantom Cambodian soldiers. The corruption story that broke late last year and resulted in investigations and a few token dismissals had been resurrected.

The practice of adding non-existent personnel to army payrolls has been very lucrative for high-ranking officers in Cambodia. The official investigations disclosed that, with an army of less than 150,000, Lon Nol's officers had manufactured at least a further 100,000 soldiers. This amounts to at least $2 million in excess pay that went to the officers' private bank accounts each month.

In early January the US Military Equipment Delivery Team surveyed FANK ostensibly to check the military hardware donated under the US aid programme. Sources close to the Americans report they found not only "a depleted force" of less than 150,000 troops, but an ill-equipped army as well. One person noted: "They were caught—and suddenly large casualty figures were published and huge equipment losses reported as soon as the phantom story hit the papers." This was at a time of little combat activity.

FANK's reorganisation programme picked up speed after the scandal. The Cambodians had never known how many soldiers they actually had. During the brief period of high nationalist spirit at the beginning of the war, anyone was taken into the unit of their home area. Both sexes, the old and the young, the trained and the unskilled entered the corps in a fashion similar to the recruiting procedure of the US during its civil war.

FANK's plan was to dissolve this old system as well as the corruption-prone payroll procedure inherited from the French. Previously, the officer in charge of personnel accounting doubled as the payroll officer. The new system calls for a division of these tasks, which would presumably lessen the possibility of padded payrolls and ensure that all soldiers received their salaries.

The reorganisation strategy involved a major reshuffling of soldiers once their numbers had been determined. Wisely, under-strength brigades and battalions have been dissolved and soldiers relocated to the remainders. Officers in charge of this programme have discovered and punished soldiers guilty of "some misbehaviour and dishonesty." They admitted some difficulty, especially with the "extended families" of wives, children and injured who depend on their provincial brigades for their livelihood.

For the past two months FANK and the Americans have predicted success for the project, anticipating a new army capable of countering any rebel offensive. The plan itself is sound; however, some snags have resulted from very senior officers who refuse to allow their units to be counted, according to one diplomat.

Stories of desertions started to crop up in the middle of February, before Symington's disclosure. Opposition forces launched a major offensive on January 29, successfully weakening government defence positions on most highways and the Mekong River. Late in February, during a crucial battle to clear Highway One, hundreds of soldiers walked off the field to protest about not receiving pay for two months.

Since then more troops have left their units to protest about lack of pay. Two hundred rather courageous soldiers even demonstrated in front of the former royal palace to demand back salaries.

Hours after the news of the Washington corruption investigation reached Phnom Penh, Gen. Fernandes held a rare news conference to brief the press on the general military situation. After releasing casualty figures from the opposition offensive and reiterating the official policy that the remaining North Vietnamese troops were responsible for Cambodia's problems, he made a strange request, asking the press not to report stories of corruption. "The press must cooperate," he admonished, "as stories of corruption demoralise our army."

The General went on to explain that FANK's reorganisation programme was proceeding slowly and with some difficulty. However, guilty officers were being removed and punished. "This talk of corruption is the work of North Vietnamese sabotage," he asserted, "and you are aiding the enemy by reporting it."

With Washington's newest probes and the Cambodian Army's vocal dissatisfaction, one diplomat doubted that the American taxpayer would accept the General's analysis.
CAMBODIA, MIRED IN WAR, LOOKS TO U.S. AS ONLY HELP  
(By Henry Kann)

Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Feb. 13—Cambodia, the last country of Indochina to be engulfed by the war, watched dejectedly as peace continues to elude her.

While negotiations on how to make and apply peace are the principal preoccupations of neighboring Vietnam and Laos, the sound of gunfire is heard here once again and is coming nearer to the capital.

The Government of President Lon Nol and the guerrilla forces fighting under the banner of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, far from talking to each other, deny each other's legality.

Worst of all, in this capital that has gone from prim to sleazy, from gay to sullen, in less than three years of war, belief has become general that the Government is so incompetent, its army so impotent, that it can make neither peace nor war and cannot protect the vital interests of Cambodia and her seven million people.

And the Cambodians—who had known only French colonialism and Prince Sihanouk's authoritarianism and who have not had practice in being masters of their national fate—look hopefully, often pleadingly, to the chief present source of power in their country to solve their problems.

That power is the United States. America provides Cambodia with about $170-million a year in military assistance and about $100-million in economic aid.

In 10 days of conversations with Cambodians—leaders of government and political life, laborers, generals, teachers and other civil servants, businessmen and ordinary soldiers—one common theme stood out: American power in Cambodia is so great and Cambodia is so feeble that the country's future is in the hands of the United States.

Significantly, this feeling is as widespread among leaders of the Government and the military as it is among the general public and the opposition.

In the American view the Cambodian attitude is an anachronism: The United States Embassy does not want to be the viceroy or proconsul of Cambodia. The United States no longer creates and overthrows governments in Indochina; it merely supports countries to defend themselves against aggression.

Without Advance Notice

Vietnamese Communist troops invaded Cambodia after Prince Sihanouk's overthrow in March, 1970, and before the United States and South Vietnam invaded Cambodia in their turn. The invaders did not ask Cambodia's permission or even give her Government advance notice.

The relationship seems different now: American diplomats encourage Cambodian opposition figures—this includes almost all politically active Cambodians except Marshal Lon Nol and most of his entourage—to confront the marshal with their views and make a republican and democratic form of government work.

But the Cambodians, whose faith in the words of the great powers exceeds that of many other peoples, do not see the United States' role in Cambodia in such terms. They do not distinguish between American support for Cambodia and support for Marshal Lon Nol.

They interpret the congratulatory messages from the United States that followed Marshal Lon Nol's election to the presidency last June—after he had unilaterally disbanded the Constituent Assembly in March and had proclaimed his own Constitution and obtained its adoption in a referendum in May that is generally considered to have been exceeded in voting irregularities only by the presidential election that followed—as genuine expressions of support and admiration rather than routine courtesies.

Message from Agnew

When Vice President Agnew stopped here on Feb. 1, a principal message he intended to deliver was this: The United States believes that Marshal Lon Nol's exclusion of such major political figures as Lieut. Gen. Sisowath Sirik Matak, his one-time Premier, and Brig. Gen. In Tam, an opposition leader, from the Government made it too narrowly based and unrepresentative and therefore not in the best condition to negotiate with its enemies.
At American urging, to underscore the message, the two leaders, as well as a former chief of state, Cheng Heng, were invited to Marshal Lon Nol's lunch on for Mr. Agnew. One of them said the principal result of the Vice President's visit was to make the Cambodian chief "200 per cent" optimistic about American support and his ability to win the war.

Similarly, when Gen. John W. Vogt Jr., deputy commander of American forces in Vietnam and commander of the Seventh Air Force, visited on Feb. 6, he intended to lend emphasis to American urgings of tighter military discipline and the elimination of corruption to achieve the best use of the military aid.

The principal impression of the visit that circulates among the presidential entourage is that General Vogt so praised Cambodia's military performance as to cause Marshal Lon Nol to believe that the United States was encouraging him to pursue the war to final victory.

One of Marshal Lon Nol's close associates after Prince Sihanouk's overthrow who held high office until ousted by the marshal asserted: "This country has no political maturity. All Cambodians regret the effects of what the United States has done. It is true that you do not want to—must not—dominate us. But you come as friends. You must say the whole truth, not all the flattery."

'IF YOU HELD UP THEIR PAY'

"You do not want to stage a coup d'etat—I understand that," said a political leader of unusual sophistication acquired during a long stay in France, "but you pay the soldiers. If you held up their pay for one month it would finish the Government."

Actually the United States foots slightly less than half of the military payroll by allowing the Government to use for that purpose the counterpart funds in Cambodian riels that it receives by selling goods imported with American financing.

About half of the budget of 22 billion riels (about $150-million) covers the military payroll. Counterpart riels in 1972 amounted to 7.2 billion to 7.5 billion riels. This contribution to the military is in addition to the direct military aid.

Reflecting an oppressive political atmosphere, people interviewed, with few exceptions, voiced the fear that if their names were disclosed in stating their views they would be in trouble. Such timidity, in the absence of repression of major political figures—if not of strong-arm methods by the Government—is traced by informed sources partly to political habits dating from colonial days and to Prince Sihanouk's rule.

Another and increasingly important element of the fear of what expressed opposition might entail appears to be based on the growing arbitrariness of Marshal Lon Nol's Government and the open power of the only man remaining close to him—his younger brother, Brig. Gen. Lon Non.

OUT IN THE LIMELIGHT

After two and a half years as a gray eminence General Lon Non emerged from behind the throne last October to become an open power in his own right as Minister Attached to the Interior Ministry, in Charge of Liberation and Education (Community Development) General Mobilization and Rallying—that is, winning guerrillas over to the Government.

Those attributions, in addition to the special power conferred on the President's brother and close confidant, have made the general, who at the time of Prince Sihanouk's overthrow was a major in the military police, the undisputed head of internal security as well as the man officially responsible for such contacts as there are with the guerrillas and their leaders.

In an interview General Lon Non reiterated the official line that Prince Sihanouk exercises no control over the guerrillas, whose number is estimated at 30,000 to 40,000, and that they are profoundly divided into mutually hostile factions. As a result, he said, there exists no central leadership with which he can establish contact.

His policy, he said, is to make contact with local leaders to encourage them to defect with those under their command. He added that such defections were increasing.

The general's view finds limited credit among Cambodian officials and foreign experts. The surrender ceremonies that have been held under his sponsorship are believed to have been staged, using villagers or even soldiers to whom old weapons and clothing have been issued and a few riels paid to act as "defectors."
OBSTACLES TRACED TO LON NON

On the political scene General Lon Non is held responsible even by local officials for intrigues that have prevented the broadening of the governmental base to include such loyal figures as General Sirik Matak and General In Tam, who is head of the Liberal party.

General Lon Non is known to exercise decisive influence over the one-party National Assembly, elected last year without opposition candidates because the preceding presidential voting had instilled in the opposition no confidence in a fair vote or count.

Last month, mainly in response to the American urgings, Marshal Lon Non asked General Sirik Matak to return to the Government as Vice President and General In Tam as special counselor to the President. When General Sirik Matak posed as a condition the consent of the leadership of Marshal Lon Non's Social-Republican party, the Assembly, to the Marshal's chagrin, produced a negative petition, unsolicited by him and signed by 126 of the 140 deputies.

New efforts to bring General Sirik Matak into the Government are believed to be making progress, but sources close to him fear that unless his acceptance of the vice presidency is accompanied by the departure of Marshal Lon Non and his brother for an extended visit to the United States for medical reasons, the results will not be positive.

General In Tam, one of the principal architects of Prince Sihanouk's removal, accepted the counselor's post last week, but in an interview at his hospital bed, where he is recovering from a kidney ailment, he said that he would stay only if he was assured of the tasks of pacification and of making contact with the guerrillas and with the necessary means of carrying them out.

In the last two weeks Premier Hang Thun Hak has been the target of staged demonstrations of opposition as well as of apparently inspired rumors of his resignation. They reached a high point last Saturday, when the Khmer Press Agency, controlled by General Lon Non, gave them official currency by issuing an unsolicited official denial.

The agency is just one of the interests of General Lon Non, who appears to control considerable funds for the sponsorship of a number of shadowy committees. The Committee for Special Coordination, a large group of unspecified functions, was his principal instrument until he became a minister.

"He is the champion of committees, meetings and intrigues," a former close associate said.

The main source of funds, in the common belief—which is supported by the highest military sources—is the body of troops that General Lon Non commands, the Third Brigade Group. It is the successor to irregular troops that he began to recruit, many among the Cambodian minority in South Vietnam, shortly after his brother achieved power.

ACTUAL STRENGTH UNCERTAIN

When it was only a brigade the general said in an interview that it had more troops than a division. A real count remains unavailable, and in the difference between actual manpower and the numbers for which pay is drawn is thought to lie a source of financing.

Nonetheless, in the current American-backed restructuring of the armed forces to eliminate "phantom" or nonfunctioning soldiers, the Third Brigade Group is to become one of the army's four divisions; on Marshal Lon Non's order his brother will be its commander.

Ranking sources close to Maj. Gen. Sosthenes Fernandez, Chief of the General Staff, said the command was aware of the problem and planned to establish the other divisions first, with an honest head count, in the hope that this would persuade the President to insist on similar procedures in his brother's division.

General Lon Non, whose taste runs to large or flashy cars and boldly printed silk blouses, which he says are inspired by Pierre Cardin, has achieved extraordinary eminence among his military and political colleagues.

At a Cambodian New Year party at his house last April, he stepped out among his guests under an arch of sabers held by fellow officers, including generals. He was a colonel. At a recent dinner party attended by two other senior ministers, he entered amid signs of deference from all present, and even the ministers fell silent in mid-sentence when he began to speak.
Marshall Lon Nol's popularity and reputation have declined as steeply as his brother's power has risen. In the past, associates told puzzled foreigners that one had to be Khmer to understand his penchant for mystical Buddhist fantasies, his oracular pronouncements of the grandeur of Khmer civilization and his air of remoteness from the pressing problems of the day. Now they concede that they are equally puzzled.

High officials describe the method of government as Byzantine, with orders, sometimes contradictory, issued by the President in response to friends, mainly military, who have caught his ear or to requests by his brother. Recently two officials had notes on scraps of paper bearing his consent to their appointment to the same foreign post.

As a result, high civil servants in technical capacities said that administration was falling apart and resources were being pillaged. Military commanders hold supreme power in most provinces and despoil them by selling natural riches—timber, fishing rights, land—to the highest bidder.

**TAKE WHAT THEY WANT**

Businessmen in Phnom Penh complain that the Government or its high civil and military officials take what they want when they want it and that payment often has to wait.

Meanwhile, the avenue in front of the Yycee Descartes, an elite school, clogged every morning and noon with the cars of the war-rich delivering and picking up their children. The city is swollen to perhaps double its prewar size of 600,000, with refugees crowding into relatives' homes or in shacks they put up where they can.

Most of the men work as coolies, earning about 50 cents a day, and the women sell fruit and vegetables to earn perhaps a dime.

"If the Americans continue to help a regime that is in its agony," a physician of high reputation commented, "it will either lead to total civil war or it will chase all of us into the arms of the Communists."

[From The New York Times, March 10, 1978]

**U.S. AND CAMBODIA: AT A CRITICAL CROSSROAD**

(By Henry Kamm)

Phnom Penh, Cambodia, March 8—The United States has come to a critical juncture in its relationship with Cambodia. In the only country in Indochina that remains fully at war and where American planes carry out daily bombing raids, its policy has been stalemated by both "friend" and "foe." North Vietnam has dashed American hopes that it will extend to Cambodia the scaling down of the war in South Vietnam and Laos.

And the Phnom Penh Government appears to have killed American efforts to share leadership with the man the United States considers best qualified to guide Cambodia out of the war and reverse the Government's alarming military and political decline.

As a result, the United States faces the indefinite continuation of a war in which it participates directly under the stewardship of a Government in which it has little confidence. And that Government depends for its survival entirely on American military and economic assistance, which amounts to about $200-million a year in addition to the cost of American air support.

**CHOICE FOR U.S.**

The United States must decide whether to continue its present policy or proceed to a radical revision.

The present policy has succeeded in maintaining Cambodia at the edge of military disaster while keeping her from totally succumbing. The Cambodian Army with all its superior equipment supplied by the United States has been outmaneuvered and outfought by its combined Vietnamese and Cambodian foes at every point. Military experts, including Cambodians, believe that it would collapse without American bombing support.
Along with the military predicament, a disintegration of political support for President Lon Nol's Government has left nothing of the enthusiasm and elan, at least among the small number of politically conscious Cambodians, that followed the overthrow of Prince Norodom Sihanouk three years ago.

The unpopularity of the Government is a result of rising prices, incompetence, corruption, authoritarianism and manipulated elections. The man generally held responsible for the regime's failings, by Americans as well as Cambodians, is Gen. Lon Non, much more than his partly paralyzed and remote brother, President Lon Nol.

Well-placed Cambodian and diplomatic sources believe that the demoralizing effect of the continuation of the regime is as much a peril to the survival of a Cambodia not dominated by the Communists as the military superiority of the guerrilla forces.

**POLICY DEALT SETBACKS**

United States political and military policy has been dealt severe setbacks in recent days.

Henry A. Kissinger returned from Hanoi and Peking apparently having failed, according to informed diplomatic sources, to obtain any encouragement in his efforts to persuade either capital to act to reduce the war in Cambodia.

The same sources said that more than six weeks after the Paris agreement, which pledged the signers "to put an end to all military activities in Cambodia," North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops show no intention of withdrawing.

Consequently, the United States, after an initial suspension of bombing to test the other side's intentions, has resumed air strikes to help the Cambodian army when it is seriously attacked.

Last Monday, United States hopes of introducing Lieut. Gen. Sisowath Sirik Matak into the Government were thwarted. He is the one man it believes qualified to bring some enlightenment into what it considers the mystical muddle of the regime.

General Lon Non declared that General Sirik Matak must not return to the Government.

Sources close to General Sirik Matak as well as interested diplomats believe that General Lon Non's attack, in an interview that he requested with The New York Times—in order, he said, to put his view before the United States—rules out the possibility of General Sirik Matak's participation in the Government while his opponent remains there.

**FRIENDS SINCE YOUTH**

The United States had urged Marshal Lon Nol to persuade General Sirik Matak, his friend since their youth, to accept the vice-presidency, which is vacant. General Sirik Matak, whose power was almost as great as Marshal Lon Nol's, resigned last year as chief of government after students, instigated by General Lon Non, demonstrated against him.

The serious illness of President Lon Nol and his tendency to deal with pressing problems with elliptical Buddhist pronouncements have limited his effectiveness. The political scene has been dominated for three years by a struggle behind the scenes between the two men who exercise influence over him—General Sirik Matak, his friend, and General Lon Non, his brother. The United States has consistently favored General Sirik Matak, whom it trusts.

General Lon Non's public declaration of his antagonism for General Sirik Matak was a dramatic and shocking move in the Cambodian context, because it put the younger brother into open opposition to an expressed wish of the President, who is the head of his family as well as the head of the nation.

Respect for elder members of the family is a keystone of the Cambodian social structure.

'**TRAITORS' ARE SEEN**'

Sources close to General Sirik Matak said that General Lon Non had succeeded in persuading his brother that General Sirik Matak is surrounded by "traitors" and must be kept out of the Government.

General Sirik Matak's personal and political character make his Cambodian supporters and Americans disinclined to believe that he will answer General Lon Non's opposition directly. His condition for accepting the vice-presidency had been an assurance from the President that he would keep his brother's opposition in check.
The political inertia of Cambodia made General Sirik Matak the only real alternative to the Lon brothers. His apparent elimination as long as the marshal and his brother remain in power leaves Cambodia and the United States the choice of continuing with them, as long as the United States Air Force can keep them in place, or facing a change.

America's identification with the unpopular Government has not yet led to a perceptible growth in anti-American sentiment. Rather, Cambodians on various levels of society trust the United States to change the Government when it becomes necessary.

The widespread disappointment over the continuation of the war—coupled with fear for Phnom Penh as battles draw nearer daily and with price increases ruinous to an ever-increasing number of people—has led many Cambodians to express a belief that the time for change is at hand. But they do not believe it is their job to bring it about; instead the United States is expected to effect the change, because it supplies all the power Cambodia has. This thought makes American officials shudder and recall the series of events that began when the United States connived at the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem and his macchavelian younger brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu a decade ago.

Publicly the officials continue to express hope that Marshal Lon Nol will broaden his Government, a diplomatic way of saying they want General Sirik Matak as vice President and would not mind if the marshal and his brother then decided to go to the United States for the marshal's health, leaving General Sirik Matak in charge.

But General Lon Mon said that no such trip was necessary. Privately, Americans voice fear that the marshal might go, leaving his brother in charge without what is believed to be the marshals' restraining influence.

Meanwhile, the Lon brothers have responded to the American desire for genuine efforts to talk peace with statements of harsh intrasigence.

In a speech last Wednesday President Lon Nol offered to negotiate with North Vietnam and the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government but maintained his refusal to recognize that there is a Cambodian resistance movement by not mentioning it.

In his interview, General Lon Nol limited his concessions to the insurgents to allowing them to lay down their arms, return to the Government they do not recognize and participate in elections under a constitution they do not recognize.

GUERRILLAS CONTINUE WAR

The war continues—at any place the Vietnamese and Cambodian guerrillas choose. The principal battle areas are the outskirts of Phnom Penh, the Saigon-Phnom Penh highway, the banks of the Mekong River, on which vital supplies are transported from Vietnamese ports to Phnom Penh, and the region south of the capital.

The guerrillas overrun Government positions, American planes bomb them out, the Government announces the reconquest of devastated places. Meanwhile, refugees drift into this city telling of the civilian dead and pillaging by the soldiers.

Well-placed Cambodian and diplomatic sources fear that even American involvement at the support level cannot save Cambodia from defeat under her present leadership.

They believe that the decision of who governs Cambodia will have to be made by the United States, or the United States will soon face the even more painful decision of whether to acknowledge defeat or heighten its involvement.


CAMBODIAN HOPES FOR PEACE SUBSIDE

(By Martin Woollacott)

Phnom Penh—The widespread hopes of instant-peace fostered among Cambodians by Henry Kissinger's magical aura and their own government's pronouncements have now largely subsided;
They have been replaced, at least among educated people, by the glum realization that Cambodia is further away from even a limited settlement than any of the other countries of Indo-China. For even if a ceasefire were to extend to Cambodia it is difficult to see what kind of political follow-up there could possibly be.

The mood of pessimism deepened with recent Communist military successes. For a time the Communists had closed four of the country's six main railroads and were threatening the other two. They crowned their temporary dominance with the destruction of a heavily escorted convoy and consequent butchery of the government troops and a number of women and children, the soldiers' dependents.

President Lon Nol has given his new prime minister, Hang Thun Hak, a brief to arrange talks with the other side at the local level. Officially all that is on offer is service in the government, army or re-settlement on the land. According to rumor, there may also have been some vague suggestions of a "place in political life."

The official government line has always been that if the North Vietnamese withdrew, Khmers—as the Cambodians are historically known—would soon settle their differences amicably. Since it is unlikely that all Vietnamese will withdraw and since it is reluctantly conceded that there is such a thing as a dedicated Khmer Communist, the actual government strategy is to try to make little local settlements with the less committed Khmer dissidents.

It is recognized that a "hard core" will be left. Western diplomats who share the Cambodian government view suggest that "over time" the Cambodian army will be able to get the better of these units.

The government's plan is thus essentially to bring about the capitulation of some hostile units and to destroy the others, a plan for continuing the war rather than ending it. It is based on the hope that the majority of North Vietnamese units, advisers and support personnel will indeed depart, or at least, even if they stay on Cambodian territory, will cease to intervene in the major way in the Cambodian war.

It ignores the signs over recent months that the Khmer dissidents are increasing in number, now to an estimated 30,000-35,000, and in combat effectiveness while the Cambodian army doesn't seem to be getting significantly better. It ignores, too, the possibility that there may soon be a major reduction in American supplies of arms and equipment, even if the United States provides straight cash for arms purchases to circumvent any restriction in a cease-fire agreement on direct supply.

One Khmer opposition party member commented: "Lon Nol isn't interested in any settlement. He tells Hang Thun Hak to get some talks going but he won't let him offer anything that the other side would accept."

Other critics of Lon Nol who take the same view would like to see him replaced, somehow, by a more honest and less lackadaisical government.

What would the other side accept? The answer seems to be that, like the Phnom Penh government, it too is opposed to a settlement. Exiled Prince Norodom Sihanouk has, of course, already announced his opposition loudly and vociferously in Peking. But he speaks only for the Sihanoukists among the dissidents, if he speaks for them.

However, in this case he may well be voicing the common attitude. The Khmer dissidents make up an uneasy and complicated alliance, and its complications are further compounded by the policy differences among Peking, Hanoi, and Moscow.

"If they tried to get together a national leadership that could negotiate with Phnom Penh," one informed student of their affairs here said, "they would bring into the open so many problems and differences within their own ranks, it just wouldn't be worth it for them at this stage."

Others would argue that, there is no need to go into the internal problems of the Khmer Rouge, one of three major rebel groups, to consider a settlement. Communists and non-Communists alike, the Khmer Rouge leaders went off into the jungle with the aim of ultimately seizing power in Cambodia.
Phnom Penh, Early in 1970, in the last moments of Prince Norodom Sihanouk's rule, a road was built from his Chamcar Mon Palace to the Tonle Sap River. It was not much of a road—perhaps 100 yards long—but it was beautifully asphalted, and it would have enabled him to reach the river bank without getting dust on his shoes. Sihanouk was then taking a spa cure in France and, in the manner of a suzerain whose benevolence is appreciated by his subjects, he explained, "My children want to give me a homecoming present."

As it turned out, the subjects had a different mindset in mind. While Sihanouk was spaing, his ownPremier, Marshal Lon Nol, staged a coup and moved into the vacant palace. Sometime last summer, the soothsayers with whom Lon Nol surrounded himself told him that neither he nor the country would prosper until the road built to welcome Sihanouk was made to disappear. Thus, one day astounded foreign diplomats saw a fleet of trucks dumping sand on the road. But the rains soon exposed the paved surface, and rather than chance the nation's good fortune, a second fleet of trucks brought more sand. On the soothsayers' advice, moreover, the curbstones were dug out and the trees lining the new road were uprooted.

On my visit to Phnom Penh, I drove to the river bank, with its watchtower manned by armed men and with barbed wire fencing off the privileged passage. I did get my shoes dusty, and it did not help to know that under the sand there was a perfectly good paved road.

According to senior diplomats here, this is not the only such counsel that Lon Nol has had from his astrologers. In the heart of the capital, there is a hill (phinom) with old royal tombs and a decayed Buddhist wat atop it. One day, a soothsayer told Lon Nol that beneath the phnom there lay a dragon and that the weight piled up on it was making the creature very unhappy. The only thing to relieve the dragon's misery, the sage said, was to remove the hill and the structure on it. The suggestion produced a mild outcry of protest, and other soothsayers then came up with a better solution. The dragon, they said, was really very long. In fact, it extended all the way to Oudong, some 20 miles to the northwest, where there were other hills and wats. If suitable adjustments could be made there, the dragon could be made more comfortable.

The problem was that the Oudong area was occupied by the North Vietnamese. Thus, Lon Nol ordered his troops to drive the enemy out, and this was done, at some cost in blood. Foreign diplomats say that suitable modifications were made at Oudong, and the dragon, after all these centuries, could at least rest in peace.

The two tales illustrate a facet of the strange, alluring, partly paralyzed man who is now President of the Khmer Republic and the U.S.-supported champion of freedom in Cambodia. Mysticism and superstition are woven into the fabric of Cambodian life, but even by these standards, Lon Nol outdoes his subjects. He believes deeply in demons and spirits, including the wild crocodile which, it is said, will some day appear before the palace to herald the arrival of the millennium. He is sustained by a faith in omens and relies on his soothsayers to protect him from ill fortune. When some of them betrayed him not long ago by predicting he would not last out April, he bundled them away to jail, 50-old soothsayers in one roundup.

Lon Nol had a massive stroke in 1971 that left him with an inactive arm and a limp. But the illness only made him more superstitious. It has also reinforced his conviction that this is the time for the revival of the old glory of the Khmer people. Even as disasters keep piling up and war engulfs his capital, he continues to speak of neo-Khmerism and of the magnificent culture and powerful rulers that eight or nine centuries ago were Cambodia's. He sees himself as one of the interrupted succession of god-kings. And he spends hours working on the design of a Khmer national dress for his people.

Lon Nol is an improbable leader in a never-never capital. The Khmer Rouge units are only a few miles from Phnom Penh. All the highways are
usually cut. Rice is rationed, and in theory everybody receives 12 ounces a
day. There is only a few days' supply of gasoline, and the power plant and the
water works which depend on it work erratically. At night, the city shudders
from the sounds of explosives being dropped on the countryside by the U.S.
B-52's. The gutted hull of a ship lies across the Tonle Sap River from the city's
heart, and other ships that tried to run the Communist blockade and failed
are beached higher up, on the Mekong River. On the main streets, the bank
are beached. On the main streets, the bank
from the sounds of explosives being dropped on the countryside by the U.S.
water works which depend on it work erratically. At night, the city shudders
buildings and the central post office stand cocooned in barbed wire.
beart, Rand other ships that tried to run the Communist blockade and failed
seems, strangely preoccupied with other things. Foreign diplomats and Cambodians alike busy with political
questions of, "Save from what?" and "Save for whom?" For this is not just a
simple civil war. The Khmer Rouge are as badly divided as the Government in
Phnom Penh, with China backing a different faction from the one that seems
to be favored in Hanoi and Moscow.

While the frantic politicking goes on, the leaders, both civil and military,
are still engaged in doomsday speculation, in company with Khmer and
Chinese businessmen, unbeknown, there is a lively market in real estate, with
colonels and generals shopping for villas. And despite the ban on night life, a
few establishments manage to remain open with the help of payoffs to the
coupled dance or drink, and no one seems aware of the sharp
on March 17, was, for all the official talk of a broad conspiracy, an isolated
episode. It was also a symptom of a fatal illness. The Lon Nol administra-
ion is politically inept, shamelessly corrupt and callously indifferent to, public
well-being. No diplomat I met in Phnom Penh doubted that the hours of the
regime were numbered, and that sooner rather than later Cambodia would
become the first of the non-Communist states in Indochina to come under Com-
munist sway. Some diplomats, in fact, have been advising Lon Nol to go
abroad for his health—and to leave behind a man of greater political acumen.

Lon Nol's presence is only half the Cambodian tragedy, however. Almost by
default, power in Phnom Penh has passed to his abrasive and devious "little
brother," Brig. Gen. Lon Nor, a short, fleshy man in his mid-40's who has held
a variety of ill-defined posts which allow him to range across the entire spec-
trum of national life. He commands a brigade, also known as the Third Divi-
sion, which helps to garrison the capital. He holds no office in the ruling
Social Republic party, but he controls it. Early this month, he had to give up
his post as a minister in the Ministry of the Interior; perhaps as a result of
U.S. pressure on the President, but, as the man closest to his brother here, he
lost none of his dominant influence.

Prince Sihanouk trusted Lon Nor enough to give him the crucial job of
chief of the Phnom Penh police, and he was in that post when Sihanouk was
ousted in March, 1970. A Cambodian official says, "Lon Nor was never ident-
ified as an anti-Sihanoukist. In fact, no one ever paid much attention to him."
This attitude has changed. In the past couple of years, most people have
been watching Lon Nor with fear and fascination. After secret army polls
indicated Marshal Lon's chance of election as President were not too good, the
"little brother" used guile and a heavy hand to ensure sufficient votes. He has
also been putting his friends in useful posts. At least two Cabinet members
are known to owe their eminence to him. And since last January, it has been
obvious that it is Lon Nor, and not his ailing brother, who decides who is to
join the Government and who is to be frozen out.

-UP to that point he seemed to see himself as a kingmaker rather than as
king. Today, it seems that the "little brother" wants to rule Cambodia himself.

The bombing of the Chamcar Mon Palace by a disgruntled air force captain
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The bombing of the palace grounds brought a touch of panic to the Govern-
ment. (Presiden Lon promptly moved out to a villa.) But it also proved useful to
Lon Nor, who took advantage of the bombing to break a potentially danger-
ous strike of 20,000 schoolteachers, to close all 15 non-Government newspapers
and to round up more than 100 leading intellectuals and political figures. Most
important, it permitted Lon Nor to put under house-arrest the man he regards
as the principal obstacle in his path to power, Lt. Gen. Slaowath Sirik
Matak, the third leading character in the Phnom Penh tragedy.

Sirik Matak joined Marshal Lon in unseating Sihanouk in 1970, and after-
ward the two governed the country as a team, until Sirik Matak found his
powers increasingly restricted and quit. Now in his 50's, Sirik Mataik is widely regarded as a sound administrator. He is popular with the civil servants and with the disaffected army officers. He is even more popular with foreign diplomats, who admire his sophistication and patrician ways, even though at Phnom Penh's social gatherings, there is much hush-voiced talk of Sirik Mataik's dubious business ventures and of his intimate ties with Chinese millionaires.

Many doubt that this cool and remote man has much of a popular following. When he and his wife appear in public, the people part to open a path for them. They are treated as royalty, and, after all, he had a stronger claim to the throne than Sihanouk when the French touched Sihanouk's side of the royal family with their king-making wand.

Since last fall, the U.S. Embassy has been pressing Lon Nol to bring Sirik Mataik back into the Government as Vice President. Lon Nol seems to have been willing. But not Lon Non. The latter—probably with justice—sees it as a stratagem to send both the Lon brothers into exile abroad and let Sirik Mataik's elder brother to move slowly, then by an open declaration of hostility toward Sihanouk, when the French touched Sihanouk's side of the royal family with their king-making wand.

Sirik Mataik, finally by confining the latter to his villa and cutting Mataik back into the Government as Vice President. Lon Nol seems to have the royal family with their king-making wand.

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The Americans find themselves in an odd position in Cambodia. In their post-Vietnam mood, they would like to extricate themselves from the situation, but they do not know how. The possibility of a larger role for the South Vietnamese in the war involves great risk because of Cambodian resentment over the sorry behavior of Saigon's "allied" troops during an earlier incursion. The Americans have little use for the Lon brothers, but they continue to provide cash and B-52 bombs. They would like to maintain a non-Communist Government in Phnom Penh, but the cease-fire negotiations they are urging can only lead to a very large measure of Communist control. And while they are paying the piper, they find it impossible to compel the Lon brothers to bring in a politician on whom the Americans base their hopes for a half-acceptable solution. If the Lon brothers are puppets, as the Communists have been saying, they are puppets with obdurate wills of their own. If the Americans prevail and Sirik Mataik does come to power, he will have to devote himself to three missions that the diplomats regard as all but impossible. The first will be to reduce corruption that is now on a far grander scale than it had ever been under Prince Sihanouk, and that is curbed neither by scruple nor by law. The second would be to reinvigorate the economy of the one-fourth of Cambodia which the Government still controls at this point. The final talks would be to open negotiations with the Communists and somehow wrest concessions from them.

The corruption often involves the same men who were deep in it under Prince Sihanouk—except that a good many of them are now in military uniform—and reaches up to the highest levels of the Lon administration. According to knowledgeable Western sources, some generals at the front are selling their U.S.-supplied ammunition to the Communists, who promptly fire it back at the Government troops. The Communists also purchase from the generals the essentials their armed forces need, including rice and fuel. "Can you imagine Churchill selling his best planes to Goering?" asks an observer in Phnom Penh. "But that is, in a way, what the Cambodian generals are doing each day." And the diplomats repeat the bon mot uttered by a visiting German: "Before there could be any improvement, the Cambodians would have to invent conscience."

One of the more bizarre characters in the drama is Brig. Gen. Norodom Chantarangsev, who has become a virtually independent warlord astride Highway Four, which leads to the port of Kompong Saom (previously known as Sihanoukville). As a teen-ager, Prince Chantarangsev fought the French, later

1 Washington's channel to the Lon regime is the heavily guarded U. S. Embassy in Phnom Penh, headed by Emory Cohenst Swank, a veteran of 27 years in the Foreign Service and posts in Bucharest, Moscow and Vientiane. Mr. Swank has been in Cambodia for the past 20 months. He is the over-all head of a large and busy mission which includes a 75-man U. S. military team commanded by Brig. Gen. John R. D. Cleland, a defense attache's office and an unknown number of C.I.A. operatives. Few of the American military are even seen in Phnom Penh's streets in uniform. The profile is studiedly low.
joined the army and attended military academies in Vietnam and France. On his return to Cambodia in 1957, he was put in jail by his uncle, Prince Sihanouk, for suspected disloyalty. After three years of imprisonment, Chantarangseya was let out, and promptly went into a variety of lucrative business ventures. Eventually, Sihanouk made him a director of the Phnom Penh casino. Like all those involved with this establishment, Chantarangseya made a fortune. When Sihanouk was ousted, Chantarangseya was asked if he would raise a brigade to fight the Communists. He would, and did. Today he commands the 18th Brigade and controls an area of about 200 square miles, with 60 villages and 100,000 people.

Uneasy about this possible rival, Lon Non has tried to detach some of Chantarangseya's units for duty elsewhere. Chantarangseya, who has his own dreams for the future, would not allow his force to be chipped away. Under a compromise, the units have been detached on paper, but in fact they remain in Chantarangseya's feudal fief and under his direct command. The reason Chantarangseya can enjoy such independence—and this is where the corruption comes in—is that he has been using his money to buy American arms from the neighboring generals, and it would not be safe to challenge him.

The rice riots of last September, in which troops (including Lon Nol's men) joined the civilians in a three-day shop-rioting spree, could be traced in part to the activities of Lon Nol's personal physician, to whom the President gave one of the most lucrative posts of all—Minister of Commerce. When the press, at that point still reasonably free, began to accuse the minister of selling Phnom Penh's rice reserve, as well as the rice contributed by Japan, to the Communists, he resigned. Marshal Lon, who is loyal to his friends, elevated the doctor to the rank of presidential adviser. But the press kept digging up more damning evidence, and in October the doctor decided to resign once more. There was talk of a court-martial but, instead, the good doctor was allowed to retire to Hong Kong.

The greatest scandal by far involves the so-called "phantom troops." Under a system bequeathed to the Cambodians by the French, the Government pays its armed forces through the unit commanders. Quick-witted generals, colonels and majors have thus learned to pad their unit rosters with the names of nonexistent soldiers.

In 1970, when Sihanouk was ousted and there were clashes with the North Vietnamese, the Cambodian Army numbered just 28,000 men. Overnight, it was swollen with thousands of university and high-school students eager to fight the hated invaders. The United States undertook to finance the expansion, and by the mid-summer of 1972 it was paying for an army of nearly 300,000 men.

By this time, the Americans in Phnom Penh began to have doubts. In September, 1972, Maj. Gen. Sosthene Fernandez, who was Prince Sihanouk's Secretary of State for National Security, became Marshal Lon's chief of staff. Under U.S. pressure, he at once began to look into the padding of army rolls. A head count was taken, and one brigade and a couple of battalion commanders were put under arrest and ordered to return the money they had collected for "ghost soldiers." But the effort soon slowed down, in part because neither Lon Nol nor his good friend Brig. Gen. Ith Suoang, who commands the First Division in the capital, would allow a nose count in his unit.

Still the issue would not die. Early this year, Minister of Information Keowi Reth told a press conference, attended by a number of foreign diplomats equipped with tape recorders, that while the army was at times drawing salaries for up to 500,000 men, in fact 80,000 of them did not exist. The Government was dismayed by the unfavorable comment abroad, and the minister is said to have heard some harsh words from the military. When I saw him in February, he denied he had ever said Cambodia had phantom troops.

"What I did say," he explained, "was that by now we have identified and verified 150,000 troops. But we have also accepted the lists submitted to us and showing additional troops to a total of 250,000 to 300,000 soldiers." The army's effective strength, he insisted, was 253,000, but if one added commandos, dam guards and such, the number would actually reach 280,000.

Until Lon Nol shut down the non-Government newspapers, they kept the scandal alive. A journalist was haled into court for accusing officers he named of collecting pay for nonexistent troops. Undismayed, his newspaper named two colonels, two majors and two captains who, it said, had collected money for "phantom soldiers" and bought villas for themselves. It also demanded to know how army majors could afford to drive around in new Mercedes-Benz cars, which cost $20,000 each.
The foreign embassies are also unconvinced by the denials. One senior diplomat put it bluntly: "In last year's 30-billion riel [$200, million] budget 18 billion were allotted to defense. Of this amount, 15 billion was to pay the soldiers. Actually, the troops got only 8 billion. The rest was stolen."

Unpaid, the desperate soldiers have been launching looting expeditions of their own. In Battambang, according to a Phnom Penh newspaper, Lieut. Col. Sok Oul's troops, whose pay is four months in arrears, have been robbing peasants. There, too, the soldiers and junior officers imposed a "black tax" on the Chinese noodle-shop owners. "Much of the army," says an observer, "is no longer fighting. It is too busy stealing chickens. It has to, for otherwise it will starve."

The second problem to confront Sirik Matak, if and when he comes to power, is that of the desperately sick economy. Even by the modest standards of Southeast Asia, Cambodia has never been rich. Some 95 per cent of its seven million people, mostly of them Buddhists, grew rice, corn, sugar cane or kapok; suffered from floods and disease; did not bother about family planning, and let the Chinese and Vietnamese run the retail trade. Some 60 per cent of the people were illiterate. There was always enough to eat, but few peasants were well off.

Thanks largely to the war, Lon Nol's Cambodia today is, to all intents and purposes, a bankrupt that is given the illusion of solvency by the U.S. taxpayer. One measure of the crisis is the position of the riel. Two years ago, $1 was worth 55 riel; by May, 1972, the official rate had gone down to 150; today it is 216 riel for $1. But even this steep decline in the official value of the riel is not a true measure of the inflation.

Phnom Penh's peace-time population of about 600,000 has swollen to perhaps 1.6 million with refugees from the countryside. Among the highways radiating from the capital that have been cut by the Khmer Rouge is Route Five, over which enormous convoys had been bringing to the city 8,000 tons of rice each month from the only remaining granary in Battambang. Also interrupted is the Mekong traffic. River convoys bringing fuel and ammunition from South Vietnam earlier this month found themselves under heavy fire, and for the first eight ships which did make it to Phnom Penh, three others were lost. Later, the U.S. began airlifting fuel into the capital. Only a massive airlift to the capital's vulnerable airport, however, could bring the needed fuel and rice.

Even before Phnom Penh found itself in this desperate position, the Government had deliberately yielded to the Communists the greater part of the country. In embassies, the line which separates the two hostile words has been knocked, as the "Lon Nol Line." Men have been dying in battle along this line but it is also an extremely porous frontier, for contraband flows both ways—with the connivance of both sides. It is an open secret that rice, medicaments, salt, oil and guns are moving into Communist territory without hindrance, enriching army officers, key officials and the Phnom Penh robber barons to whom, in the words of a diplomat, "the war is money in the bank."

The Communists pay for the smuggled essentials with such items as rubber from the vast French plantations which have fallen under their control. Thus, the generals and the colonels have been closing their eyes (and holding out their palms) as at least 2,000 tons of rubber have been flowing each month across the battle line to the processing plants in Phnom Penh. Cambodia last year exported about $7.5-million worth of rubber. "Ask yourself," says a diplomat, "where does this stuff come from? After all, no plantations are being operated in Government territory."

The mainstay of the economy, however, is still the heavy infusions of foreign aid, the lion's share of which comes, predictably, from the United States. Since January, 1970, American economic assistance has totaled a little more than $200-million, spent on a variety of programs, from the import of essential commodities to the support of the riel. (U.S. military aid in the 1972-'73 fiscal year will total a little more than $200-million.)

The main hunger in Marshal Lon's shrinking world is for rice, and the bulk of it, nearly 160,000 tons in the current year, is being provided by the United States. (Japan gave 20,000 tons in 1972 and 6,100 tons so far this year). Rice, of course, is one of the main elements in the state of public morale, and last September, right after the riots, the United States organized a 10-day airlift to bring in 1,200 tons of it. Thanks to fear, shortages and speculation, the price of rice has trebled in less than a year.

The peasants have fled their fields by the tens of thousands, or have been recruited as soldiers or carriers by both sides; villages by the hundreds have
been bombed or burned; what little industry there was is either wrecked or fule. Some economists have estimated the war loss to agriculture and industry since 1970 at close to half a billion dollars. This is a staggering total for a country of seven million, with a Gross National Product of $850-million. But even these figures cannot reflect the personal tragedies, the dislocations, the economic paralysis of a small country caught in what is delicately described as a “peripheral” war.

The third crucial problem that would face any new Government in Phnom Penh—and the most urgent of all—is to end the war. This problem is as intractable as the others. In both South Vietnam and Laos, a cease-fire has been proclaimed. Cambodia, prostrate and bleeding, remains at war. In part this is so because the Lon brothers—and especially Lon Nol—continue to insist that the Communists accept their terms for peace. But the negotiations are also difficult to begin because of the remarkable disunity in the Communist ranks.

Knowledgeable foreigners I met during my stay in Phnom Penh are agreed that the number of North Vietnamese in Cambodia has declined from a high of 60,000 to about 20,000, and the brunt of the fighting is now borne by Khmer Rouge, equipped with arms left behind by Hanoi’s forces. The trouble is that the term Khmer Rouge embraces a gaggle of insurgent groups, often at odds with each other.

Some of the Khmer Rouge, estimated at 5,000 to 10,000 men, are known as “Sihanoukists,” and carry the banner of the Prince’s United Front. Others are Phnom Penh students and intellectuals who, in the spring of 1970, answered the call of Marshall Lon and Sirik Matak and went off to give battle to the North Vietnamese, but who have since, sickened by the corruption of the Lon Government and the rapacious vandalism of Saigon’s troops, formed their own Khmer Rouge units. (A Cabinet minister described them, with disdain, as “Khmer Rouge intelligentsia.”) There are even freebooters who loot where they can and, for respectability’s sake, call themselves Khmer Rouge.

There is also a fourth group, the “original” Khmer Rouge, the biggest (with an estimated 30,000 men), best-led, best-trained and best-equipped. This body is now doing most of the fighting. It has also been in charge of the administration in the vast Communist-held areas of the country. This Khmer Rouge will not forget that Prince Sihanouk used to hunt down and execute its members in the nineteen-sixties, and when its men take over a village, they almost ostentatiously fail to mention his name. One of their slogans, which tells a great deal of their politics, attacks the Lon Nol Government for promoting “Sihanoukism without Sihanouk.”

The desperate Khmer Rouge groups, by and large, coordinate their military operations. But their political rivalries reflect the differing interests of their Communist patrons, North Vietnam, the Soviet Union and China. For more than three years now, Peking has been giving Prince Sihanouk and his large family the use of a huge, high-walled compound in the heart of the capital, financial support and diplomatic blessings. Because the “Sihanoukists” are backed by Peking, the Russians have no use for them. Moscow recognizes Sihanouk’s United Front, but refuses to recognize his government-in-exile and maintains a large embassy in Phnom Penh. Diplomats are also convinced that Hanoi is less than eager to see Prince Sihanouk return to power because of his closeness to the Chinese. Both Hanoi and Moscow are thought to be betting on the “original” Khmer Rouge.

Prince Sihanouk is the only “name” among the anti-Government leaders, if only because he has had the time and the inclination to make himself widely known. His reputation will also no doubt be enhanced by his claim, earlier this month, that he had spent four weeks in the “liberated area,” in the company of his wife. (“Our enemies have always said that I would not or I could not go there,” he was quoted as saying in Hanoi. “Now it has been done.”)

But the “original” Khmer Rouge also have some notable figures, known in the Phnom Penh diplomatic jargon as the “three phantoms.” These are Khieu Sam Pan, a former National Assembly deputy very highly esteemed by the nation’s intellectuals; Hu Youn, another deputy; and Hu Nim, a one-time Cabinet minister. The three were accused of subversive contacts with the Khmer Rouge in the sixties, tried and sentenced to death. Subsequently, Peking and Sihanouk, in their various ways, announced the executions of the men. But in 1970, to general amazement, their names suddenly appeared on the list of the Prince’s Cabinet. Urged to produce them, Prince Sihanouk argued that they
were maquis who were too busy fighting to come to Peking. But the Khmer Rouge statements and decrees often bear the names of one or another of the three. One of the minor pastimes in Phnom Penh is to try and guess if the statements come from the three or merely from men who have taken on the popular names.

When Prince Sihanouk still ruled Cambodia, he sometimes described the "original" Khmer Rouge as the greatest domestic threat, and he sent his troops to Battambang Province and the Southeast to flush them out. The organization at the time was thought to have about 8,000 men. It included the highly motivated and disciplined members of the Cambodian Communist party and worked in close concert with Hanoi and the Vietcong.

In 1970, the Khmer Rouge received a remarkable transfusion when 1,500 to 2,000 men who in 1954 had been taken to North Vietnam as boys in their teens returned to Cambodia. (Hanoi's explanation for removing them from their homeland had been that they were orphaned children of the anti-French guerillas and were being given asylum in North Vietnam.) Most of these men, now in their late 20's, returned as highly indoctrinated and superbly trained Communist organizers. They helped to administer Cambodia's north-eastern regions, which (according to Prince Sihanouk's own bitter plaint at the time) had been detached from his country. They organized an intelligence service, conducted propaganda, trained cadres and, when necessary, fought. Many died, but replacements came from among the Cambodian youths being continuously trained in Hanoi. (At present, nearly 1,000 such trainees are said to be in North Vietnam.) When peace returns to Cambodia, it is these hard-core—and still nameless—"originals" who are expected to assume responsible posts.

When diplomats in Phnom Penh speak of the future, Prince Sihanouk's name inevitably comes up. Opinion about him is sharply divided. Some feel that his era ended that March day in 1970 when he was deposed. These observers believe that Sihanouk's role, for all its benevolence, was that of a semi-feudal ruler, that his administration was rotten with greed and that the family of his beautiful Khmer-Italian wife, Monique, was in the middle of the corruption all this, it is argued, was widely known and deeply resented, especially by the Phnom Penh intellectual elite. An Asian diplomat says, "The enthusiasm with which the young people in this city, the businessmen, the Buddhist clergy greeted Sihanouk's fall had to be seen to be believed. They all thought the golden age of Cambodia had arrived." The view of such observers is that the long absence has not helped Sihanouk politically, and that even if he soon returns to Phnom Penh, his power will be limited and his stay brief.

Nevertheless, a good many other argue that the peasantry—more than 80 percent of the population—identifies Sihanouk with the relative peace that prevailed in Cambodia while Vietnam and Laos were aflame. "The Establishment here," says a Phnom Penh informant, "remembers Sihanouk as an erratic bully, as the man who could order his ministers at diplomatic parties to show the diplomats the way to the toilet, or who impressed them into the cast of his movies as comic characters. But to the peasants, Sihanouk is still the god-king. Monarchy—and he remained a monarch even after he gave up the title—meant to them national unity, the sense of being Khmer. The Khmer Rouge detest him, but it would be difficult for them to prevent his triumphal tour of the countryside."

Sihanouk, it widely agreed, is an important X in the political equation. It is also agreed that before he can return to Phnom Penh a decision would have to be made in long and delicate deliberations between Peking, Moscow and Hanoi. There are now some signs suggesting that in a compromise solution, he might be allowed to return to his old capital as the frontman of a regime dominated by the more militant and decidedly pro-Hanoi Khmer Rouge "originals."

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2 According to most reputable sources, Sihanouk was told by high Russian officials about the plot being organised against him in Phnom Penh the day he arrived in the Soviet Union on his trip home from Peking—March 12. He was advised to return immediately to his capital so that he could arrive the next day, March 14, and, by his prestige and political skill, thwart the conspiracy. Sihanouk, who looked to the Chinese for his support, felt that the Russians were trying to prevent his scheduled stop-over in Peking. He did not take the advice. On March 18, just before he took off for China, he was informed that he had been deposed by Lon Nol and Khieu Samphan.
While the Communist Governments are settling their own problems, the cease-fire must wait, for the Phnom Penh Government quite genuinely does not know whom to approach. Even if it did know, it is very likely that no Khmer Rouge group would want to negotiate with Lon Non, whom they all regard as a schemer who represents no one but himself and his sick brother. And even Sirik Matak is thought to be considered by the Khmer Rouge as only a man who could sign the document of surrender.

"The ruling elite here," says an observer in Phnom Penh, "is doomed, as it was in France in 1789. It will not survive, despite all the B-52's that the Americans can send over Cambodia. All they are doing is gaining time—but time for what?"

"Change is coming, and it can be wrought not by anyone here, and not by Sihanouk, but only by the hardened young men who passed the test of guerrilla war. They may not make this country happier—but a society that sells guns and food to its own enemy, and does not blush about it cannot survive."

We sit on the shady patio of his villa, and he studies the beautiful garden before him. "It is a beautiful country with a wonderfully peaceful people," he finally says. "Sihanouk surrendered great portions of the country to the Vietcong. He allowed them to use Cambodia for their war in Vietnam. He permitted them to bring their supplies through the port of Sihanoukville. He sold them rice and drugs. But at least there was no war."

"Now, even if there is a cease-fire, the future is dark. It will be decided by Communist countries which cannot agree among themselves. And here, in Cambodia, the groups they dominate will be struggling for power, settling scores, seeking to impose on others their pet doctrines. I can only see tears and anarchy ahead for this little country."


REPORTERS NOTEBOOK: PHNOM PENH PERIL NOT QUITE REAL

(By Syndey H. Schanberg)

Phnom Penh, Cambodia, May 2—If Phnom Penh is under siege, as a number of recent headlines have suggested, then it is surely among the most bizarre military sieges in history.

Cambodian peasants—and probably insurgent guerrillas in the guise of peasants—move freely out of the enemy-held territory, where they live, into the largely somnolent capital, and then go back again when their missions—visits to relatives, the buying of rice and perhaps some clandestine duties as well—are completed. No one in Phnom Penh is alarmed or even surprised.

As soldiers push off in landing craft to attack enemy troops a few miles away across the muddy Mekong River, a Westerner in a private speedboat whizzes by, like some tourist on Lake Tahoe. The thwack of rockets connecting with tennis balls at the Cercle Sportif resonates with the boom and rumble of artillery fire and bombing outside the city.

One reads of shortages because the enemy periodically cuts the city's supply routes, but food is actually quite plentiful for those who have enough money to pay the exorbitant prices that are the work of the ever-present speculators. Fuel is rationed, but one can get enough of that too by paying black-market prices.

It is true that the enemy is closer than ever before, and in larger numbers, and there have been recent rocket attacks on the airport area and other suburbs, but such attacks are now new in Phnom Penh and there is no sign that the unfriendly troops around the capital—most of which are Cambodian insurgents and not North Vietnamese or Vietcong—are planning a major attack.

In short, Phnom Penh seems in no greater danger than usual.

"The bombing is terrible," says a well-to-do Cambodian woman. "It goes on every night."

"Are you frightened?" a friend asks.

"No, no, not frightened, she replies, "just annoyed—because it wakes my baby up every night in the middle of the night, and I have to get up."

Eight civil servants in a quiet Government office talk freely with two foreign visitors about conditions in Phnom Penh. Typically, they express no panic,
fear or even concern about the possibility of an attack on the city. They are concerned only about rising prices and the Government's failure to control inflation.

"Nothing is lacking if you have enough money to pay for it," says one, who has four children and earns only about 6,000 riels a month, or about $25. "It is only the price."

The price of a bag of 100 kilos (220 pounds) of rice, which the average family used to eat in a month, has soared to 4,500 riels, or about $20.

How can a civil servant afford a bag of rice that consumes three-quarters of his salary? "We are eating less," the office worker says. "Now we eat only 50 kilos a month."

These Government office workers also talk freely—and casually—about the open traffic between the enemy-held zones and the Government-controlled areas. With the Communists in control of three-quarters or more of the territory and perhaps half the population of seven million, movement from one side to the other has become part of the normal pattern of social and economic life.

All eight employees in the Government office have relatives "on the other side." One woman said: "They come into Phnom Penh often. They get passes from the enemy to come and go."

The office workers indicate that in many cases peasants are dispatched by the enemy to buy rice—apparently the only staple that is short in the Communist zones. Everything else they say is plentiful and is cheaper than on the Government side. Fish, for example, is only 15 riels a kilo, or about 7 cents, in enemy territory; in Phnom Penh it is 200.

All this information is confirmed by Western diplomats in Phnom Penh who have contacts "on the other side."

On a riverine peninsula about 10 miles north of Phnom Penh a young infantry lieutenant, whose company has been in fierce, close combat with enemy troops in an effort to push them farther from the capital, is asked who the enemy is—Khmer or Vietnamese. He drops his voice so his men cannot hear and shrugs apologetically. "They are Khmers," he says.

The lieutenant, who conversed with his visitors in fluent French, makes a poignant mental sup as he bids them good-by. The war is real and immediate and scary for him, in a way that it is not for the residents of Phnom Penh, and he says in Pithing, "Je suis très dangereux de vous voir" ("I am very dangerous to see you") when he means to say, "I am very happy to see you."

At Takhmau, an industrial suburb seven miles south to downtown Phnom Penh that has been a recent battle site, the scene is drowsy and languid. Fishermen ply the Bassac River in their sampans as cows graze in a shaded park on the bank. Someone has placed an offerings of fresh white tuberoses on the outstretched arms of a statue of Buddha in a square nearby.

The headquarters of the local army command is equally peaceful. The sergeant at the main gate tells two Western journalists it is impossible for them to tour the post, but naked children can be seen frolicking in the compound and the families of soldiers stationed there pass in and out at will. Other people such as Chinese merchants also have free access. Two emerge on motor-cycles pulling flatbed carts loaded with large covered baskets.

The sergeant, when asked, explains that the baskets contain sugar that was captured from the enemy has been sold to the Chinese merchants. Who captured the sugar and who will the money? "The Deuxieme Bureau [army intelligence] captured it, and they will keep the money," he replies.

Since a significant part of the commerce in Cambodia is done clandestinely with the enemy, it is not unlikely that the captured sugar might find its way back to the people it was captured from.

Corruption remains a fixture. Some of it is large-scale, but much of it is individual enterprise, spawned by the pitifully low salaries the Government pays, particularly to soldiers.

The average soldier earns about $38 a month, so latey he has been taking gasoline from his army base and selling it on the black market to civilians in Phnom Penh who either want more than their ration cards will allow or are unwilling to stand in the long chaotic lines at filling stations.

Under strong pressure from the United States, Cambodia's principal prop in this difficult period, President Lon Nol finally agreed recently to reorganize his Government to take in opposition leaders and present a more united anti-Communist front to the enemy.
The Americans' desire to stem the downward slide of national morale and give the Cambodians some sense of confidence in their leadership so they will pursue the war with greater vigor.

"Low morale is the reason for the poor performance of the army now," a Western diplomat said, "and the troops are going to continue to lose morale unless they get something decent at the top."

A Cambodian intellectual, commenting on the men at the top, said: "They are all children. They need a father, and there is no one.

Suffering these economic and political headaches, many residents of Phnom Penh find relief by watching the war—from a discreet distance. Every time enemy troops seize control of villages just across the Mekong, and American and Cambodian planes swiftly arrive to bomb them, thousands of residents rush to the river bank at the city's edge, right next to the royal palace, to watch the fireworks.

"It's the best show they've got," commented a Frenchman who came down to watch. "There's nothing else in their lives to cheer about."

Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who was deposed as Chief of State in 1970 and who claims the loyalty of all the Khmer insurgents—this is doubtful—told newsmen at his exile headquarters in Peking the other day that his forces surrounded Phnom Penh but had no intention of attacking it. The plan, he said, is simply to isolate the capital from the rest of the country and then sit back and wait for it to fall "like a ripe fruit."

Some Cambodians in Phnom Penh agree with the Prince's forecast.

A waiter at poolside at the decaying but fashionable Hotel Le Phnom was asked by a guest for tea with lemon.

"I am sorry, sir," he said. "After three years of war there are no more lemons."

"And after three more years," he added, making a swooping gesture with his hands to indicate planes diving and bombing, "there will be no more Cambodia."

[From The New York Times, Apr. 28, 1978]

CAMBODIA AT WAR, BUT STILL AT EASE

TAKHMAU, Cambodia, April 22—An occasional mortar shell crashed through the simmering morning heat, but no one was hurt and no one seemed inclined to do much about the casual bombardment.

On field maps the Cambodian war looks intense and desperate, and with Communist forces threatening this suburb of Phnom Penh only seven miles from the city center, a military analyst would have grounds for viewing the situation with alarm.

But alarm is a Western word that does not seem to fit Cambodia.

Takhmau seemed quieter than usual this morning despite the sporadic shelling, partly because some residents were apparently concerned enough about the shells to move into Phnom Penh for the day, and partly because of the stifling heat.

THE COGNAC COMMAND

At a popular floating restaurant on the banks of the Bassac, Brig. Gen. Dien Del sat at a table with a few staff officers, sipping iced cognac. Rising unsteadily to his feet, he explained that although he was governor of Kandal Province, which includes Phnom Penh and extends all the way to the Gulf of Siam, his main duty at the moment was commanding the Cambodian Second Division.

Gesturing vaguely down the river, he said the Communists were a few kilometers away and that the village of Setbo around the curve of the river was surrounded. He added that his forces were reacting vigorously.

In a nearby encampment, a dozen armored personnel carriers were drawn up in a circle, looking for all the world like a wagon train under Indian attack. Their 50-caliber guns pointed menacingly outward. But it did not appear that a single one of them was manned.

SOLDIERS STROLL BY

Soldiers were strolling along the beautiful, shaded river bank or relaxing in the town itself.
The market was open, and a few women were wetting down their pigs to keep them from getting too hot. The red blossoms of the flamboyant trees make Cambodia's villages and roads a blaze of color at this time of year and the hundreds of varieties of fruit associated with the end of the dry season are nearly ripe.

Here and there the red-tile roofs of white or yellow stucco houses show signs of the mortar bombardment, but war has still scarcely touched Takeo. The town's ubiquitous monks in their brilliant saffron robes seemed perfectly undisturbed by the proximity of the fighting.

A pair of American-built helicopters were thumping through the skies around Phnom Penh most of the morning. But the thing that seemed to interest them most was a spectacular column of smoke rising from a four-story building in Phnom Penh that accidentally caught fire, attracting a huge crowd.

EUROPEANS GO TO CHURCH

The carillon at Phnom Penh's architecturally grotesque Catholic church summoned worshippers to Easter mass, and many came, most of them French or other Europeans.

As usual, the garden and swimming pool at the capital's fashionable Hotel Le Phnom were packed with European and wealthy Cambodian girls in bikinis, frolicking dogs, diplomats, newsmen and relief workers, drinking ice tea or beer.

It seemed this morning that a really determined military force could punch its way into Phnom Penh from any direction and with little serious resistance from anyone, save, perhaps, the American bombers that often turn up when the situation looks threatening. But it was also evident that the theoretically besieging enemy was in no rush, and presumably was also brushing fires away from his gently rocking hammock.

[From The New York Times, Apr. 11, 1973]

FROM RURAL CAMBODIA, WAR LOOKS DIFFERENT

(By Malcolm W. Browne)

TRAM KHNAI, CAMBODIA, April 10—A single Communist mortar shell crashed into a village 100 yards away, sending soldiers and their families running for ditches. Three persons were killed by a rocket last night, and everyone was nervous.

Col. Pan Nann, the local Government commander, drained his canteen of iced tea and rose from a hammock where he had been explaining his position.

"A helicopter is arriving from Phnom Penh with pay for my troops and it seems the enemy is opening an attack at the same time," the colonel said in impeccable French. "I am afraid you'll have to excuse me and since they may overrun us, I suggest you leave right now."

Then he climbed into his bullet-riddled jeep and drove off.

This town, 25 miles southwest of Phnom Penh, is the outer limit of Government control along Route 3, and the road leading here is often cut by Communist forces.

Enemy troops have cut all the roads leading to Phnom Penh in addition to having established a blockade on the Mekong River that only a trickle of supply ships has been able to penetrate.

All this has led some foreign newsmen to describe the Cambodian capital as besieged, with the clear implication that it is in danger of falling.

But a drive along those parts of Routes 2, 3 and 4 over which traffic still p asses reasonably freely shows the situation to be considerably less than apocalyptic.

In the last mile or so as one approaches the Communist belt of control, there are signs of anxiety among the civilian dependents of Government soldier stationed in the area. It has been many months since any other civilians apart from softdrink and cigarette vendors have lived anywhere in this whole huge region, and towns and villages remain in ruins while fields are empty of humans or animals.

One military family, of two women and two young boys, asked this correspondent, after this morning's brief shelling of Tram Khnar to take them to safety in Phnom Penh.
TROOPS BAR ACCESS TO VILLAGE

"I have seven bags of rice over in Srang, but our soldiers won't let us go there to get them," one of the women said. She was referring to Khum Srang, a village six miles west of here that probably fell to the Communist forces last night.

As the car jolted over the battle-scarred macadam road, she told of the harrowing times she had had during the constant moves she had had to make ever since 1970, when the war suddenly uprooted much of the Cambodian population more or less permanently.

But after three or four miles the family abruptly decided to go no farther and to settle in a roadside hamlet rather than travel all the way to Phnom Penh.

"We are country people and we know better how to live here than in the big city," the woman said.

In fact, although the countryside is still largely deserted in this area, conditions by all accounts are much safer now than they were during the last big Communist thrust a few months ago.

At that time, almost every road and culvert along Route 3 in Kandal and Takeo Provinces had been dynamited by the Communists and the road itself was either impassable or controlled by Communist units.

Now the road is repaired, all but one of the dozens of small bridges have been repaired and buses, bicycles and taxis move freely—although soldiers traveling from one post to another seem often to observe the precaution of changing to civilian clothes while on the road.

FOOD SEEMS PLENTIFUL

As usual, food appears to be plentiful here. Agriculturally speaking, Cambodia is probably the richest country in Southeast Asia, and even war has little effect on its rich harvests of fruit and fish.

In Phnom Penh itself, wealthy Cambodians and foreigners accustomed to air-conditioning are suffering in sweltering heat from the lack of electric power for all but a few hours a day. The power shortage, the fact that a faucet often produces no water and the sight of long lines of people at filling stations carrying Jerry cans waiting to buy a few liters of scarce gasoline produces a disheartening impression on a foreigner.

Experts say, however, that despite the current blockade there are nearly two months' supplies of rice in Phnom Penh and the city obviously has plenty of other foods. The fuel shortage has not noticeably affected traffic jams and life generally seems normal.

By comparison, last September Phnom Penh was down to only two days of rice supplies at one point, and looters and mutinous soldiers were ripping up the market places. The feeling of crisis was acute then and it is not now.

The roar of American jet aircraft and the rumble of explosions are nearly always audible. But in the shade that bamboo thatch offers against the searing heat, radio sets soothe soldiers and villagers with the tinkling, peaceful music of ancient Cambodia and the war seems little more than a necessary nuisance.

The mango season has begun and red and violet flame trees are in full blossom.

"I wish the Americans would give us more air support," an army officer said.

B-52 STRIKES REQUESTED

"Two days ago we asked for B-52 strikes near here and we're still waiting for them to arrive," he said. "The American air strikes are what keep our troops fighting."

An old man selling herbal medicines, cigarettes and soft drinks disagreed vociferously.

"I know a fine woman who was killed by American bombers last week five kilometers from here," he said. "The bombers may kill some Communists but they kill everyone else, too."

Everyone here and in other hamlets close to the big Communist units seemed to agree that the enemy now consisted of local elements rather than Vietnamese, although there are still Vietcong advisers with the Communist forces.

Neither soldiers nor their families seem to be particularly frightened by the current fighting, although everyone is tired of constant moving. The relatively
limited scale of fighting is indicated by the fact that people speak of "heavy"
casualties when five people have been killed in an action.

"I think a lot of Americans imagine Cambodia is on the verge of collapse,"
an army major said. "I agree that the situation is serious, but then it has
always been serious. We have been fighting for a thousand years or so, and
Cambodia is still here."

[From The Wall Street Journal, Apr. 16, 1978]

ONE DAY AT A TIME—CAMBODIAN SITUATION LOOKS BAD, BUT CAMBODIANS
SEEM TO BE LESS CONCERNED THAN ANYONE ELSE

(By Barry Kramer)

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA—Things were looking bad for Cambodia: For the
first time in the war, the Communist insurgents had simultaneously severed all
five major highways connecting the capital, Phnom Penh, with the rest of the
country and with the nation's main seaport to the south. And the enemy held
long stretches along both banks of the Mekong River, preventing boatloads of
desperately needed fuel and other supplies from reaching the city.

As a result, the city was running out of fuel both for its vehicles and for its
two electrical generating plants. Gas was rationed, and electricity was fre-
quently interrupted, often for days at a time in large parts of the city. A water
shortage loomed because without electricity water pumps could not operate.

Phnom Penh's army, never the best of fighting machines, was beset by
morale problems caused mainly by rampant corruption among the officer corps.
And the government of President Lon Nol was becoming increasingly repres-
sive and dictatorial in the face of growing public disenchantment over infla-
tion and the war.

Both the Americans and the South Vietnamese expressed concern about the
deteriorating situation. The Americans responded by increasing the pace of
bombing, the South Vietnamese by hinting they might send forces into Cam-
bodia. The British, Japanese and Israelis ordered dependents of their embassy
personnel to depart immediately.

Everyone, it seemed, was concerned about the Cambodia crisis.

Everyone, that is, except the Cambodians.

FOUR TIMES THE PRICE

Other than the fact that long lines of autos and motorcycles queued up for
rationed fuel at Phnom Penh's gas stations, or that alternately drivers sought
black-market fuel at three or four times the official price of about 10 cents a
liter, life in the capital went on almost as usual. The central market was
thronged with shoppers stocking up for the Cambodian new year, Chaul
Chhnam. Markets and shops had large supplies of food and goods; at least
two months supply of rice was in the city's storehouses. Activity at night was
curtailed by a 9 o'clock curfew, imposed more for political reasons than
because of the trouble.

At the Hotel Le Royal, a 10-piece orchestra imitated Lester Lanin for a
formal reception held for the city's military attaches and their wives, while
tourists frolicked at the hotel pool.

If large portions of the city were without electricity, only the well-to-do
appeared to suffer. They had to do without their air conditioners and ceiling
fans during what is Phnom Penh's hottest season. (Several U.S. embassy
officials, who chose to use their rationed gas to run their automobiles rather
than their home generators, have taken to sleeping outside at night in ham-
mocks.

The apparent inability of the Cambodians to get excited about the current
situation can best be ascribed to their penchant for living life one day at a
time. That doesn't mean, however, that the situation isn't serious. "It's the
worst it's ever been," says one Western diplomat, echoing the opinion of most
of the foreign community here.

SHRINKING TERRITORY

A continuing Communist offensive launched last Feb. 10, less than two weeks
after the cease-fire went into effect in neighboring South Vietnam, has further
chipped away at government control so that Phnom Penh today is left with only about 20% of Cambodia’s 70,000 square miles of territory and about half of its seven million people. The blocking of the main highways and the Mekong lasted a week before government forces were able to reopen Route 4, connecting Phnom Penh with the main ocean port of Kompong Som (formerly Sihanoukville) on the gulf of Thailand, and two small ship convoys were able to get up the Mekong, bringing several precious days supply of fuel and other supplies to the city. (The United States has since begun an airlift of fuel to the city, since most ships are unwilling to run the Communist gauntlet on the Mekong. Yesterday, however, additional vessels did complete the voyage to Phnom Penh.)

Outside Phnom Penh, most of the country’s major provincial capitals are surrounded by Communist forces and must be supplied by air. Half of the nation’s rice lands are in enemy hands.

Military experts say it’s unlikely that Phnom Penh itself is seriously threatened, although the enemy is thought to have the capability of launching harassing attacks, including the use of suppers who might try to blow up installations inside the city.

The war has changed complexion since it came to Cambodia two and a half years ago following the deposition of Prince Norodom Sihanouk as chief of state. The communism aside, the enemy of the Ho-ovan Cambodian army was the Vietnamese, both the North Vietnamese and the Vietnamese from the south. Cambodian enmity for the Vietnamese dated back hundreds of years, and thousands of Cambodians eagerly volunteered for service.

Then, too, American soldiers joined South Vietnamese troops in attacking North Vietnamese and Vietcong strongholds inside Cambodia, and the South Vietnamese troops have returned several times since. (Press-service dispatches indicated yesterday that the South Vietnamese again had entered Cambodia. Some of these reports said the troops later withdrew.)

CAMBIODIANS VS. CAMBODIANS

In the intervening 30 months, however, the native Cambodian insurgent forces—made up mostly of Khmer Rouge and pro-Sihanouk units—have grown from an estimated 3,000 men in 1970 to between 40,000 and 50,000 today. American officials say the insurgents are led by between 6,000 and 8,000 North Vietnamese who provide advice, logistic support and some special-weapon forces. “More and more,” says one U.S. official, “the army finds itself facing exclusively Khmer (Cambodian) insurgents.” (There are an estimated 27,000 other North Vietnamese soldiers in eastern Cambodia along the 300-mile border with South Vietnam.)

As a result, many Cambodian army units don’t seem to have the stomach for fighting their fellow Cambodians that they had for fighting Vietnamese, U.S. officials say. The Cambodian insurgents are made up of disparate elements, some of whom aren’t Communist. Some, indeed, are simply bandits. And while some of the rebels favor the return of Prince Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge—or Cambodian Communists—harbor old grudges against the prince. The Khmer Rouge apparently would be most unlikely to welcome him coming back to power despite statements by the prince Saturday indicating that he had patched up some of his differences with them.

If the fighting spirit of the Cambodian army is ebbing, there are probably more potent reasons than the fact that they are battling fellow Cambodians. Corruption in the army has reached such heights, U.S. officials say, that morale among Cambodian troops is being affected.

In Phnom Penh, especially, officers whose salary isn’t much more than $80 a month nevertheless manage to build expensive villas and to drive imported luxury cars that would cost them 10 years’ salary.

“The corruption in Phnom Penh infects everything within 50 kilometers,” says a U.S. embassy official. “Soldiers who have to scrape by on 4,000 riel a month ($20) see how their officers live: big houses, cars and painted women covered with jewels. It’s no wonder it affects their morale.”

Much of the corruption involves Cambodia’s “ghost army,” made up of nonexistent soldiers whose names appear on official rosters and whose pay goes into the pockets of army colonels and generals. The Cambodian national budget calls for an army of 300,000 men, all of whom are paid in one way or another by the United States. American embassy officials estimate the actual
strength of the armed forces at 180,000, meaning that an estimated $2 million goes into the pockets of corrupt officials every month.

"As far as I know, we haven't done more than strongly urge that they clean up the army," a U.S. official admits. The government, he says, has agreed to cut its budgeted armed strength to 250,000, which means the ghost army will number only 70,000 instead of 120,000 next year.

Just how much money is available for corruption was indicated recently when a payroll officer in Battambang fled to Thailand with 500 million riels (about $2.5 million), money apparently entrusted to him by other corrupt officers. He was arrested by Thai officials and brought back to Cambodia to stand trial.

The corruption reaches to the highest levels. Lon Non, the younger brother of President Lon Nol, is commander of the Third Division, and U.S. officials say a substantial amount of money is drawn for that division's ghost soldiers. Both brothers are known to have large bank accounts in France, Switzerland and Hong Kong.

Attempts to correct the situation have caused more problems. Thousands of Cambodian soldiers have not been paid for months as stricter payroll regulations are put into effect. As a result, there are reports of "mutinies," including one battalion that paraded its trussed-up commander through the central market of a provincial town because he had kept their pay. Another, similarly disgruntled unit drove fully armed to the gates of the presidential residence in Phnom Penh for a sit-down strike. Another battalion is reported to have defected to the other side when its pay was not forthcoming for several months.

There are also reports that units needing ammunition or fuel sometimes have to pay off supply officers to get what they ask for.

Not surprisingly, officials say, the army functions "reasonably well," away from the corruption of Phnom Penh. Communist forces have been unable to take any of the several province capitals they have surrounded, although military sources say a recent attack on the provincial capital of Kompong Thom was thwarted only by U.S. air strikes, including B52 raids.

In fact, one Western military observer contends, the widespread and massive American bombing is the only thing keeping the Communists from overrunning Cambodia. "In the past three months," he says, "government forces have not won a single tactical victory." He says B52s from Thailand are being used to protect the capital, to keep the Mekong open and to protect the provincial capitals.

One source says that the Communists had apparently underestimated President Nixon's willingness to order the B52s back into action in Cambodia despite the cease-fire in Vietnam and the hoped-for cease-fire in Cambodia that never came about. "Even people in the U.S. embassy were astounded when U.S. air power was reintroduced in Cambodia," the source says.

While the Communists appear unable to take the capital militarily, by cutting the roads and the Mekong to isolate the city they may be aiming to aggravate further the political and economic problems of President Lon Nol's administration and bring about the collapse of his regime.

Most Western observers are frankly surprised that the regime has held on this long. "By all the conditions in the city there should have been an attempt at a political overthrow," says one Western analyst. "The trouble is, there's got to be a catalyst and one hasn't come along."

"Right now, most Cambodians appear to be waiting for either a new government to take over or the Communists," says a knowledgeable American. "In Vietnam, there are a great number of people who can't stand the Communists, but in Cambodia they don't fear the Communists; no one really seems to know who the enemy is."

[From the Baltimore Sun, Apr. 18, 1978]

WAR MAGNIFIIES GRIFT IN CAMBODIA'S REGIME

(By Arnold R. Isaacs)

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA.—The American-backed Cambodian government is losing its war not only on the battlefields but also on the home front.

Economic hardships are worsening, partly because of the war but also partly because of the overwhelming inefficiency and corruption of the government.
President Lon Nol and his younger brother, Brig. Gen. Lon Non, who now wield absolute power, seem impervious to the rising popular dissatisfaction.

The rice market, which affects every Cambodian, offers a perfect example of how the hardships of war are magnified by government corruption.

Theoretically, rice sales are controlled by a government monopoly and the rice is sold in state stores at the official price of about $8 for a 220-pound sack—about one month's supply or a little more for a large family.

In fact, the officers in charge of the distribution sell huge amounts to black marketeers, who resell it to the public at nearly three times the legal price.

For weeks at a time there has been no rice at all in government stores in Phnom Penh, meaning the entire supply for more than a million people has been sold for the private profit of the government agents.

Large amounts of American aid dollars are involved, since the United States finances the import of about 180,000 tons a year, at a cost of more than $25 million.

In recent months, with the Communist-led insurgent offensive that has closed or threatened all of the important supply routes into the capital, scarcity, hoarding and graft have driven the black-market price up to nearly double the price of six months ago. For the first time, refugees and others among Cambodia's very poor are finding it hard to get enough to eat.

"Some days we are very hungry," said a refugee mother living in the shell of an unfinished luxury hotel on Phnom Penh's waterfront. The government gives her only a week's ration every month, and it is difficult in the refugee-swollen capital to earn enough to feed her four children the rest of the time.

When she finds a day's work, she is paid 100 riels, or about 40 cents.

She says it costs her twice that much for food.

Overall, according to American estimates, the average Cambodian's income now represents only one-third to one-half of his purchasing power before the war, with disastrous effects on his willingness to continue backing the inept Phnom Penh government.

The economic crisis is mirrored on the war fronts, where the Cambodian Army has suffered defeat after defeat despite unprecedented American air support.

"DE FACTO CEASE-FIRE"

There is no sign of peace negotiations or of the "de facto cease-fire" the White House predicted would follow the Vietnam peace agreement. Instead, the heaviest insurgent offensive of the war has closed or threatened every important highway and has slowed, though not entirely stopped, the flow of petroleum and other supplies up the Mekong River, the most vital supply route of all.

Though there are long lines at gas stations and the electricity and water supplies are even more erratic than usual, Phnom Penh does not have the atmosphere of a city under siege.

During the three-day Cambodian New Year, which ended Sunday, crowds of celebrants flocked to the pagodas and to the broad grassy malls that still give the capital an attractive look despite the shabbiness of war.

LIGHT-HEARTED GAMES

Fortune tellers, dancers, tightrope walkers and high-kicking Thai-style boxers entertained the crowds, and children and adults happily flung themselves into the lighthearted games that are a tradition of the New Year celebration. Despite the fuel shortage, civilian cars and motorcycles still swarmed along the broad avenues.

The surface normality, however, does not mean there is not a genuine crisis of spirit in the Cambodian capital.

A CRITICAL FACTOR

Few Cambodians or foreign observers expect the current Communist offensive will end with a clear-cut military decision. World War II style, with the victors marching into the capital from the countryside. But many are wondering how long Marshal Lon Nol and General Lon Non can hold out against the internal decay of their regime and the steeply rising popular discontent.

A critical factor is the increasing dissatisfaction in the Army. Never a good fighting force, in the last months its morale has plunged and its performance in the field seems more hapless than ever.

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