Units ranging in size up to entire brigades have refused to advance or have left their positions, sometimes holding their commanders at gunpoint. Most of the disputes have involved the government’s failure to pay the troops, sometimes for three or four months at a stretch.

One military observer said he knew personally of more than a dozen incidents of mass indiscipline just in the weeks of the current offensive.

**PAY SITUATION**

Cambodian officials and their American backers—who foot the bill for the Army, as they do for virtually the whole Cambodian budget—in insist the pay situation has improved and that most of the troops have now been paid at least through March.

Still, two young soldiers encountered in an afternoon of random interviews in Phnom Penh reported they were paid this month—more than two weeks late—only after members of their battalion fired a fusillade of shots into the barracks housing the finance officer.

Military pay is part of the picture of corruption that pervades the entire government. While real soldiers go unpaid—and, since they are normally issued no rations but buy their food in the markets just as civilians do, this leaves their families in grave need—the government continues to pay an estimated 80,000 “phantom soldiers,” who exist only on payroll records and whose salaries are pocketed by corrupt commanders.

Through payroll padding and other forms of graft, high-ranking officers are becoming wealthier and wealthier while their soldiers and their families suffer. “The military aristocracy is living at Hollywood heights,” one diplomat remarked—and the evidence is plainly visible.

In the posh neighborhoods of Phnom Penh there are literally hundreds of elegant new villas, costing $20,000 to $40,000 and up, owned by colonels who officially earn only $60 to $70 a month.

Ultimately, the entire cost of this corruption is underwritten by American aid, which has been called sarcastically the world’s largest upper-income housing program. Army payroll padding alone is estimated to cost more than $2 million a month.

Direct U.S. military aid has reached a total of about $500 million in three years of war. If large amounts have been lost through corruption, as much or more is wasted through sheer incompetence.

**DIVISION PANICS**

Two weeks ago, for example the Cambodian 7th Division, ambushed after a highway clearing operation near the provincial capital of Takeo panicked and abandoned five of its eight 105-mm. howitzers and 40 truckloads of shells to the insurgents.

This was a division on which the 75-man U.S. military-equipment delivery team had lavished special attention and for which the Americans had very high hopes. Most other units are regarded as considerably worse.

Other factors affect military morale as well. One may be that in the last six or eight months the North Vietnamese, who had done most of the fighting in Cambodia since open warfare broke out after Prince Norodom Sihanouk’s overthrow in March, 1970, have turned the bull of the combat to Cambodian recruits.

**HANOI ADVISES REBELS**

The North Vietnamese still advise and in some cases command insurgent units, and they supply heavy weapons units and logistical specialists. A cadre of 5,000 to 6,000 North Vietnamese stiffens an estimated 40,000 Khmer rebels.

While fighting the Vietnamese, government soldiers were bolstered by the deep ancestral hostility between the two peoples. They have far less appetite, military observers believe, for fighting fellow Khmers.

As the military and economic situations deteriorate, Marshal Lon Nol and General Lon Non have proved unable or unwilling to take any serious measures toward reforming their regime. Constant appeals by American officials for large and small reforms produce plenty of promises but little concrete action.

“The Cambodians agree with everything and promise to change,” one observer commented. “Then when they’ve promised they think they’ve reformed, and everything goes on just as it was.” New programs are
announced, to the relief of the American Embassy, only to vanish in the fog of incompetence and venality that hangs over the regime.

While the United States was urging Marshal Lon Nol to "broaden his political base"—an appeal reportedly conveyed by Gen. Alexander M. Haig, Jr., on his recent trip (which apparently led to the cabinet reshuffle reported yesterday) the partly paralyzed president in the last month has crushed the last open political dissent, closing down the opposition press and placing hundreds of real or imagined political opponents under arrest.

Lt. Gen. Sisowath Sirik Matak, the former deputy prime minister and the man backed by many Americans as a potential leader to bring Cambodia out of the morass, was one of those detained and has been under house arrest for a month.

The pretext for the crackdown was the March 17 attempt by a disaffected Air Force pilot to bomb Marshal Lon Nol's residence. The "state of emergency" afforded the government a fortuitous chance to prevent a planned mass protest by striking students and teachers, which would have represented, in the words of one diplomat, "a conspicuous demonstration of the government's unpopularity."

**Rally Broken Up**

The very day of the bombing, a rally of teachers was broken up when grenades hurled into the crowd killed two persons. The government said the grenades were thrown by "terrorists," but most Cambodians and foreign diplomats believe they were the work of undercover agents of General Lon Non, the president's brother.

"Petit frère," (little brother) as General Lon Non is generally called, has become a target of widespread public hatred. The Americans have urged Marshal Lon Nol to curb his brother's powers, but the only result has been a typical Cambodian shadow-play in which General Lon Non gave up his ministerial title without surrendering any of his authority.

General Lon Non still heads the "coordinating committee," whose functions are as vague as its name and which is essentially able to step in and overrule any minister anytime General Lon Non or Marshal Lon Nol wants.

**Growing Disbelief**

In view of the monumental incompetence of the Lon Nol regime, foreign diplomats in Phnom Penh have watched the unstinting flow of American aid and the stepping-up of the U.S. bombing with growing disbelief.

"Frankly, we don't see what the Americans are hoping to accomplish," one ranking diplomat said, wondering out loud if the U.S. bombing were not the start of another endless, inconclusive air war in Indochina.

The U.S. Embassy itself has put strict controls on all discussions with newsmen. Top officials have been almost entirely unavailable, and section chiefs meet reporters only with a "monitor" from the public affairs office.

However, among other embassies it is common gossip that many U.S. Embassy officials assess the situation in far gloomier terms than apparently are prevalent in Washington. Dissenting U.S. officials are described as frustrated and bewildered by the policy of continued all-out support for Lon Nol.

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*[From The New York Times, Mar. 25, 1978]*

**CAMBODIA—"THE SPIRIT OF DOOM IS DEEP"**

Phnom Penh—The crisis in Cambodia deepened last week, leaving the Government teetering on the wreckage of the democratic republic it set out to create three years ago—and the United States Air Force bombing heavily to keep the wreckage from falling into Communist hands.

The people of Phnom Penh are frightened by all the forces at work. The spirit of doom is so deep that the yearning for an end to the war—any end—is the most vivid emotion. The popularity and credibility of the Government of President Lon Nol have sunk so low that the predominant reaction to last Saturday's bombing of the Presidential Palace was regret that the disgruntled Cambodian Air Force pilot who carried out the lone attack missed his target.

The fact that his bomb hit a densely populated area, killing more than 50 persons, mainly children, received little notice last week, because one of the
Government's response was to declare a state of emergency and suspend all privately owned newspapers. Only "official" news has currency now. A few hours before the raid—the Communists later announced that the "patriotic" Air Force captain landed his fighter-bomber in their zone—a hand-grenade attack in Phnom Penh did find its mark.

Within the small class of politically alert Cambodian civilians, perhaps the only politically significant group is composed of the teachers. The teachers have been on strike throughout the Government-held parts of the country for more than a month, and about 20,000 of them were holding a mass meeting a few blocks from the Presidential Palace. The explosion of several hand-grenades at the meeting killed two persons and wounded many.

The Government said "enemy agents" were responsible for the attack; most everyone else was convinced it was the work of soldiers from one of the units of Brig. Gen. Lon Non, brother of President Lon Nol and the strongman of the military regime that seized power three years ago. The attack was interpreted as a warning to the teachers to call off the strike, which started as a demand for higher pay in the face of runaway inflation but has provided an outlet for all the political and social unrest in the Government-held areas.

The Government has already arrested an unknown number of teachers, students, journalists and others of an openly skeptical disposition. Criticism has been stilled; a number of Cambodians have taken to sleeping in pagodas rather than at home.

The Government has also characterized the palace bombing as part of a royalist plot to overthrow the Khmer (Cambodian) Republic. This allegation, though met with equal disbelief, has been used by Government leaders to neutralize their most important potential opponent—former Premier Sisowath Sirik Matak, a prince who gave up his title and helped found the republic but who now finds himself accused of royalist leanings. He was placed last week under a kind of unannounced house arrest.

Meanwhile, windows shake in Phnom Penh every day from the air waves set off by American B-52 strikes against rebel troops concentrations. Western military sources report that American tactical air support from bases in Thailand is as heavy now as it was at peak periods before the Vietnam cease-fire agreement of Jan. 27.

Today, according to these sources, it is American air power alone that is preventing the collapse of the Cambodian Government and army. The Cambodian rebel troops allied with the Vietnamese Communist forces in Cambodia are credited by American, Cambodian and neutral sources with a remarkable improvement in their combat competence. The Vietnamese, these sources say, are able more and more to stay in the background and let the Cambodian rebels fight their own civil war.

The Americans are conducting what they regard as a "holding action" at best. They are holding in place a vastly unpopular Government—criticized for authoritarianism, corruption, incompetence and rising prices—by furnishing military and economic assistance (much of it misappropriated) and by bombing.

The Americans say they can do little about the Government itself except to urge reforms, since to take steps to change the Government would be interference in internal Cambodian affairs inconsistent with the Nixon Doctrine and the post-Vietnam posture of American policy-makers. But to many unofficial observers here the American policy of providing the Government with weapons, money and power, while the Government deprives its non-Communist opposition of any political role, amounts to pervasive interference on the Government's behalf.

On the other hand, if the United States ended its bombing and its support of Marshal Lon Nol's Cambodia, the Vietnamese Communists in all likelihood would determine the policies of the Cambodia that would follow. And that would make South Vietnam's western border even more vulnerable to infiltration than it is now.

[From The New York Times, Apr. 15, 1978]

AIR FOR THE BESIEGED

PHNOM PENH.—Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr. had just landed. Speculation as to the purpose of his trip was rife. The American Ambassador, Emory O.
Swank, felt that an explanation of United States policy on Cambodia was required. Hurriedly, he wrote out a statement to the press, in pencil. “Because of the shortage of supply of petroleum products to Phnom Penh through normal channels, this mission has been authorized to airlift certain quantities of petroleum products to Pochentong [the capital’s airport]. No particulars of this operation will be made public, since they would provide information to the enemy forces operating in Cambodia.”

With that statement the United States took another step deeper into the Cambodian war.

The United States was already conducting a bombing campaign with fighter-bombers and B-52’s. It was already providing the Government’s soldiers with arms and ammunition and senior commanders with advice.

American officials insisted that the airlift was small and designed principally to demonstrate Washington’s unqualified backing for the government of Marshal Lon Nol. But other Western sources claimed that workmen at the airport were preparing pumps and tanks capable of accepting nearly 100,000 gallons of fuel a day—far more than could be used by the tiny Cambodian Air Force of diminutive World War II bombers and 16 helicopters.

American involvement in the Cambodian war has deepened as the Government’s forces have deteriorated and the insurgents’ power has increased. The insurgents have grown in the past three years from a force of 1,800 men to at least 40,000, and they are now doing most of the fighting.

Military experts say the Cambodian rebels have been armed and trained mainly by the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong. One of the Communists’ most effective recruiting themes has been an appeal for opposition to a Government that is increasingly viewed as corrupt and repressive. The intensified American bombing has provided the Communists with the added argument that proved so effective in South Vietnam: that the Government is the tool of the Americans and that the struggle is really against foreigners trying to dominate the country.

A potentially significant political factor has entered the situation. Phnom Penh was astir last week with reports from Peking and Hanoi that Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who was overthrown in 1970, visited the rebel-held areas of Cambodia recently.

The insurgent leaders fear they would find themselves with a very small share of power, if any, if Sihanouk made a political comeback. At the same time they are aware of his popularity with the peasants and in the Communist capitals whence they draw their material support. How they handle the delicate Sihanouk problem may affect the course of the insurgency.


SHAPING UP IN CAMBODIA

PHNOM PENH.—It looked last week as though Washington had finally prevailed on President Lon Nol to pull the Cambodian Government together for an 11th-hour stand against Communist forces battering at the approaches to the capital.

On Tuesday night the eccentric and deeply superstitious Cambodian leader broadcast to his people, saying his Ministers had resigned to give him a free hand in creating a collective leadership—which, for the first time, would include opposition leaders.

The resignation of Prime Minister Hang Thun Hak and the rest of the Cabinet had little significance in itself, since the Cabinet is largely ceremonial in Cambodia. What mattered more was that President Lon Nol had apparently finally agreed to send his brother, Gen. Lon Non, on a vague mission of indefinite duration to the United States.

General Lon Non, the eminence grise of the Government, is feared, disliked and distrusted by virtually every politician in Cambodia, some of whom have had disagreeable brushes with the general’s police agents. Only by depriving General Lon Non completely of his access to power could opposition figures be persuaded to consider entering into coalition with the President. And such coalition, American policy-makers contend, is essential if Cambodia is not to succumb quickly to anarchy on the one hand and the Hanoi-backed Cambodian insurgent army on the other.
The general's American mission—which would take him 10,000 miles from Phnom Penh and presumably keep him there for a long time—was announced on the radio on Thursday, and a leading opposition figure, In Tam, said he was ready to join the President in a coalition. Similar agreement was obtained from Sisowath Sirik Matak, a descendant of Cambodian kings, a former soldier, an experienced administrator and Washington's choice as the only man capable of assuming real leadership. But both In Tam and Sirik Matak set conditions. In effect, they wanted assurances that the President would cede his power completely to what would amount to a ruling junta, of which Marshal Lon Nol would be essentially one among equals. They also insisted that there be no nonsense about having to share power with the moribund National Assembly, which they charged had been elected by fraud. These conditions may be difficult for Marshal Lon Nol to accept.

The Dutch uncle treatment is said to have been applied to President Lon Nol during the recent visit here of President Nixon's emissary, Gen. Alexander Haig. Whether the Marshal has sincerely capitulated or is merely dissembling to gain time remains a troublesome question for both the Americans and the opposition politicians.

One point on which the Americans and Cambodians seem in complete agreement, however, is that peace in Cambodia is nowhere in sight—and, consequently, that it is necessary to think again in terms of at least limited military victory over the enemy.

The enemy these days is mostly Cambodian. Official American sources here say that since the Vietnam ceasefire three months ago there has been no documented evidence of Vietnamese troops serving in combat roles in Cambodia. The Vietnamese appear to be participating mainly as advisers. And one source said their influence on the Cambodian insurgents was continuing to decline—an assessment corroborated in recent weeks by Cambodian Government officers in the field and villagers in combat areas.

The Cambodian insurgent forces are portrayed by American observers as badly disciplined and divided politically—some Communists, some adherents of the deposed Prince Norodom Sihanouk, some belonging to other factions. Nevertheless, the Government's forces are regarded by American officials as so weak and disorganized that an insurgent triumph would be an imminent likelihood were it not for the American bombing.

American air power is in spectacular evidence over Cambodia, day and night, carpeting the country with detonations. Since at least 70 per cent of the country is in insurgent hands, with very few pockets of Government control, target restrictions are apparently less stringent than was usually the case in Vietnam.

Most Cambodians in or near the capital seem to know of relatives or friends in the countryside killed or maimed by the raids. The full extent of current civilian casualties may never be known, but some experts here, most of them foreigners, feel the carnage is probably appalling.

"The flame of the Indochina war has been turned down," a Cambodian official said, "but the pilot light is still burning brightly in Cambodia. It's just a question of time before our war reignites the whole thing."

[From The Far Eastern Economic Review, Apr. 30, 1978]
PHNOM PENG.—Not even the certainty that the US will not allow Phnom Penh to be another Dien Bien Phu keeps the inhabitants from being jittery. Khmer Rouge guerrilla units last week were so close to the city that they were able to blast parts of the Pochentong air base with rockets. The airport, now almost the only reliable link with the outside world—highways are cut or under frequent fire—was not put out of action. Casualties in this action were heavy. Anti-Government forces also began operating from the further banks of the Mekong River, adding to the nervous stresses of a population which knows that the Government's defences are weak and its soldiers demoralised, and that only the US Air Force was preventing a takeover by the Khmer Rouge.

Amid the tension and desperation, the only relieving factor is that food and fuel are available in Phnom Penh. But this, too, reminds the people that the capital's precarious life depends on the US connection.

There is now enough rice for two months, although most of it is the American variety, which the fastidious Cambodians do not much care for. The rice which used to come from the fertile province of Battambang in the northwest is needed for that area itself. But prices have remained steady for three weeks, and the marketplaces in the city are crammed to overflowing with fruits and vegetables, fish and meats.

The critical bottleneck was fuel, but this was dramatically broken on April 28 when a convoy of six tankers made it up the Mekong. They arrived in Phnom Penh at the cost of one dead and four wounded, and a mild battering for three of the boats, but they brought enough diesel and fuel oil to keep the city's two electricity plants and the water pump generators active. The ubiquitous Hondas which seem to proliferate more and more daily testify to the availability of petrol. There are still power cuts but this is due to the extreme age of the generators, and the fact that the system is heavily overloaded. The airport, now under frequent fire—was not put out of action. Casualties in this action were

During the 83 days of the offensive, diplomatic sources estimate some 600,000 refugees have poured into the city. Many of these have taken up with relatives and friends and have been assimilated into the city, but there are still enough unsheltered camps around to illustrate the plight of thousands.

The respite is undoubtedly just that. The other five highways which converge on the city remain cut, and although only Route 5, the river road to Battambang, is of strategic importance to Phnom Penh itself, the fact that the others are sequestered means that the provincial capitals such as Takeo and Kampot must be relieved by air. Pressure on them remains intense. Takeo has been shaken continuously by dozens of American B-52 missions pounding its perimeter as the North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces make a determined effort to capture it. Around Phnom Penh the enemy forces have edged closer and closer and at their nearest point are only 15 kilometres from the city centre. This is on Route 2 just south of Takeo.

It is evident that Lon Nol has been suffering the discomforts of the American forearm lock. This uniquely painful hold, which has been applied with conspicuous success to other Indochinese leaders supported by the US, is designed to make him come to terms with his opposition. In this case it is not the collection of Sihanoukists, communists and nationalists who already hold around 80% of the country and continue to pose a very real military threat to the capital Phnom Penh. It is a question of Lon Nol mending his fences with erstwhile colleagues and conspirators.

Intense negotiations had taken place to "broaden the base" of Lon Nol's unpopular government by bringing into it other leading Phnom Penh political figures. An original idea that an 11-man council should be set up was abandoned on the grounds that it would be too unwieldy. It has now been agreed it should be a four-man operation with In Tam, Srik Matak and Cheng Heng, the old hand of the National Assembly.

What has still to emerge is what relationship it will bear to the other instruments of government and where power will eventually settle. Srik Matak, In Tam and Cheng Heng had all laid down that the conditions of their joining were that the Council become an effective ruling body and that within it power be shared equally on a one-man, one-vote basis.

In an interview with the Review, In Tam said he and the other two councilors had laid down certain conditions before they had agreed to join. One of these conditions could have been a clarification of Lon Non's position: Lon Nol's younger brother is shortly to leave on a special mission to the US where
he will see President Nixon. His long-term political role is unknown. Another condition, almost certainly, was the suspension of the National Assembly, in which Lon Nol’s Socio-Republican Party controls all 126 seats. The Assembly is to be put on ice for six months.

Lon Nol’s radio broadcast on April 24, announcing the new government format, said the Council would make all decisions pertaining to the running of the country and that these would be executed by a special government. This has been taken to mean that the 16-man Cabinet which resigned two weeks ago will be reinstated.

The US Embassy in particular is known to think very highly of Sirik Matak and is expecting great things from him in the way of streamlining government machinery. Some diplomatic sources here are describing the Council as the most significant political development in Cambodia since Sihanouk was toppled. Others are not so sure, although they admit that it is agreeable to see all these four political figures, who have spent a good part of the past three years squabbling, together again. They think the key sentence in Lon Nol’s broadcast announcing the Council was that it was being set up “to help the President in leading the country,” which suggests it might be advisory.

In all fairness to Lon Nol it may be he has finally realized how unpopular his government has become and that he must refresh its image if he is to survive. But the fact that Brigadier-General Lon Non started to make plans for a trip to the US shortly after the visit of President Nixon’s special envoy, General Alexander Haig, suggests that it is the Americans who are currently working the strings. Once upon a time, before he had his stroke last year, Lon Nol was said to have kept his ambitious younger brother in check. But the rather sinister Lon Non has steadily increased his power over the ailing Lon Nol. Lon Non is throwing out hints that he will not be away all that long and will not relinquish control of the 3rd Division of the Cambodian Army.

Sirik Matak is reckoned to be the most capable administrator in Cambodia. But the aloof and patrician Matak, who was Lon Nol’s partner in the March 1970 coup which ousted Prince Sihanouk, is hardly more popular than Lon Nol and, in fact, was obliged to resign from the Government last year because of student demonstrations against him. In Tam must owe his inclusion in the Council partly to the idea that he will be a counterweight to the unhinged Sirik Matak. The mild-mannered In Tam is probably at the moment the most popular politician in the country although this is not saying much. He was a member of it for a short time in February but quickly resigned, and the suspicion lingers that he basically enjoys popping in and out of power. Cheng Heng, the former head of state, seems to be included for old times’ sake, having shared the glory days of 1970.

Whether these three manage to prise some of Lon Nol’s power from him, assuming that the President does not manage to enlarge the Council to include his supporters, remains to be seen. On past performance the 59-year-old President—who has come, according to sources, to think of himself as ruling by divine right in much the same way as Sihanouk used to—is unlikely to give up much willingly.

The arguments being advanced here are that some government window-dressing will quickly restore the army’s sagging morale, and enable the Government more vigorously to pursue the war and clear the severed highways into Phnom Penh. It will also make for more effective government, it is said, since the numerous Lon Nol appointees could be weeded out and replaced by efficient administrators.

One of In Tam’s main functions will be to establish contacts with the other side. He will not attempt to talk to Sihanouk, he says, because “Sihanouk lives in Peking in an airconditioned flat.” But, he claims, there are plenty of nationalist leaders around Phnom Penh who are wearying of the fighting and who might be interested in coming over to the government side. In Tam was a little short on names, but these figures, whoever they are, could be given seats in the National Assembly and, in time, perhaps be represented on the Supreme Council. The implication is that the Government is not facing a unified and determined opposition. All appearances suggest the opposite.

Denzil Peiris writes: One of the objectives of Prince Norodom Sihanouk’s tour of Cambodia, sponsored jointly by Chou En-lai and Pham Van Dong and conducted by Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap’s soldiers, appears to have been to prove the futility of certain proposals which he seemed to be attributing to the
Soviet Union. These rest on the presumption that the support the Khmer Rouge is giving Sihanouk is, at best, perfunctory. He could, in the circumstances, be ditched for a compromise settlement between the Khmer Rouge and the Lon Nol government.

At his recent press conference in Peking, Sihanouk was openly critical of the Soviet Union. Speaking after his return from Cambodia, the Prince said of the Soviet Union that he hoped it would end its commitment to the Lon Nol group. He continued in trenchant vein: "We hope they will change their present stand of assisting Lon Nol and [working] against us. We hope so, but I'm not too optimistic about it. It's just a dream. Perhaps such a dream may become true. We do not want to be their enemies and we are very sad that they do not like us. We can't change their policy."

This criticism represents more than Sihanoukian idiosyncrasy. Indeed, it hints at divergences between the Soviet Union and the Khmer Rouge as well. During his visit to Cambodia, Sihanouk had presided at a meeting of the government-in-exile run by Khieu Samphan and other leaders in the liberated areas; obviously, they would not wish him to embarrass them. Moreover, Ieng Sary, one of the Khmer Rouge leaders, is with Sihanouk in Peking.

Another factor, of course, is that Sihanouk sticks in Richard Nixon's craw. He refuses to talk with the Prince. Sihanouk insinuates that the Soviet bloc is working for a settlement that would exclude him, saying that the bloc has lent "a too complaisant or credulous ear to the songs of the Washington sirens."

Article 20 of the Paris Agreement stipulates that "foreign countries shall put an end to all military activities in Cambodia and Laos," yet America has been bombing Cambodia since March 7, Laos since mid-April. Why? The most frequently cited reason is communist violations of the ceasefire, but other, more detailed, explanations have been offered, reports William Shawcross from Washington.

On March 27 William Sullivan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Southeast Asia, reportedly told a group of congressional aides: "For now, I'll just say the justification is the re-election of the President."

Secretary of Defence, Elliot Richardson claims, quite simply: "Our constitutional authority rests on the circumstances that we are coming out of a 10-year period of conflict. This is the wind-up. What we are doing in effect is to try to encourage the observance of the Paris agreements by engaging in air action at the request of the [Cambodian] Government."

In fact, the Nixonians fear nothing as much as a ceasefire in Cambodia. The bombing is designed to prolong the fighting in that country, not to end it. It is an attempt to stop the insurgents from throttling the Lon Nol regime. It is quite clear that a ceasefire must involve the formation of a coalition in which the forces of the right will have, at best, a minor place. As Richardson said on "Meet the Press" on April 1, the fall of the Lon Nol government would have a "significant" effect on Thieu's survival. It would enable the communists, he said, to get "virtually the untrammelled use of Cambodia as a staging area for attacks against South Vietnam" by enabling them to "resupply forces in South Vietnam, via the ports on the Gulf of Siam that have been shut off since the fall of Sihanouk."

The prognosis for Cambodia's refugees, according to Wells Klein, who headed a team of doctors sent by the Senate Refugee Subcommittee to assess Indochina's post-war humanitarian needs, is "dismal." Medical supplies and food are in desperately short supply and in many areas starvation is setting in. More and more refugees are being created every day by a bombing policy which one diplomat described to the New York Times as that of a "mad woman."

"The Americans just throw air support around; they don't know what effect it's having."

Nor do they seem to care very much. Not only is there just one man on the US Embassy staff to deal with the 2.5 million refugees, but neither the US nor the Cambodian Government has even initiated a programme of refugee relief. In 1971, Nixon himself described Cambodia as "the Nixon Doctrine in its purest form" because "in Cambodia what we are doing is helping the Cambodians to help themselves." Unfortunately for Cambodians, Nixon's helping hand will probably be pounding their country for a long time to come.
Phnom Penh, Cambodia—For several weeks now, newspaper headlines have described Phnom Penh as threatened by a Communist buildup, encircled, cut off, and besieged.

The focus of newspaper reporting has been on the city, sometimes with the implication that it could fall at any minute. It is true that the antigovernment forces have been putting more direct pressure on Phnom Penh lately, through sporadic rocket fire, the infiltration of small units into the suburbs, attacks on supply convoys, and the cutting of roads. But none of this is particularly new in the three-year history of the war in Cambodia.

As one Western businessman in Phnom Penh put it, “We’ve always lived from one convoy to the next.”

“I can’t think of anything happening around Phnom Penh now that hasn’t happened before over the past two years,” he said. “The only thing unprecedented is that one ship convoy was delayed.”

Military analysts are virtually unanimous in concluding that the antigovernment forces do not now have the necessary force in the Phnom Penh area to take the capital city. And there are half-a-dozen reasons why the would actually have no interest in trying to take it at the moment.

The real significance of what has been happening on the battlefield in Cambodia over the past few months is to be found not on the outskirts of Phnom Penh but in the provinces.

ATTACK POSITION HELD

With the exception of some territory to the extreme west of the country, the Lon Nol government has effectively lost control of most of the rural areas. The North Vietnamese grabbed huge chunks of territory during their offensive last year. And the Cambodian insurgents, backed by the North Vietnamese, took some smaller chunks this year.

The antigovernment forces’ control of the rural areas now has put them in a position to attack a provincial capital. And this is what they are doing at Takeo, 55 miles to the south of Phnom Penh. The words encircled, cut off, and besieged fit Takeo much better than they do Phnom Penh.

Takeo is no major city. Refugees have swollen its population to a total of perhaps 40,000 people. But as the administrative center for one of the country’s most heavily populated provinces, it is considered an important town.

The loss of Takeo would almost certainly amount to a serious blow to the Phnom Penh government’s already shaky morale. Heavy American air strikes are probably what have saved Takeo so far from being overrun. But it still could end up being the first province capital to fall in Cambodia since 1970.

It is in this area south of Phnom Penh as well as to the south and east of the city along the Bassac and Mekong Rivers that the antigovernment forces have made most of their gains in recent weeks. In other areas of the country, the situation has remained roughly the same.

Despite heavy American bombing, the Phnom Penh government’s Army has been unable to make any significant gains of its own.

The army is not patrolling sufficiently to be able to provide the kind of intelligence that would make tactical air strikes effective against the dispersed antigovernment units. The strikes only seem to be truly effective in a case like that of Takeo where it is clearer just where the insurgent forces are located. There are a number of reasons why the Communists probably do not intend to make a big push to take Phnom Penh just now.

There is still a chance that if they went for the capital in a big way, President Nixon would decide on some kind of retaliatory action.

The North Vietnamese and their Cambodian allies now control a huge swath of territory all along the South Vietnamese border. It is all that they need to support continued military operations in South Vietnam. North Vietnam’s main concern remains South Vietnam, not Cambodia.

To take Phnom Penh at this point might require the open use of North Vietnamese units, which would not fit well with liberation doctrine or the kind of image the Communists are interested in building.
To take responsibility for administering this refugee-swollen city with all its problems might be a burden the Communists are not quite ready to assume.

Although the North Vietnamese and their Cambodian allies appear to be working in a militarily united way, they still may not have the united political front needed to run the entire country.

**COLLAPSE SOUGHT?**

Rather than launching a frontal assault which, incidentally, would probably mean heavy casualties, what the Communists probably desire in Phnom Penh is an internal collapse. This they can hasten by putting steady pressure on the city while continuing to build their strength in the countryside.

They are also probably going to continue to make probing actions in the Phnom Penh area aimed in part at testing President Nixon and his Indo-China allies.

Keeping the pressure on Phnom Penh, without actually trying to take it, has the added benefit for the Communists of tying down a good number of Cambodian Army units so that they cannot be used in the provinces.

In Phnom Penh itself at the moment, the supply situation has improved with the arrival of several truck convoys from the coastal port of Kompong Som over the past two weeks.

American officials say that there now is enough rice in Phnom Penh to feed the city for two more months. The problem is the rice-distribution system, which is far from satisfactory.

The ship convoy which made it up the Mekong River to Phnom Penh about 10 days ago had its troubles. One crewman was killed and two wounded by fire from the banks of the Mekong. But the ships and tankers did get to Phnom Penh, and they brought the city's fuel supply up to what businessmen consider "normal" by recent Cambodian standards.

There is plenty of food other than rice in the Phnom Penh markets. But the big problem here is prices. The price of living has skyrocketed as a result of the war. And many people simply cannot afford to buy much of the food that is available.

But the Cambodian capital has never been as "besieged" as some press accounts would have it.

At the moment, the real danger to President Lon Nol is not that he will lose Phnom Penh anytime soon. It is that he will take even greater losses in the provinces, possibly to the extent of losing a few province capitals. Then he would truly deserve the title which a few diplomats some time ago jokingly bestowed on him: "the mayor of Phnom Penh."

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**BEHIND ENEMY LINES**

Prince Sihanouk has brought off a very considerable political coup as a result of his recent 1,000-kilometre tour through the communist-controlled regions of Cambodia—itself both a symbolic pilgrimage by a "god-king" and a significant propaganda victory. He has proved that his almost religious charisma is not limited to exerting a spell over mass meetings, but that his charm can be brought to bear in difficult private negotiations. After uncomfortable years of exile in Peking during which he has maintained his own political potential and his value to his hosts, he has returned to his own country and persuaded all the guerrilla factions fighting the Lon Nol government to accept him as their Head of State. And the front-line troops which he has made his own are hammering at the gates of Phnom Penh.

One cannot but spare some sympathy for poor Lon Nol, who chose to betray his master and seize the reins of power when Cambodia's always precarious neutrality was on the brink of crumbling, as foreign troops used Cambodia as a corridor and a sanctuary from which to attack South Vietnam. The Khmers were swiftly engulfed in the horror of what became an Indochina war. Lon Nol's government lost any title to the sort of leadership which might have united the people against both Vietnamese and Khmer communists or prevented the wide-scale corruption, particularly in the army, which gradually sapped the will to fight. Lon Nol may have made a medical recovery, from his
untimely stroke, but never recovered politically. Too late he has recognised the necessity of broadening his support and is forming a coalition which smacks uncomfortably of the belated last-minute reforms attempted by Louis XVI, the last Tsar of Russia and Chiang Kai-shek before the deluge overtook them.

B-52 OVERKILL

For the moment, it appears unlikely that the beleaguered city of Phnom Penh will fall, not because of the tenacity of its Khmer defenders but because President Nixon has unnecessarily put his country’s “honour” on the block again and, incredibly, is attempting to uphold it by yet another futile exercise in indiscriminate B-52 bombing. Just as, with an honourable re-election within its grasp, Nixon’s Administration criminally indulged in the overkill of Watergate, so, having engineered an American escape from the morass of Indochina through the funkhole of the ceasefire agreement, Nixon has immorally and stupidly chosen to recommit his death machines.

The B-52s, while temporarily preserving Phnom Penh, are killing and maiming peasants who, like their Vietnamese cousins, will have no reason to love America when peace finally comes. Nixon has evidently learned no lessons from Vietnam. He regards Sihanouk with the same relentless hostility accorded to New Delhi at the time of the Indo-Pakistan conflict. Lon Nol’s name has been added to the long list of those leaders who, worthy of an American commitment, further diminish its honour with their demise. Nixon, the former McCarthyite, is still apparently unable to make the basic distinction between “popular forces” and “left-wing guerillas,” between a communist and a social democrat, or between a leader of the “free world” and a military dictator. So Cambodian peasants are dying to shore up the validity of the twisted Nixonian view of Southeast Asian realities.

INDOCHINA WAR III

Baulked by the B-52s at the gates of Phnom Penh, the Cambodian guerillas will undoubtedly tighten their grip on the rest of the country, putting a tourniquet on the Mekong artery, securing the Ho Chi Minh trail and storming strategic towns such as Takeo. This would cause understandable alarm in South Vietnam and probably Thaiiland. If these two neighbours, traditionally regarded by patriotic Khmers as enemies, decide they must rescue Lon Nol, the peninsula may erupt again. The first Indochina war got rid of the French; the second got rid of US ground forces; the third may have already begun.

Neither Saigon nor Hanoi believes that the other will abide by the ceasefire, and Sihanouk is undoubtedly backed by Hanoi. But Samdech is once again providing more wily than his enemies and knows better than to welcome a high-visible, counter-productive foreign ally. The North Vietnamese and Vietcong technicians and pioneers (plus probably gunners) who are supporting the Khmer Rouge have been kept in the background (had their presence not been minimal, Phnom Penh would probably have fallen by now). So, riding in Russian jets, escorted by Hanoi’s troops and accompanied by Monique and a French chef, Sihanouk has returned to Cambodia to stake his claim to comeback one day as Head of State. What his fate will be after he has achieved reinstatement is anybody’s guess. Will he, like Lee Kuan Yew, out-maneuvre the left-wingers on whose backs he rode to power? Or will his own sad forebodings about his own fate and that of his country in a communist Indochina come true? The B-52s are merely postponing the answer.

[From the Baltimore Sun, Apr. 25, 1971] PROPPING UP LON NOL LIKE TRYING TO NAIL CUSTARD PIE TO WALL

WASHINGTON.—What must surely be devilish coincidence dictates that mass-bombing in Indochina was full blown on the great anniversaries of the Christian faith. For Christmas it was the bombing of North Vietnam. For Easter the bombs rained down on poor, shattered Cambodia.

Before the Nixon incursion with American ground and air power in 1970, Cambodia retained some vestiges of its charming, slightly comic-opera past.

The latest report by a study group of nine persons sent to Indochina by Sen-
ator Edward M. Kennedy's subcommittee on refuges shows half the population herded into refugee camps, on the brink of starvation, with a rising threat of epidemics among a people close to extinction.

Except for the terse announcement from Pacific headquarters in Honolulu saying the raids are continuing, the Defense Department keeps tight security on numbers. On the scene, however, it is estimated that 8,000 sorties have been flown by B-52's. This is comparable to all but the most intense bombing of the Indochina war.

All this is to prop up the government of President Lon Nol in Phnom Penh and to compel the Communists to cover to the peace table.

Propping up Marshal Lon Nol is like, in Al Smith's famous figure of speech, trying to nail a custard pie to the wall.

Although the administration is trying to keep the lid on, reporters working under great handicaps in the field are bringing out the painful truth. A hard-hitting dispatch from staff correspondent Arnold R. Isaacs of The Sun from Phnom Penh put it on the line:

"Despite the heavy United States bombing, President Lon Nol's ramshackle Army has lost substantial territory and population to the Communist-led Cambodian insurgents in the last two months.

"Government troops, cheated of their pay by corrupt officers and often defeated on the battlefield through the incompetence of their commanders, are growing more demoralized.

"Popular support for the government has melted away. There is no sign of peace negotiations or the 'de facto' cease-fire that the White House has predicted would follow the Vietnam peace agreement."

"Marshal Lon Nol's offer of negotiation has a decidedly phony sound. The unhappy president, dominated by his brother, Brig. Gen. Lon Non, whose corruption even by Asian standards is wonderful to behold, is trying to revamp his government by bringing in opposition leaders in response to a demand from President Nixon brought by Gen. Alexander M. Haig, Jr., when he went to Phnom Penh.

But so long as General Lon Non is next to the seat of power, the Khmer Rouge, the Cambodian insurgents, will not negotiate.

In their testimony before the Kennedy subcommittee, the specialists who had made a three-week study of Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam did not try to estimate the number of civilian casualties from the Cambodian bombing.

It would obviously be impossible, since there are no hospitals other than crude improvised shelters where the wounded and those badly burned with napalm are taken.

"One thing is certain," the study group reported. "Bombing is the most pervasive reason for refugee movement."

Another witness was the Rev. Robert Charlebois, who had returned more recently from Cambodia. With long experience in the country, he verified the testimony of the study group.

The collapse of Cambodia is only one aspect of the swift deterioration of the "peace with honor" arrived at by President Nixon and his principal negotiator, Henry A. Kissinger. Members of Congress, back in their home districts for the Easter recess, will be asked to explain what has gone wrong.

The suspicion is strong here that, if the reported North Vietnamese violations of the cease-fire violations of the cease-fire continue, the President will order bombing of the North resumed. This will, in short, be the air war as before.

So much was said about the success of Vietnamization that one can only wonder what has happened to the forces of the government of President Nguyen Van Thieu that were created with vast amounts of American help to insure his independence.

American help armed and sustained a force put at 1,100,000 on the ground. With planes and helicopters provided by Washington, the South Vietnamese Air Force was at one time rated fifth in the world—in numbers, at any rate.

The grim fear is that, for all the ruffles and flourishes of his American visit, Mr. Thieu is another custard pie.

As critics of the war have long said, the choice has been between simply getting out and leaving Vietnam to its own fate or starving for the indefinite future with a sustaining force.
A "FATAL INNOCENCE" IS WRECKING CAMBODIA

(By Anthony Lewis)

LONDON.—Cambodia was always regarded by well-traveled westerners as the loveliest of countries, her people gentle and beautiful, her art remarkable, her countryside untouched by war. That was three years ago.

Today Cambodia is a smoldering wreck of that vision. American bombs are falling on the country in nearly the volume that once fell on all of Indochina. In desperate efforts to escape the bombs, nearly half of the population of 7-million have become refugees.

What was Cambodia’s sin? How did she earn this fate? The answer is that she got in the way of a juggernaut, the United States. If Americans make an effort to see what happened, we may better understand the difference between the pretensions of our government’s foreign policy and the less lofty reality.

Before 1970, Prince Norodom Sihanouk kept Cambodia aloof among the antagonisms on her borders. He moved toward the west, then away; he tacitly allowed the North Vietnamese to use Cambodian territory, then said no to them. It was all very untidy and irritating, but it happened to spare the Cambodian people their neighbors’ horror.

Just what role the United States played in the coup that overthrew Sihanouk is not yet known, but at the least it welcomes the outcome; Cambodia was now on the anti-communist team. Soon afterward, on April 30, 1970, President Nixon announced that he was sending American forces into Cambodia to sweep out the Communists. It was a limited and necessary extension of the Vietnam war, he said, adding:

"I would rather be a one-term president and do what I believe is right than to be a two-term president at the cost of seeing America become a second-rate power and see this nation accept the first defeat in its proud 190-year history."

The result of the coup and the invasion was to turn Cambodia into a continuing battleground, What had been a minor rebellion turned into a full-scale civil war. Since 1970 the Cambodian rebel forces have grown from 3,000 to between 35,000 and 45,000. How many North Vietnamese remain is uncertain, but official American sources in Phnom Penh say that there has been no documented evidence of any serving in a combatant role in the last three months.

The rebels now control three-quarters of the country. The inept and isolated government of Lon Nol is preserved in Phnom Penh entirely by American aid, which is running to nearly $1-million a day—and by the bombing, which is described by those on the scene as indiscriminate, and exceptionally savage even by recent standards.

It is all as if we had learned nothing from Vietnam. Once again the United States has committed its power and prestige to a country of the most marginal strategic interest to us, and one with a weak and unpopular government. Once again an American president is leading his people down that road without deigning to tell them why.

Why is it all happening? There are evidently two basic reasons. The first is that Nixon and his advisers are concerned about the impact on Saigon if Cambodia falls entirely to communist or communist-learning forces. And so, to save our surrogates in a contest from which we supposedly have withdrawn, we must make war in another country.

The second reason may be more important: the face of Richard Nixon. When he invaded Cambodia in 1970, he insisted that the American involvement would be strictly limited. But the highly personalized language he used made clear how much he felt his own reputation at stake. How would it look if the Khmers Rouges won now?

We cannot even say, as the American major said of a Vietnamese village in the 1968 Tet offensive, that we are destroying Cambodia in order to save it. Cambodia hardly comes into the reckoning. When was the last time American policy-makers actually thought about what the people of Cambodia might like?

The new American foreign policy is often described as realistic. Not dogmatically anti-communist, restrained in its use of power. Henry A. Kissinger is very persuasive when he builds those verbal structures. And there obviously has been a change in this direction in terms of relationships: with the great powers, the Soviet Union and China.
But these American professions mean rather less in relation to the not-so-great. If they get in the way, they just may find themselves ground up by the most destructive power on earth. It is not the Soviet Union that is savaging Cambodia today, or China or North Vietnam; it is the United States.

The peace with honor that Nixon claimed in Indochina promised at least one thing to most Americans: an end to their destructive role. It is becoming clearer every day that Nixon and Kissinger had no real intention of getting out. They merely intend to enforce the Pax Americana by other means. That is, they hope to arrange it this time so that no Americans are killed, only Indochinese.

The Cambodians are the most poignant example for a reason well expressed by a British correspondent, Gavin Young of the Observer. They are, he said, "The least guilty of all parties in Indochina. They are guilty only of a fatal innocence."