Kissinger, it is said, because he felt the move was ill-timed since the Government was doing badly on the battlefield.

**NO CONTACT WITH FOE**

In making this year's peace offer, the Lon Nol Government acknowledged that it had had no advance contact with the other side. Government officials say there have been no contacts since, nor did they expect any.

Despite the unlikelihood that early peace talks will result, the Government proposal—which, like last year's, was stage-managed by the Americans—does have other purposes.

Both offers were timed to the debate in the United States Congress over how much aid to give this country and the beginning of the Government's annual campaign to save its seat in the United Nations. China, Algeria and many so-called nonaligned nations want to give the seat to the exile government of Prince Sihanouk. Their first attempt, at the General Assembly session last year, failed only narrowly, and they are going to try again.

Long-time diplomatic observers think the vote will be close, though it cannot get much closer than it was last year—63 to 50 in favor of the Government.

**PRODDING BY AMERICANS**

American diplomats here believe the new peace offer will make the United Nations fight easier for Phnom Penh. More important, they believe, will be the stability that the Lon Nol Government is able to show at the time of the vote, in September or October.

The Americans here have been prodding the Cambodians into military activities that, over the last few months, have resulted in some improvement in the situation. The Americans have also been urging positive economic activity as well, though it has been only marginally successful in combating rampant inflation and equally rampant war profiteering.

The Americans, moreover, have increasingly become the shadow administration of this Government—shaping its programs, ordering its decisions. They say they want to breathe efficiency into its ministries and pump corruption out of them. This has been particularly true since the advent four months ago of Mr. Dean, an activist Ambassador whose apparent goal is to push the Government into the best possible negotiating position.

United States aid is running at more than $600-million a year in known, reported categories. The consensus is that if this is cut by a half or even a third, the Government will fall—and quickly. The aid has always been crucial, but as the war has ground on for four and a half years, the Government's resources, never large, have virtually ceased to exist, and American money and weapons have become its only crutch.

[From the New York Times, Aug. 30, 1974]

**WARFARE IN CAMBODIA REELS IN CONFUSION—ON AND ON**

(By Sydney H. Schanberg)

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA.—As the war in Cambodia grinds malignantly on through its fifth year, eroding all the normal patterns of life, events here become more and more bizarre, more and more surrealistic.


Government antiaircraft crews protecting the presidential palace sometimes fire on their own planes (there are no enemy planes) because they get a bonus every time they shoot. Sometimes the planes fire back.

The President Marshal Lon Nol, seeking to woo the Khmer Rouge insurgents away from their North Vietnamese mentors, refers to them now in public speeches as "our compatriots on the other side who have fought us under duress."

A smoldering freighter struggles into Phnom Penh after being hit by insurgent shells on its way up the Mekong River. The initial public reaction is one of hope that the cargo can be saved, for surely it must be something vital, like fuel. With great difficulty, the fire in the hold is put out and the cargo is saved. It is whiskey.

Here are random jottings from a visitor's notebook, recording some of the normal abnormalities in Cambodian life.

It is not uncommon for a patient to present himself at an overcrowded military
hospital in Phnom Penh, carrying an observation and diagnosis slip signed by a Cambodian doctor working on the enemy side.

"They send us patients all the time," said a Government doctor, who asked not to be named.

Many patients are insurgent soldiers. Others are simply wounded and sick civilians living in insurgent territory.

"We know the doctors who send them," the Government physician said. "We studied with them before the war."

The Government doctor was trained in Paris and Boston as well as Phnom Penh. He spoke without malice—indeed, with some nostalgia—about his former colleagues who find themselves on the opposing side in this civil war, which is not really a civil war because it is kept alive and financed by greater powers.

He sympathizes with his colleagues' problems.

"They send us only the people they have tried to treat but have not been successful, because they don't have the proper facilities in the jungle and they are short of medicines and drugs."

Medical problems—next to astrology and soothsaying—often provide the meat for the gossip and folklore of this city. Primarily the problems of Marshal Lon Nol, who suffered a severe stroke early 1971, which left him partly paralyzed on his left side, but still able to walk daboriously with a leg brace and cane.

The state of his health is always a choice topic in the cafes and political backrooms.

Last year President Nixon invited the Marshal to come to the United States for special treatment. Marshal Lon Nol, according to persons close to him, wanted the treatment badly but saw the invitation as an attempt to remove him as an obstacle to negotiate with the other side. So he declined.

A Cambodian doctor who treats the President said, anonymously, that his health was quite good. But this doctor speaks with disdain of the local acupuncturist who still visits Marshal Lon Nol once a week.

"Acupuncture does not work on stroke cases," he said.

In pursuit of better health Marshal Lon Nol, who is 60 years old, also regularly consults soothsayers and Buddhist priests, who provide him with special spells, blessings and amulets.

When his wife gave birth six months ago to their fourth child, a girl named Santepia, the President was buoyed and elated.

He confided in a Western diplomat that he attributed it all to the Geritol he has been taking regularly since a friend gave him a supply last year.

The presidential palace has been bombed twice—in March and November, 1973—by Government pilots who then defected to the other side. As a result the antiaircraft batteries around the palace are under strict orders to shoot at anything with wings that comes anywhere near the compound.

Since the crews receive a bonus every time they fire their 37-mm guns, they fire them as often as possible—sometimes at commercial planes. This recently persuaded Air France to stop flying to Phnom Penh.

Sometimes the gunners fire at Government warplanes that stray into the area. Until recently, although the gunners had hit a few planes, they had not brought any down. But on Aug. 1 they shot up an unarmed observation plane.

PILOT SLIGHTLY HURT

The stunned pilot crash landed a few miles away in the mud of a paddy field. The plane was a total loss, but the pilot somehow walked away from the wreckage with only a wounded arm.

Perhaps the most bizarre incident occurred some months ago, when a helicopter gunship mistakenly flew near the palace and the batteries opened up. Then the infantry guards at the palace fired their automatic rifles. Then the soldiers who guard the Polish Embassy across the street ran to the roof of that mission and opened up too.

The helicopter pilot decided he had had enough, so he let go at all of them with a few bursts from his machine guns, which tore up some lawn in the area. Then he veered off sharply to get himself out of range and returned to his base.

Despite the heavy expenditure of ammunition, nothing was hit.

The official line in both Phnom Penh and Washington is that this as a war to be fought and resolved between Cambodians without outside dictation. But Cambodians pay no attention to this. They have always known that other countries will determine the war's outcome and their fate.
Which is why they have welcomed the new American Ambassador, John Gunther Dean, with a surge of plain—that other countries will from Vientiane, where he helped forge the coalition peace agreement for Laos—will perform the same miracle here.

From his activities and what he has told close associates, it is clear he will do anything to bring the Cambodian antagonists to the negotiating table. In only five months here the 48-year-old diplomat has exhausted himself trying to put some semblance of spine and effectiveness into the Lon Nol Government—on the theory that a strong military and political posture might bring the other side to talks.

He has bounded around the country, speaking bluntly to local officials and military commanders, issuing what are tantamount to orders to shape up.

This has obviously not delighted some generals and political leaders, but it has pleased most other Cambodians—not just the educated middle class, but the poorer working class as well.

Some of them now refer to Mr. Dean as “King of the Khmers,” using the ancient name for the Cambodians.

A lot of airline entrepreneurs-of-sorts have poured into Cambodia in recent months, bringing with them DC-3’s from World War II and other aging craft. They have come to take advantage of the fast-money opportunities created by the fact that the main roads from the food-producing areas are cut and vital supplies can be brought to Phnom Penh only by air.

Some of the American pilots soon became disillusioned by the corruption, and callousness here.

“I’m disgusted,” said Roland Milam, a 28-year-old corporation pilot who took a job in Cambodia because he thought he could save more money here and do some good as well.

“I’m going home next month,” he went on, “I thought this was a struggling country, trying to pull itself together. I thought it was a war where the bad side was trying to take over the good side. But then I got here and I see you can’t tell who’s the good side and who’s the bad side.”

“When a Government soldier offers to sell you his gun on the street for $5,” Mr. Milam said, “you know something’s wrong. I see Government Air Force planes land at these provincial airfields and refuse to take the wounded back to Phnom Penh, where the only hospitals are.

They take sacks of sugar, instead. They can’t make any money on a wounded soldier. “Seeing that sort of thing really gets to you after awhile. I think we should just pull out and let them settle it the way they always have, settle it by themselves without any interference.”

[From the Baltimore Sun, Mar. 2, 1974]

WAR’S RISING SAVAGERY POURS SALT IN CAMBODIA’S WOUNDS

(By Arnold R. Isaacs)

KOMPONG, SPEU, CAMBODIA—Along Cambodia’s Highway 4, burned, broken tree-stumps stand among the shattered wreckage of what were once pleasant farming villages. For miles, not a house remains standing. In some places, grass has begun to grow again, but much of the earth is still blackened and dead.

Some of the destruction was caused by ground fighting. Some was deliberately caused by the Cambodian Communists, who have begun burning villages on a large scale. Most of it was probably the result of the massive American bombing campaign that began after the Vietnam cease-fire agreement in January, 1973, and ended by congressional action last August 15.

Whatever its cause, the devastation along Highway 4 reflects the increasing cruelty of the Cambodian war. The total extent of war damage is hard to measure, but a visitor leaves with the unmistakable impression that, in relation to its size and population, Cambodia has suffered worse agonies than Vietnam.

VIOLENCE OUT OF CONTROL

The savagery of the war has grown so intense that some observers feel Cambodia’s soul has been mutilated as much as its land, and that violence is so out of control that even a negotiated peace will not end the killing.

The most incomprehensible aspect of the situation is the brutality of the Khmer Communists. Ironically, in the first several years of the war, when North
Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops made up most of the fighting strength of the insurgent side, there were few verified reports of wanton cruelty to civilians, despite the deep racial hatred between Khmers and Vietnamese and the killings of Vietnamese civilians who lived in Cambodian government territory when the war broke out.

At the time, refugees' descriptions indicated the Vietnamese Communists were somewhat more benevolent in Vietnam. There was less drafting of civilians for forced labor, less strict control on movement between rebel and government zones, and fewer executions.

**ARTICLE OF FAITH**

At that time, also, it was practically an article of faith among most Cambodians that "Khmers don't want to fight Khmers," and that if the Vietnamese and the big powers lost interest in Cambodia, the war could easily be resolved.

It did not work out that way. As Khmers gradually replaced Vietnamese troops on the rebel side, brutality increased. More and more often it seemed militarily, economically and politically senseless, unlike Viet Cong violence in Vietnam, which while harsh, nearly always was selective and served some political purpose, as in the case of the execution of unpopular government officials.

The cruelty of the Khmer insurgents often seems to have been sheer brutality for brutality's sake. The destruction of a refugee settlement on the fringe of Kompong Speu, 30 miles west of Phnom Penh and the last major town on Highway 4 still reachable overland from the capital, is a case in point.

"WE HAVE NO IDEA"

"They came in December, over there," said the refugee leader, motioning away across the powdery-dry fields stretching out from the camp. "We ran away. There were no government soldiers here, no fighting. They just burned down everything. We lost all we had. We have no idea why they did it."

This group of refugees had been driven out of their home village, 5 miles to the south, last spring. Their homes were destroyed, either by insurgent attacks or American bombing. They had squatted around Kompong Speu with some 25,000 other refugees from the fighting along Highway 4, which is the most strategic route in the country since it leads to Kompong Som, Cambodia's only seaport.

Like most of the more than 2 million Cambodians uprooted by the war, they had received virtually no help. Last month, they finally received some housing materials from Catholic relief services.

The cruelty is by no means one-sided. It exists on the government side as well as among the insurgents. During the American air war, for example, many journalists and diplomats had the feeling that the Cambodian commanders calling in air strikes were extraordinarily unworried about civilian casualties. It was the American Embassy, rather than the Cambodian government, that set rules of engagement designed to protect civilian lives.

Foreigners who have watched Cambodian Army officers interrogate prisoners say that sickening tortures are sometimes used. Ordinary soldiers sometimes cut off the heads of dead enemies. Beatings are common in Cambodian jails and last month four students who were arrested in Phnom Penh were found the next day hanged in their cells, reportedly with signs of torture on their bodies—a case the government first called suicide but now admits it is "investigating."

[From the Washington Post, November 24, 1974]

**CAMBODIA: COMMUNISM ALTERS LIFESTYLE**

(By James Fenton)

AN THANH, REFUGEE CAMP, SOUTH VIETNAM.—Recent refugees from areas controlled by the Khmer Rouge report that Cambodia is undergoing a rapid forced transformation affecting every detail of life, from marriage laws to the Cambodian language itself.

There are nearly 40,000 Cambodian refugees at present in South Vietnam—the equivalent of the population of a major provincial capital. Many of them have fled from areas where the Cambodian Communists have been strong since the beginning of the war, the northern provinces of Kratie and Stung Treng.

Peon Sam Ath, a teacher, said: "At the beginning of the war all the peasants hated Lon Nol. They detested him as a Fascist." However, he said that the
peasants also disliked the measures taken by the Communists to control the people. These included, he said, enforced collectivization of property, attacks on religion and harsh punishments.

All those interviewed agreed that the name of Prince Sihanouk, the formal head of the insurgent government in Peking, was now no longer mentioned by the Khmer Rouge.

They said that this had led to a division among the insurgent forces in the Kompong Cham area, where a group called the Khmer Sor or White Khmers had broken away from the Khmer Rouge and taken to the forests. The White Khmers, whose leaders are former Communist officials, are mostly Cham Moslems. They support Sihanouk and oppose collectivization of property. They believe simply in the abolition of middlemen.

If it is true that the Cham Moslems support Sihanouk, this puts into question much of the diplomatic activity of Cambodian Prime Minister Long Boret on the eve of a key U.N. vote. Phnom Penh has recently made a bid to obtain Arab support for retaining its U.N. seat on the ground that the Lon Nol government is defending the interests of Islam in Cambodia.

The refugees, however, insisted that the Cham Moslems in the liberated zones were working for the overthrow of Lon Nol.

A Cambodian newcomer to Khmer Rouge territory would have a new, unfamiliar vocabulary to learn. According to a student who had been captured last year during the siege of Kompong Cham, the Communists have introduced many new words and usages to express their philosophy.

Apart from obvious expressions, such as comrade and citizen, which have replaced the polite forms of address used in Phnom Penh, there are fresh coinages to cover the stock Khmer Rouge concepts of hard work, giving orders, reprimanding, punishment and secrecy. The new word for reprimanding, for instance, means literally "Reconstruction."

Neang Bun Hoa, a student, said that a man who violated Khmer Rouge laws by having an illicit love affair would find himself treated to a very severe "reconstruction." This would be followed by at least three months of punitive labor.

Other refugees claimed that such infringements were often punished by death.

One refugee from Svay Rieng Province said that thousands of villagers had been killed for not toeing the Khmer Rouge line.

Several refugees claimed to have seen two Communist leaders, Hu Nim and Hou Youn, but none had set eyes on Khieu Samphan, the Khmer Rouge prime minister.

Nor did they have any idea where the Khmer Rouge government was situated or how it was run. Such matters, they said, were not allowed to be discussed. But they expressed respect for the abilities of the three leaders.

The refugees’ main dislike was reserved for the Communist administrators, for the marginal privileges they enjoyed—such as cigarette money and use of motorized vehicles—and for their cruelty in executing official policy.

They said that if a peasant owned a large house, the Khmer Rouge would insist that it be pulled down and a smaller one built in its place. One refugee claimed that the large houses in Kratie Province which had not been destroyed by U.S. bombing had been demolished by the Communists themselves in the interests of equality.

All the refugees interviewed expressed a strong desire to go to Phnom Penh. However, the Cambodian Embassy in Saigon (CMA) can repatriate only 60 a week. Nearly all of those being sent home at the moment are Khmers of Chinese or part Chinese origin.

Those who are living in the camps are experiencing a poverty similar to that they suffered among the Khmer Rouge. With one difference—and that is that they have no work to do.

[From the Washington Post, June 9, 1974]

REFUGEE AID SKYROCKETS IN CAMBODIA

(By Elizabeth Becker)

PHNOM PENH.—The Cambodian government and the U.S. Embassy are engaged in a costly program of aid to win the support of civilian populations in insurgent areas.

The rebel authorities alienated many civilians in their areas last fall when they imposed an austerity program for distribution of food and other supplies in preparation for their dry-season offensive.
At the time, large numbers of civilians crossed over to government areas, complaining about a shortage of food and clothing.

The U.S. Embassy moved quickly to capitalize on the situation by increasing the size of its Agency for International Development mission here. The mission now is the second largest AID unit in the world.

Last year the United States spent $1.5 million of a total economic aid package of $93 million on refugee projects in Cambodia. This year, economic aid has jumped to $272 million, of which $20.5 million is to help refugees. Among items sent Cambodia were 225,000 tons of rice—for a country of less than 5 million people.

"If the U.S. spent as much in India, that country's famine problem would be over," said a high-ranking foreign diplomat.

In the provinces the abundance of aid, the comfortable resettlement villages, the distribution of food and technical assistance such as free fishing equipment provided by foreign relief organizations apparently have won over the refugees.

The showpieces of the vast aid expansion are various projects undertaken by the foreign voluntary agencies. President Loan Nol and Premier Long Baret have reaped political advantages by touring provincial refugee settlements where they welcome inhabitants in the name of the government.

The United States has donated $20 million of its aid funds to agencies such as CARE, Catholic Relief Services, World Vision and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

"We provide grants to voluntary agencies and they administer their own programs subject to our approval," said Thomas Olmstead, the embassy's AID director.

According to informed sources, there were two reasons behind the U.S. decision to channel so much relief money through international agencies.

First, there was the experience in South Vietnam where many relief programs were riddled by corruption and inefficiency. The U.S. mission in Phnom Penh wanted independent professional groups to handle Cambodia’s refugees.

Secondly, the embassy is limited by law to 200 persons. It could not afford to fill 20 of those slots with relief workers.

The voluntary agencies are cautious about discussing their role in Cambodia. The Red Cross claims it does not report directly to the embassy but only to its headquarters in Geneva. It says the United States provides only 7 per cent of its budget.

The other organizations are all U.S.-based and receive most of the embassy grants. Aside from foreign staff salaries and special projects such as medical teams, their budgets are wholly financed by U.S. aid.

"We are often accused of being an arm of American policy here," one American director said. "I guess it is no secret that most of our budgets come entirely from American government sources. Almost all private donations are going to other countries with greater emergency problems."

Most observers think the agencies are doing admirable work. They are feeding hundreds of thousands and housing even more. A visitor to any provincial camp or soup kitchen is likely to hear spontaneous expressions of gratitude from refugees.

The visitor also is likely to hear speeches from politicians of various stature who want to be associated with the aid program. One American relief official became so disgusted with the practice that he prohibited appearances by politicians.

While discussing relief projects in the northern city of Kompong Thom, U.S. Ambassador John Gunther Dean reportedly told a foreign diplomat, "This is what the war is all about—refugees—and we are winning."

He also reportedly said that the increase in refugees represented "a vote by the feet for this side."

The agencies' work has had only marginal impact on Phnom Penh which is becoming largely a city of refugees.

Because of inflation, the real personal income for the working class in the capital dropped 50 per cent in the past year. Workers have been hit much harder than the wealthier classes since the basic items on which they spend so much of their income have drawn the sharpest price increases.

Last year, a timely—and massive—shipment of rice from the United States lowered the cost of the grain. But the black-market price is rising again and fast approaching the price last fall when the city had only half the amount now in stock.
Hoarding, the poor distribution are the only explanation for the increase, a foreign economic specialist said.

"The U.S. Embassy can control the expenditure of its aid by private relief organizations but not by the Cambodian government," a foreign diplomat said. "Corruption continues unabated."

"The working class is hurt the most," a foreign economist said. "It is the poor 90 per cent of the population that has made the sacrifices for the war."

[From the New York Times, Mar. 9, 1974]

LIFE POOR, BUT CAMBODIAN REFUGEES ARE GLAD TO BE FREE OF REBELS

(BY SYDNEY H. SCHANBERG)

KOMPONG THOM, CAMBODIA—Two strange sites greet the visitor to this cut-off province capital 75 miles north of Phnom Penh.

THE TALK OF KOMPONG THOM

First, as the plane approaches for a landing, one sees long, green strips stretching out like signals on the brown earth. Then, on the ground, there are throngs wearing black pajama-like garb and Ho Chi Minh sandals cut from rubber tires, as if one had suddenly come upon a village on the Communist side.

The green strips are sheets of plastic provided by foreign agencies that are being used by new refugees to roof makeshift communal tents. And the people in black are the new refugees—about 20,000 of them—who dress that way because, until recently, they lived in areas under insurgent control in the region around Kompong Thom.

What changed their status was the decision of the Communist-lead insurgents to withdraw most of their troops from here for the current offensive against Phnom Penh, the capital, and the decision by the military commander here to take advantage of the drastically thinned enemy ranks to regain control of some of the population.

This pattern has been repeated recently around other province capitals—Siem Reap to the northwest and Takeo to the south—but the result in Kompong Thom have been the most favorable—the largest group of civilians to be returned to Government control in a war nearly four years old.

By all accounts the people came over to the Government side willingly, some even eagerly, as soon as they realized the enemy soldiers were on the run and could not block them.

Witnesses described it as a dramatic spectacle—first the Cambodian insurgents trying to herd the people away as they withdrew, then the arrival of the advance Government elements, then skirmishing and confusion as the outnumbered enemy went into hasty retreat and the refugees began to break away helter-skelter, and, finally, the refugees reorganizing and moving en masse across the plain toward Government territory in a great sea of people, cattle and oxcarts.

"It was like Moses leading his people out of Egypt," said a Western missionary here.

The refugees had been under enemy control since the beginning of the war, and judging from interviews with many of them, they are happy to be out of it—even though they know about the failings on the Government side, including widespread corruption and frequent indifference or ineptitude in dealing with the problems of war victims and refugees.

Describing their lives in enemy territory, some say they saw people shot; others say they only saw people taken away, not to return. Some say their movements were narrowly restricted, while others say the rules were more flexible. Apparently it depended on the village and the degree of rigidity of the particular insurgent unit.

Long Iem, a 23-year-old farmer who caught and sold fish when he was not growing rice, is typical of the refugees. At the start of the war in 1970, he related, Vietnamese Communist troops entered his village with an interpreter. They asked whether the people supported Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the exiled nominal leader of the insurgents, who had been deposed only weeks before, or were supporters of Marshal Lon Nol, President of the Cambodian Government in Phnom Penh, who had deposed him.

"We were afraid," Mr. Long Iem explained. "so we all said Sihanouk. Then we went looking for pictures of Sihanouk in old books and magazines to put up on our walls.
After four or five months, he said, the Vietnamese brought in Cambodian troops and Communist party officials to organize the village. By the end of 1972 the Cambodian rebels were in complete charge and the Vietnamese were gone.

Mr. Long Iem, like many other refugees, said the Vietnamese were more decent to them than the Cambodian insurgents, known as Khmer Rouge.

From their stories it would appear that the Vietnamese made an effort to maintain the forms of popular decision-making—by seeming to seek a consensus or by holding a trial—while the insurgents simply did as they wished.

"The Khmer Rouge were more brutal," Mr. Long Iem said. "We are not angry at the Vietnamese, only at the Khmers."

What bothered him most about living on the other side, he said—other refugees agreed—was the rigid communal form of life, the mandatory sharing of property and money, the ban on private business, the forced labor on community projects, the persecution of Buddhist monks, the puritanical attitude toward relations between the sexes.

According to Mr. Long Iem, the insurgents said: "Our system is clean and right. We must destroy everything of the old system." He added that "if someone refused to follow one of their rules, they killed him."

Referring to the insurgents, Mr. Long Iem went on: "They said those who have some wealth must take care of the poor. I am poor, but I speak truly to you, I do not like that system. Those who have money have worked hard too. They have earned their money, so why should it be taken away."

"They gave us more work but less to eat," he said. "How can you find the strength to work in the day if you get only rice soup for the evening meal?"

Mr. Long Iem did not make it out of enemy territory with all his family—only his aging mother, his teen-age brother and his 2-year-old daughter. His wife and their other child, a month-old daughter, were in a more distant place when the Government troops came and could not get away.

It would be natural to expect that the Government, having gained 20,000 people who willingly came over to its side, would do everything in its power to see that they were properly taken care of. This has not been the case.

Aside from crowing about the achievement on the national radio and in other propaganda organs, the Government has done almost nothing to provide food, shelter and other necessities. While it is true that Kompong Thom is reachable only by air and that Government resources are limited, transport planes at the Phnom Penh airport either lie idle or are used to carry high officials and their families on junkets.

Virtually the only aid getting into Kompong Thom is being brought by international relief agencies—primarily Catholic Relief Services—on Air America planes chartered by the United States Embassy in Phnom Penh.

So negligent has the Government been that military units here finally had to burn large caches of badly needed rice to keep it from falling back into the enemy's hands. Despite urgent radio requests the Government delayed sending the trucks needed to carry the rice the 35 miles to Kompong Thom; those it did send lacked fuel.

"The Government gives us nothing," said Brig. Gen. Teap Ben, the province-Governor and military commander here. "They keep saying 'yes, yes' to all my requests, but everything says on paper in some office in Phnom Penh."

Most of the refugees are living in gypsy-like camps in open fields on the edges of Kompong Thom—installed there by officials to avoid overcrowding and health problems in the small town, whose population has been doubled by the newcomers.

Before the war this was a gentle, snoozy provincial center of yellow stucco buildings with red tile roofs, rich with vegetables from the land around it and fish from the meandering Sen River.

Almost from the start of the fighting, Kompong Thom was surrounded by enemy forces, and most of its buildings have been destroyed or damaged in one siege or another.

Beyond the town the plains are sequined with water-filled craters from the bombs that American B-52's dropped to hold the invaders off.

Though the defense perimeter has been temporarily enlarged and the enemy cannot send his shells into the town, this is not expected to be a permanent condition. "They will be back," General Teap Ben predicted. "They will seek revenge here."

On the river bank in a shaded corner sits a relic of the town's leisurely past—a zoo of about a dozen cages that used to hold monkeys, snakes, deer, birds.
boar and crocodiles. The cages are empty now, except for one that a poultry merchant uses as a pen for ducks and chickens. The zoo animals were all eaten by hungry Government soldiers a long time ago, when sieges made it impossible to forage.

While no one in Kompong Thom has to eat crocodile these days, the inpouring of refugees has made food, especially rice, scarce, and the problem could become serious.

"I do not want any more," the general said bluntly, because there is nothing to feed them with. I do not want people coming in here to die in front of my eyes."

[From the New York Times, June 24, 1974]

PROFITEERS IN CAMBODIA FIND FOOD IS NOW GOLD

(By David K. Shipler)

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA.—With her major cities besieged by Communist-led insurgents, Cambodia has become a paradise for a new kind of profiteering—not in gold or opium, but in food.

It takes half an hour for a load of fresh fish to triple in value as it is flown the 50 miles from the city of Kompong Chhnang to the beleaguered capital of Phnom Penh. Over that distance, beef prices nearly double, and sugar rises 50 percent.

Merchants who are brand new to the food business are reported making profits of $10,000 a day simply by flying the scarce staples from the country's agricultural areas, over insurgent-held territory and into Phnom Penh, where many families spend their entire incomes just to feed themselves.

In an economy stagnated by war, this is one of the only booming segments. Sixteen private airlines are operating their 30-year-old DC-3's jamming Phnom Penh's Pochentong Airport, turning the tarmac into a busy truck terminal and marketplace.

American and Taiwanese pilots have flocked to Cambodia. A man selling planes arrived last week. Two huge new aircraft engines stood on a flatbed trailer outside an airline office in the center of town.

The frenzied commerce has run like a fever through Phnom Penh, as if the city were an old western mining town whose plentiful gold might run out at any moment.

The prospect of fast money is so intoxicating, and the poverty of most working Cambodians so acute, that suffering and greed have been blended into a corrosive mixture that produces ingenious systems of cheating and corruption.

Pilots and airline officials report that merchants try to overload planes by tampering with scales or by paying off pilots to carry an extra few hundred pounds.

SUGAR HIDDEN ON PLANES

Laborers, soldiers and officials who work at outlying airports try to cash in on the trade by hiding 22-pound bags of sugar on planes to be picked up by their collaborators later at the airport in Phnom Penh, pilots say.

"A couple of weeks they hid 200 kilos [440 pounds] of sugar in the tail section of a DC-3," one aircraft owner declared. "The pilot couldn't move the controls, so they opened up the tail section and found the sugar."

In another instance, he said, workers and military men took advantage of a moment when a plane, ready to take off for Phnom Penh, had lowered its flaps, revealing long hollow spaces in the wings.

"They were stuffing 10-kilo bags of sugar into the holes in the wings," the owner exclaimed. "Fortunately, one of our ground people saw it and warned the pilot."

Otherwise he said, after the plane was airborne the pilot would have raised the flaps and jammed them.

One recent morning, on the dirt airstrip that serves Kompong Chhnang, a Cambodian Air Force pilot took off in an American-made T-28 propeller-driven plane. No bombs were slung beneath the wings, however, and no co-pilot was in the back seat. Instead, the seat was piled high with bags of sugar.

The sugar comes from Thailand, shipped by road to Battambang or Kompong Chhnang, where women crowd along the airstrip selling 22-pound bags for 2,500 riels, about $6 at the official exchange rate.

Beyond Kompong Chhnang the road is controlled by insurgents, and so, in Phnom Penh, other women clamor to buy the bags for $9 each from the crewmen, soldiers and military policemen who take them off the planes.
BIG PROFIT TO BE MADE

By selling just three bags a day, a laborer at the airport can make six times his daily wage of about $1.50 and a plane's crewman can double his day's pay by simply carrying one bag on a 30-minute flight from Kompong Chhnang to Phnom Penh.

But the big money is in tons, not pounds. The food merchants are almost all ethnic Chinese, and their use of the shortages to drive up prices has stirred the latent anti-Chinese bigotry that pervades Indochina.

The merchants buy fresh fish for about 34 cents a pound in Kompong Chhnang and sell it for about $1 in Phnom Penh.

The cost of airlifting it to the capital runs only 10 cents a pound so that even with that expense, the bribery and the low wages, paid to loaders and truck drivers, businessmen estimate that merchants make at least 55 cents profit a pound.

A DC-3 carries 7,000 pounds and generally flies two to three trips a day. That adds up to a daily profit of $7,700 to $11,550.

The airlift has been made possible by the United States, which buys all the aviation fuel with dollars, sells it to private distributors for riels and turns the riels over to the Government.

One official said that Washington had agreed to increase fuel shipments on the condition that they would not be sold on the black market and that the airline would fly only within Cambodia transporting only food.

"We do not want them flying drugs in from Laos," one American remarked.

A PLANELOAD OF HENNESSY

There is no evidence that they fly drugs, but pilots say they sometimes fly smuggled luxury goods. "I've come out of Kompong Som with a complete plane-load of Hennessy," one pilot declared.

The fuel comes up the Mekong River by convoy, along with American rice, which is then flown from Phnom Penh to other encircled cities.

These flights are often forced on private airlines by the Government, which never pays, airline executives complain. Pilots say they are also required to use private planes to ferry troops and ammunition around the country, free of charge.

"We pay the [control] tower a few thousand riels so we don't have to fly these every day," one pilot asserted, and they say, 'O.K.—tomorrow'."

One airline executive pulled out a notebook listing 12 different agencies and officials who had to be bribed in a provincial airport, including the military chief who allegedly receives 5,000 riels, or about $12.50 each time a plane lands.

In Phnom Penh, a pilot said, "We pay the security police 100,000 riels a month for not stealing fuel."

1,500 GALLONS STOLEN

"They hit me one night for over 1,500 gallons," one aircraft owner complained.

"I figure it would have taken three trucks, ten people, five siphons and at least eight hours worth of work to siphon off that much fuel. The plane was sitting right on the apron in front of the control tower, but nobody knew anything."

Pilots have also found security policemen trying to sell them spare parts that were stolen the night before.

"They steal your fuel, they steal your oil, they steal your hydraulic fluid—anything they can sell," one pilot said.

"You pay the guy who pumps gasoline into your plane, you pay the tower operators, the customs police—even truck drivers get paid off. You know why? Because otherwise when he backs his truck up to your plane he'll bump it."

If the corruption were only better organized the pilot mused. The trouble is that every man is out for himself. "You could live with it if it were controlled," he explained. "If you knew that 10 per cent of what you made went to corruption, then you could plan."

But Cambodia cannot plan these days. It is a country scrambling to live from day to day amid a war and its profiteers. "Khmers used to be soft, very soft," a young Cambodian observed sadly. "But not now."
IN CAMBODIA CORPORATION IS AS COMMONPLACE AS WAR

(By Sydney H. Schanberg)

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA, August 7—A high school teacher was explaining to a foreign friend how he manages to survive on a salary of about $15 a month.

"We have a couple of rich relatives in the family who help the rest of us," he said. "They are Army officers."

But military salaries are also extremely low, so he was asked how his army relatives made their money. "Oh," he said, "they steal from the Government."

He spoke these words naturally, as if discussing the weather or giving someone his address.

Corruption has become natural in Cambodia—as commonplace as the war.

The four and a half years of fighting, in addition to killing and wounding hundreds of Cambodians every day, has destroyed the country's economy and replaced it with an artificial system that breeds an annual rate of inflation close to 300 per cent and a network of greed and venality that touches virtually everyone, right down to the children on the street selling bottles of stolen military gasoline at black-market prices.

It is a system supported, like almost everything else here, by United States aid, which totaled less than $9 million in the first year of the war, in 1970, but has now soared to more than $600 million a year in reported assistance—and consequently more if hidden costs like military reconnaissance flights from Thailand are counted.

At the war's beginning, attention focused on spectacular corruption, such as the 100,000 "phantom" soldiers whose salaries were being pocketed by unscrupulous unit commanders. Or corruption at the top, such as the rumored Swiss bank accounts of the high and powerful in the Government of Marshal Lon Nol.

But now, though spectacular corruption has not gone away—a river convoy of salt crucially needed by the isolated city of Kompong Cham northeast of Phnom Penh mysteriously, "disappeared" a couple of months ago—corruption has also become unspectacular, pervasive, ordinary.

CIRCLE OF EXPLOITATION

Everyone is involved—the poor out of need, because of their hunger; and others out of greed, because of the temptation to become rich by profiteering.

Little people are now preying on other little people—a sure sign that the norms of war have at least for now replaced Cambodia's Buddhist traditions, which teach Khmers to help one another.

A typical cycle of exploitation goes something like this: a military policeman gives his superior officer a bribe to obtain what has become known in local slang as a "grease post"—such as patrolling one of the big markets. Once in the market, the military policeman demands payoffs from the small shopkeepers there. The shopkeepers in turn raise prices. The little man, to pay those inflated prices for such necessities as rice, fish paste or salt, must also find a way to increase his income, usually illegally.

One way is to become involved in the sale of stolen gas. Army drivers siphon off some gasoline every day from their vehicles and then sell it to others who resell it openly, presumably after paying bribes to the police to gain their cooperation.

While long lines of cars do queue up at the filling stations to buy their rationed 1.3 gallons a week at the Government-fixed price a much larger amount of gas is sold on the street at three and a half times that price.

The Americans bring in all of Cambodia's fuel with aid dollars, and theoretically they have tightened controls on its use. But the controls are mostly on paper.

The American Embassy, through a recent audit, did find $310,000 of military aviation fuel missing and forced the Cambodian Government to repay Washington for it, but Embassy officials are realistic and know the corruption is too widespread for them to halt more than a fraction of the abuses.

AUSTERITY IGNORED

The Americans have also tried to tighten controls and impose programs to check inflation, to stop the import of luxury goods, to block the sale of arms
and drugs and other supplies to the enemy and in general to try to push the Lon Nol Government toward a measure of efficiency and austerity. The results, however, are superficial and sometimes nonexistent.

Luxury goods keep coming in: cars from France and Germany, motorbikes and transistor radios and television sets from Japan, wines and cheeses from Europe and an undiminished supply of canned food from China, a country which also supplies most of the arms for the enemy troops.

Gold and dollars are smuggled out of the country by generals and other high officials. Pilots refuse to carry critically wounded soldiers back to Phnom Penh from provincial capitals in their empty planes. They take back sugar and other scarce staples instead because they can make a handsome profit on the food. Sales of weapons and ammunition to the enemy also continue to be reported.

Anyone can buy an American M-16 rifle through black market contacts for $7 or $8.

Last month the Government declared a ban on all official banquets and receptions except on national holidays. A few days later—no holiday in sight—Marshall Lon Nol gave a reception for a visiting American Air Force general.

On all Cambodian roads, soldiers and military policemen at checkpoints extort bribes from people carrying goods to market, a practice so common it has almost become a new national custom.

River traffic is similarly controlled. Authoritative sources say that traffic on the Tonle Sap which flows to Phnom Penh from the northwest, is run by Vincent Fernandez, a former police colonel and an older brother of Lieut. Gen. Sosthene Fernandez. These sources say Mr. Fernandez compels payments from boat owners for the use of the river. According to the sources he also tried to force the American Embassy—which recently chartered 16 barges and tugs to carry food to Phnom Penh from a provincial city—to do business with him. But angry Embassy officials refused.

Evidence of corruption comes from the ordinary foxhole soldier. One such soldier in a patched uniform with rubber sandals instead of boots hitchs a ride back to Phnom Penh from his post 20 miles to the northwest. Sok Kong, 25 years old, is going to the capital to buy a mosquito net, a crucial piece of equipment in the malaria-infested countryside. But one that the Government does not issue to him.

"The Americans have a good heart," he says without being asked. "They give all the equipment we need. But we don't get it. The big people take it all."

[From the New York Times, Jan. 17, 1975]

U.S. HAS LAST-DITCH PLAN FOR CAMBODIA

(By Sydney H. Schanberg)

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA, Jan. 16—The American Embassy here said today that there was an emergency contingency plan to use the United States Air Force to run a large supply airlift into Cambodia to keep the Phnom Penh Government from falling to the insurgents.

However, the embassy, responding to questions, said this would be done only "as a last resort" and that it was "not even being considered at this point"—because the military situation did not yet warrant it.

With the insurgent offensive now two weeks old, the Government's supply situation is not getting any better. For the Communist-led rebels have effectively cut the Mekong River, on which Phnom Penh normally depends for 80 percent of its supplies.

RIVER CONVOYS HALTED

Not a single river convoy—bringing American-provided food, gasoline, ammunition and other essentials from Thailand and South Vietnam—has been attempted since the insurgents opened their annual dry-season offensive on New Year's Day.

Phnom Penh is beginning to run short of basics. Gasoline rationing, for example, began on Monday.

While the situation is not desperate yet, the Lon Nol Government must do something soon to ease enemy pressure on the Mekong. If not, the Americans will have to consider a full airlift from neighboring Thailand.

In a sense, the American Air Force is already flying supplies from its Thai bases into Cambodia—though these fall far short of the country's needs.
SHIFT TO BIRD AIR

Last October, the United States Embassy acted in response to the growing political hostility at home to the continued American involvement here. It turned over air-supply duties, which the Air Force had been handling from the beginning of this nearly five-year-old war, to a so-called civilian contractor in Thailand named Bird Air.

But the move was largely cosmetic, for under the contract Bird Air was simply given several Air Force transport planes—with the insignia painted out. The pilots, who are described as civilians, are mostly "returned" Air Force officers.

Because this operation resembles other earlier extralegal programs run by the United States Government in Indochina, there has been speculation that this one too is extralegal, and could be connected with the Central Intelligence Agency, which has financed airlines in the region.

The embassy, which has no comment on this speculation, says that Bird Air has eight planes, mostly C-130's and that it can operate, under its contract, a maximum of 10 flights a day. The embassy indicates that Bird Air is running at the maximum and bringing in at most 200 tons of supplies daily, which is only one-tenth of Phnom Penh's needs.

Ammunition alone is being expended at a rate of 600 tons a day. Then, too, 600 tons of rice a day are needed for Phnom Penh and its environs, not to mention fuel, medicines, spare parts and other supplies.

Before the offensive, Bird Air averaged two flights a day. Although it now flies in 10 loads a day, the bulk is ammunition.

Some of the supplies must be airdropped to garrisons that are cut off. The vital town of Neak Luong, which sits on the Mekong 38 miles southeast of Phnom Penh and is now under siege, is getting most of its supplies this way. And what it is getting is only enough for its soldiers. There is almost no rice left for the more than 30,000 refugees huddled there.

In 1973, when the Mekong was under heavy enemy fire, the American Air Force had to run an airlift from Thailand of 40 to 50 transports a day. And that was when river convoys were only reduced, but not halted.

A United States Embassy spokesman said today that the present plan was to use Bird Air "to the maximum" until Government troops opened large enough segments of the Mekong and the road that parallels it, Route 1, to allow at least some convoys to get through.

The spokesman said that "only in extremis" would the embassy turn to the "surge capability" of the Air Force—that is, the airlift.

The embassy gives the impression that the White House is determined to keep the Lon Nol Government from falling and will take all steps necessary to accomplish this—even if it necessitates exceeding the aid limits set by Congress.

For the fiscal year that will end June 30, Congress has imposed a ceiling of $452-million on military and economic aid to Cambodia—which is about $200-million less than last year. When President Ford signed the foreign aid bill, he called the Cambodia part "clearly inadequate" and made it clear that he would ask for more later. Reports from Washington now indicate that he may ask for $150-million to $200-million in additional aid for Phnom Penh.

However, Congress seems to be in a resistant mood.

An increasing number of Congressmen have come to feel that aid to Cambodia is not bringing the situation closer to peace talks but is prolonging the war. This clashes directly with the views of Secretary of State Kissinger, who said he believes that the limits on aid encourage insurgent attacks and reduce the likelihood of negotiations.

HANOI COOLS ON REBELS—SEEN LESSENING SUPPORT FOR CAMBODIAN INSURGENTS

(Saigon, June 22—North Vietnam appears to be trying to prevent its Khmer insurgent allies from winning the war in Cambodia, according to Hanoi-watchers here.

The policy—a change from general support for a clear-cut victory—is the result of steadily deteriorating relations between the allies.

The prevailing view in North Vietnam's ruling Politburo appears to be that an
insurgent government in Phnom Penh now would be strongly anti-Hanoi and would remain so, frustrating Hanoi’s long-range goal of hegemony over Indochina, analysts here believe.

“North Vietnam wants an indeterminate situation, no clear-cut winner,” said an expert observer. “They prefer to have the war bubble along. What they particularly do not want is the collapse of the Lon Nol government.”

Instead, it appears that Hanoi would prefer to wait until events and personalities begin to fall into place in its favor before making any move to bring a clear-cut victory in Phnom Penh, he said.

It is not clear what effect such a change in Hanoi’s policy might have on United States interests in Indochina, although it would appear to ease the strain on the United States in its support of the Lon Nol government in Phnom Penh.

The perception of a Hanoi policy change comes half a year after exiled Cambodian Prince Norodom Sihanouk told a magazine correspondent in Algiers that North Vietnam virtually had betrayed the insurgents.

“We have had to do without their active support since June 1972,” Sihanouk told the Far Eastern Economic Review.

“North Vietnam wants our victory to be deferred because the Vietnamese are afraid that a victory for us would bring American retaliation on them.”

The new policy appears to mesh well with Hanoi’s overall strategy, which has long placed, the main emphasis on victory in South Vietnam.

Hanoi has been the main supporter and supplier of weapons and ammunition to the Khmer insurgent armies during the four-year-old war in Cambodia. While North Vietnamese combat units no longer fight against the Lon Nol government, there are still more than 5,000 North Vietnamese advisers working with insurgent armies in rear areas.

Racial and cultural differences between Vietnamese and Cambodians have long accounted for some strains between the allies, but observers think that sometime during the past year and a half things got so bad that Hanoi adopted a no-win policy with respect to the insurgents.

This is seen as a switch from Hanoi’s former policy, which appeared to favor a clearcut victory for the insurgents, provided that supporting such a victory would not unduly drain Hanoi’s resources or hinder progress toward its primary goal of victory in South Vietnam.

A minority of Hanoi-watchers here disagree, saying that North Vietnam has not changed its policy. These dissenters are military personnel. Their critics say they have not taken into account the entire range of evidence.

“It’s a natural exacerbation of relations between allies with somewhat conflicting views, objectives and strategies,” said one analyst. “Also it stems from blaming each other for setbacks and defeats.”

Evidence of bad relations is contained in thick files of reports of interrogations of Communist defectors and captives.

The files contain numerous stories of Cambodian units refusing to give rice to the North Vietnamese and Vietnamese officers refusing to turn arms shipped from the North over to their insurgent allies. Instead, they might give the insurgents their old weapon.

“They say, ‘what the hell, we need the new stuff, these Cambodians aren’t using it right, they’re selling it off,’ and so on,” said a Hanoi watcher. “It comes down to dustups, even gunfire in a few cases.”

The cases are all on a low level, but they are so widespread that during the past half year they have commanded the attention of analysts.

Observers think that Hanoi’s insurgents policy is a subtle one that involves stalling, red tape and cutting down the number of advisers, rather than a direct effort to sabotage.

An insurgent request for machine-gun bullets would never be refused by the North Vietnamese, for example, but the shipment might be delayed for a long time.

“It’s like the United States and Thieu,” said an observer. “You can maneuver and nudge him into certain policies, but you can’t blackmail him.”

At the same time, North Vietnamese leaders are working to keep the Khmer insurgent leaderships divided, possible talking to different insurgent leaders separately and privately and assuring them of support.

“They don’t want the insurgents to get together,” said an analyst. “If a really charismatic insurgent leader came along, that would be the end for North Vietnam.”
The reason is, in this analysis, "The whole momentum in Cambodia is anti-Vietnamese. North Vietnam feels that this mood has heightened, and if the insurgents sweep on and take Phnom Penh the [new] government would be initially hostile to North Vietnam and would continue to get more and more hostile."

Hanoi's eventual goal is to have, in both Cambodia and Laos, governments that are nonaligned with world power blocs, but clearly defer to Hanoi; that clear all major governmental decisions with Hanoi; and that are influenced by an indigenous political party or force primarily loyal to Hanoi.

The prospects that any of these requirements will be met in Cambodia soon are bleak.

In Laos, on the other hand, North Vietnamese influence seems strong and secure, and relations with the pro-Communist Pathet Lao are easy-going.

Pathet Lao leaders regularly attend Politburo meetings in Hanoi, where they are members of the Lao Dong (Workers') Party.

It remains to be seen whether Pathet Lao leaders in the new Laotian coalition government will make major decisions without checking first with Hanoi, but in any case Hanoi's ultimate position of hegemony in Laos is seen as relatively secure.

In Cambodia, there is no known Khmer political party or force that is primarily loyal to Hanoi.

In place of such a party or force, Hanoi has tried to substitute a rigorous Communist Party structure, but the attempt isn't working very well since, as one analyst put it, "Cambodians aren't very ideologically minded."

Analysts here have noticed animosity between the Khmer insurgents and North Vietnamese at least as far back as the spring of 1970, when U.S. and South Vietnamese forces invaded Communist sanctuaries inside Cambodia.

Documents captured in the sanctuaries disclosed conflicts between the allies over moving Cambodian peasants when the North Vietnamese established combat bases, and so on. There were also racial slurs and disparaging remarks on both sides.