

UNITAS

SEMI-ANNUAL PEER-REVIEWED INTERNATIONAL ONLINE JOURNAL
OF ADVANCED RESEARCH IN LITERATURE, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY

MEYNARDO P. MENDOZA



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Prince Norodom Sihanouk from 1970-1975

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*Dilemmas of a "National Bourgeoisie":
Prince Norodom Sihanouk from 1970-1975*

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as has been the case in the last several decades, in English and Filipino. And, of late, **UNITAS** has also published articles in other languages.

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Abstract

The monograph analyzes the political trajectory of Prince Norodom Sihanouk from 1970–1975 from the perspective of the so-called “national bourgeoisie.” The years 1970–1975 cover the events from his deposition from power as head of state in a coup d’état in March 1970, the rise of the pro-US Lon Nol regime, Sihanouk’s alliance with communist forces to the civil war and ends with the victory of the Khmer Rouge in April 1975.

While external factors were largely responsible for Sihanouk’s deposition from power and Cambodia’s subsequent plunge into the Vietnam War, the Prince’s domestic politics, indecision, and frivolous activities during a critical period in the nation’s history contributed, to a large extent, to his overthrow. Sihanouk’s neutralist foreign policy made it convenient for Vietnamese communist troops to use Cambodian territory both as a sanctuary and a supply route to its forces in South Vietnam. For a long time, the Prince’s balancing act was instrumental in keeping Cambodia away from the Vietnam War. The United States, angered by the mounting casualties in this region and its inability to pursue communist forces beyond Vietnam’s boundary, courted the support of Cambodia’s pro-Western urban elite and the military officer corps in the hope of tilting the country’s foreign policy towards its war objectives.

With vigorous prodding from China, the Prince decided to fight the US-backed Lon Nol regime. He formed an alliance with Khmer communists who did most of the fighting inside the country while Sihanouk was based in Beijing as titular head of the resistance in charge of the united front’s diplomatic struggle. Yet the alliance was tenuous. The leaders of the most radical elements within the Khmer communist movement, the Khmer Rouge, not only had suffered brutal persecution during his rule but believed that he was the main enemy of the revolution.

At the onset of the war, China favored a negotiated settlement to the war. China would have wanted the conflict in Cambodia to be settled alongside that of Vietnam’s during the Paris peace talks. Hence, China played host

to Sihanouk, treating him and his retinue lavishly as the outcome of the peace settlement centered on him. But a series of events made China abandon this plan in favor of a military solution to the war as personified by the Khmer Rouge. The 1973 peace agreements saw the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia, creating a vacuum that the Khmer Rouge readily filled. Eventually, the death of Zhou Enlai, Sihanouk's main supporter, and the ascendancy of radicals within the Chinese ruling party made the military solution to the war more attractive.

Keywords

Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodia-China relations, Second Indochina War, Khmer Rouge, US in Cambodia

Prologue

This study is an account of the political trajectory of Prince Norodom Sihanouk from the years 1970-1975 from the perspective of the so-called “national bourgeoisie”—from his deposition from power, the rise of the pro-US Lon Nol regime, Sihanouk’s alliance with communist forces, and the five-year civil war up until the victory of the Khmer Rouge in April of 1975.

While external factors were largely responsible for Sihanouk’s deposition from power and Cambodia’s subsequent plunge into the Vietnam War, the Prince’s domestic policies, indecision, and frivolous activities during a critical period in the nation’s history contributed to his overthrow. Sihanouk’s neutralist foreign policy made it convenient for Vietnamese communist troops to use Cambodian territory both as a sanctuary and a supply route to its forces in South Vietnam. For a long time, the Prince’s balancing act was instrumental in keeping Cambodia away from the Vietnam War. The United States, angered by the mounting casualties in this region and its inability to pursue communist forces beyond Vietnam’s boundary, courted the support of Cambodia’s pro-western urban elite and the military officer

corps in hopes of tilting the country's foreign policy toward its war objectives. It was paradoxical, however, that prior to the coup, Sihanouk wanted to redirect the country's foreign policy toward more cooperation with the United States in hopes that the communists would moderate their use of Cambodian territory. Not seeing the impending maelstrom, or perhaps exhausted with running the country's affairs for so long, Sihanouk's last months in power were devoted more to making films, organizing festivals, opening state casinos, playing football, and saxophone than solving the country's problems.

With vigorous prodding from China and in part because of his patriotism, the Prince decided to fight the Republican regime in Phnom Penh headed by Lon Nol and Sirik Matak. He formed an alliance with Khmer communists who did most of the fighting inside the country while Sihanouk was based in Beijing as titular head of the resistance in charge of the front's diplomatic struggle. Yet the alliance was tenuous. The leaders of the most radical elements within the Khmer communist movement, the Khmer Rouge, not only had suffered brutal persecution during his rule but believed that he was the main enemy of the revolution.

At the onset of the war, China favored a negotiated settlement to the war. China would have wanted the conflict in Cambodia to be settled alongside that of Vietnam's during the Paris peace talks. Hence, China played host to Sihanouk, treating him and his retinue lavishly as the outcome of the peace settlement centered on him. But a series of events made China abandon this plan in favor of a military solution to the war as personified by the Khmer Rouge.

The 1973 peace agreements saw the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia, creating a vacuum that the Khmer Rouge readily filled. The Khmer Rouge likewise consolidated the front by purging Sihanoukists and pro-Vietnamese elements. The deployment of US bombers in Cambodia worked for the Khmer Rouge as it became the most compelling issue they used to recruit thousands into their ranks. Furthermore, Washington's intransigence in favoring a negotiated settlement earlier in the war and Kissinger's insistence that Lon Nol take part in it spelled the doom of

the planned settlement. Lastly, the death of Zhou Enlai, Sihanouk's main supporter, and the ascendancy of the Chinese ruling party's radicals after Mao's death made the military solution to the war more attractive.

Dilemmas of a “National Bourgeoisie”

In solving the Indochina question, it is not Vietnam alone—it is still a question of Cambodia and Laos but they are comparatively easier. Because no matter what happens, we can say for certain that elements of the national bourgeoisie will take part in such a government...and we can be sure in Cambodia, Prince Sihanouk will be the head of state.

—Remarks made by Zhou Enlai to Henry Kissinger in Peking
in early 1972 on his proposal to include the settlement
of the Cambodian conflict to the Paris peace talks.



Fig. 1. Map of Indochina, 1968 with the "Ho Chi Minh Trail" in red. Photo from the U.S. Army Center of Military History, <https://history.army.mil/>.

Introduction

On March 18, 1970, Prince Norodom Sihanouk was ousted as Cambodia's chief of state. A coup d'état was launched by members of the country's elite headed by Sirik Matak, his cousin from the rival House of Sisowath, and the head of the armed forces, General Lon Nol. At that time, Prince Sihanouk was returning to Cambodia after undergoing medical treatment in France. The coup quickly banished to the sidelines Prince Sihanouk who, for almost three decades, was Cambodia's ruler and dominant political figure.

The year 1970 marked a turning point in the country's history. First, the coup ended Cambodia's neutral stance in the Vietnam War and signaled her entry into it in alliance with the United States and the former South Vietnam. For many years, the Prince had been doing a balancing act to preserve Cambodia's peace and veer it away from the widening Vietnam War, which he did brilliantly until the coup. Second, the coup swiftly ended Sihanouk's lengthy twenty-nine-year reign as Cambodia's most famous monarch and ruler. He ruled Cambodia as king, prince, prime

minister, head of state, and in other various forms, but nonetheless always wielding absolute power in Cambodia. His hold on power was so dominating that, observers say, he came to personify his country's policies locally and internationally.

The coup was not totally unexpected. A confluence of several factors, both external and internal, made his fall from power quite inevitable. But aside from these factors, what eventually hastened Sihanouk's downfall was how he handled these problems.

In spite of the quixotic efforts of the Prince to keep Cambodia neutral, the escalating conflict in Vietnam threatened to drag Cambodia into the war. As the fighting intensified, Vietnamese communist troops began moving eastward toward Cambodia's border areas, which they eventually used as sanctuaries. The southern part of Cambodia, or what US military planners called the "Parrot's Beak," was an integral part of the so-called Ho Chi Minh Trail. Military supplies from North Vietnam and other socialist countries were transported via this clandestine route to communist troops in the South. The US war effort in Vietnam had been less than effective because of the steady stream of war material ferried along this jungle route. Also, the COSVN (Central Office, South Viet Nam)—the headquarters of the National Liberation Front—was located here and was thus safe from both US and South Vietnamese attacks. Sihanouk tolerated these violations of Cambodian neutrality as concessions to the socialist camp in the hope of sparing Cambodia from the conflict. However, Cambodia had no power to evict Vietnamese troops. This political balancing act infuriated the other parties to the conflict. For the United States, Sihanouk could not go on accommodating enemy troops inside the borders while declaring Cambodia neutral in the conflict. Seeking an honorable way out of the war, the US wished to sue for peace from a position of strength. This could be done if the enemy was denied the use of Cambodian territory.

On the other hand, Sihanouk's domestic opponents, particularly the urban middle class and the military officer corps viewed this as acquiescence to the Vietnamese whom the Khmers have generally considered as their tormentors. Ever since the fall of the Khmer empire in the 15th

century, when Vietnam began annexing large tracts of its territories and at one time almost drove the Chams into extinction, the Khmers have had a deep visceral hatred for the Vietnamese. This accommodation by Sihanouk, according to his opponents, was just another way for the Vietnamese to annex more Khmer territory.

Before the coup, Sihanouk's aloofness and negligence in governing were among his prominent traits. The urban population was getting disenchanted with Sihanouk's policies. His rhetoric was not matched by corresponding economic development. At the same time, the upward mobility of the middle class was thwarted by Sihanouk's and the royal families' domination over economic opportunities.

Lastly, the authoritarian monarch tolerated no opposition to his rule. Dissenters were either jailed or discredited as lackeys of foreign interests, if they were lucky enough not to be executed by the police. Prior to his joining the Khmer Rouge, Khieu Samphan was humiliated for his critical remarks in his newspaper *L'Observateur* by being beaten, stripped of clothing, and made to walk the streets of Phnom Penh naked. The violent repression of the 1967 Samlaut Rebellion demonstrated Sihanouk's brutality.

Yet, at the same time, as if losing his touch with reality, Sihanouk turned his attention to the pursuit of aesthetic endeavors. Instead of concentrating on his country's problems, Sihanouk busied himself making dilettantish films. Despite the country's financial woes, he hosted lavish feasts and built luxurious villas for his foreign guests, ignoring his advisers' pleas for austerity.

It is against this backdrop that Marshall Lon Nol's coup of March 1970 was launched. Prince Sihanouk was unprepared to face the aftermath of the coup d'état. The urban population, relieved by his ouster, expressed support for the new leadership. The Prince had two options—either accept his deposition and retire from active political life or fight back against his enemies. He chose the latter. But this was not easy as the Lon Nol government had the active support of the United States and, in varying degrees, of two powerful neighbors, Thailand and South Vietnam. Worse, the Prince's absence from Cambodia made consolidation and mobilization work among his remaining forces very difficult, if not impossible. He now faced the pros-

pect of entering an alliance with the existing opposition dominated by his bitter enemies, the Khmer Rouge, who had the support of both China and North Vietnam.

The Sihanouk Dilemma

Cooperating with the communists was a dilemma for Sihanouk. His attitude towards them immediately prior to the coup was antagonistic. He blamed China for radicalizing the urban youth as the tumult emanating from the Cultural Revolution found its way into Cambodia. In clearer terms, there was the North Vietnamese whose violations of Cambodian sovereignty in the border areas drove Sihanouk to seek a renewal of diplomatic ties with the United States. Yet, it was precisely the presence of Vietnamese troops in the country that made the military and the urban elite depose Sihanouk in the March 1970 coup. Lastly, there was the Khmer Rouge who treated him as the main enemy of the revolution. In addition, its leaders like his three former deputies Khieu Samphan, Hou Youn, and Hu Nim suffered first-hand persecution and faced the threat of being liquidated by Sihanouk's police force.

Yet, the task of eliminating the Lon Nol regime was immediate and of prime importance to all parties. For the time being, Sihanouk's alliance with the communists was based on complementarity. While they had the organizational capability and arms to fight the Lon Nol government, Sihanouk had the international stature the united front required, that is, the Prince represented to the outside world the respectable face of the Khmer resistance. Up until this time too, Sihanouk had the moral hold on the majority of the peasantry. But the Prince's position was being eroded by his status as an exile. His isolation in Beijing detached him from the revolution. Moreover, his delicate position as head of the Cambodian resistance while in exile in Beijing was, to a large extent, dependent on the policies of the Chinese government which was aiming to influence the outcome of events in Cambodia. For Sihanouk, the question of the extent of his cooperation—that is, determining up to what point he should collaborate with the communists to liberate Cambodia from the Lon Nol government while

ensuring his ascendancy in the post-war dispensation—was a guiding factor in determining his actions and decisions.

The Concept of the National Bourgeoisie

The terribly complicated position Sihanouk found himself in the aftermath of the coup tended to produce a wavering attitude on his part. This ambivalence was due to his desire to advance his own agenda while at the same time accommodate the inherently contrary position of his allies to keep the unity of the front intact. Sihanouk's attitude towards the communists could thus be likened to that of the national bourgeoisie, as the latter is represented by Marxist-Leninist discourse.¹

The concept of the national bourgeoisie was first introduced by Lenin at the turn of the century to differentiate the various sectors in Russian society. In answering the basic tactical problem of the Russian revolution, Lenin believed that the proletariat was insufficiently strong to withstand the power of an alliance between the autocracy and the bourgeoisie. He believed that only if the proletariat preserved absolute independence of action, only if it made the fullest possible use of each and every occasion of bourgeois wavering to clarify the situation, and only if it won over the revolutionary section of the peasantry to its cause would it be able to prevent the revolution from being arrested by bourgeois betrayal (Harding 220).

In Lenin's view, the ambivalence and vacillation of the bourgeoisie was a function of its "objective class situation." It must act as an intermediary between the autocracy and the insurgent people:

The gist of the bourgeoisie's political position is, as we have frequently pointed out, that it stands between the Tsar and the insurgent people and would play the part of the "honest broker" and steal into power behind the back of the militant people. That is why the bourgeoisie appeals to the Tsar one day, and to the people the next, making "serious" and business-like proposals for a political deal to the former, and addressing empty phrases about liberty to the latter (*Selected Works* 41).

Lenin describes the national bourgeoisie class as vacillating in nature and thus unreliable for the task of carrying out the democratic revolution.

They did have democratic aspirations but only to a certain extent. Yet, at a moment propitious to themselves they would, if allowed, conclude a pact with the Tsar and establish a constitutional monarchy with a complicated division of powers in which they would retain the whip hand. The essence of the bourgeoisie's dilemma was that it needed the people against the Tsar, yet, at a slightly later date, it knew that it would need the Tsar against the people (Lenin, *Selected Works* 43).

Its class instinct enables it to realize perfectly well that on the one hand, the proletariat and the people are useful for its revolution as cannon fodder, as a battering ram against the autocracy, but that, on the other hand, the proletariat and the revolutionary peasantry will be dangerous too if they win a "decisive victory over Tsarism" and carry the democratic revolution to completion. The bourgeoisie was therefore compelled to play a nicely-balanced game. It recognized that, with its own resources, it commanded no real force to frighten the Tsar into concessions; it recognized further that only such force would impress the Tsar. It must, therefore, turn to the people and use them as a battering ram to force concessions from the autocracy (Lenin, *Two Tactics* 41).

Lenin was able to distinguish between the social conditions of the West and that of the "colonies" where nationalism was a strong driving force. In his class analysis, Lenin differentiated the bourgeoisie of the West who were "rotten to the core" to that of the Asian bourgeoisie, as personified by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, whom Lenin described as "a revolutionary democrat, who symbolizes the nobility and heroism inherent in a class that is on the rise." He explained further the differentiation, to wit:

The Western bourgeoisie is in a state of decay; it is already confronted by its grave-digger—the proletariat. In Asia, in contrast, there is **still** a bourgeoisie capable of championing sincere, militant, consistent democracy, a worthy comrade of France's great enlighteners and great leaders of the close of the 18th century (*The National Liberation* 43-44; emphasis added).

Mao Zedong further elaborated on Lenin's concept of the national bourgeoisie when he wrote "Analysis of the Classes" in February 1926. He describes them as follows:

This class is inconsistent in its attitude towards the national revolution. It feels the need for revolution and favors the revolutionary movement against imperialism and the warlords when it is smarting under the blows of foreign capitalists and oppression by the warlords. But they become suspicious of the revolution when they sense that, with the militant participation of the peasantry and the active support of the international proletariat abroad, the present revolutionary movement is threatening the hope of their class to attain the status of a big bourgeoisie (*Selected Works* 4).

The dual character of the national bourgeoisie may be summed up in this formula: that it is both a victim and an opportunist. From the Marxist-Leninist viewpoint, it favors revolution and is ready to ally itself with, and at times even be used by, the insurgent masses, because they are victims of oppression by the landlords, local compradors, and foreign capitalists. Hence, from the Marxist-Leninist standpoint, they are not considered as the frontal enemies of the revolution even if they belong to the class known by the generic term "bourgeoisie." But they waver in their attitude when they sense that the threat of the worker and peasant classes is growing daily, forcing them to make more concessions to the interests of the worker-peasant class. They eventually fear the revolution, and sometimes come into conflict with it because it hinders their ambition to attain the status of the big bourgeoisie:

In China, the national bourgeoisie stood for the establishment of a state under a single class in which they are the rulers. But its attempt to establish a state under the rule of the national bourgeoisie was deemed impracticable, because the present world situation is such that the two major forces, revolution and counter-revolution, are locked in final struggle wherein there is no room for compromise. Thus, the idea cherished by the national bourgeoisie of an "independent" revolution in which their interests would be primary is a mere illusion (Mao, *Selected Works* 5).

Lenin, and eventually Mao, further differentiated the elements that could be found within the national bourgeoisie. They believed that this class

could still be subdivided into two groups: the left-wing, or those who cannot come to terms with imperialism; and the liberal bourgeoisie (right-wing) or those who, during the course of the revolution, tries to thwart it by compromising with the enemy. As early as 1906, Lenin was able to perceive that the bourgeoisie, when faced with pressures from both the autocracy and the insurgent people, would tend to split into two.

The labor movement flares up into a direct revolution while the liberal bourgeoisie has already united in a Constitutional-Democratic party and thinks of stopping the revolution by compromising with tsarism. But the radical elements of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie are inclined to enter into an alliance with the proletariat for the continuation of the revolution (Lenin, *The National Liberation* 134).

Twenty years after Lenin's "The Stages, Trends and Prospects of the Revolution," Mao pursued the idea of the split within the national bourgeoisie further. Enumerating who belonged to which section in pre-revolutionary China, Mao depicted the left-wing and the right-wing of the national bourgeoisie in behavioral terms, thus:

As for the intellectual class, there are some sons of small landowners who, having studied in eastern capitalist countries, have clearly acquired foreign characteristics on top of their original native characteristics. Even the small sons of landowners studying at Chinese colleges and universities are transformed in this way, and there are unavoidably some among them who adopt half-native, half-foreign mannerisms. They are the right-wing of the middle bourgeoisie, as soon as the national revolutionary struggle intensifies and as soon as they sense the threat of the worker and peasant class is growing daily, will certainly rush to join the ranks of imperialism and the warlords, and make excellent accomplices of the comprador class.

The left-wing of the middle bourgeoisie, i.e., those who under no circumstances will come to terms with imperialism can be rather revolutionary in certain periods. But it is extremely difficult to do away with their empty "pacifist" views. Moreover, they often take fright in the face of "Sovietization," so that their attitude towards the revolution is extremely compromised and their support for it not sustained (*Analysis of the Classes* 6).

Mao concluded that both the right-wing and the left-wing of the national bourgeoisie contained many treacherous elements and neither could be expected to follow the path of revolution and be faithful to the revolutionary cause except for a minority of individuals who might do so as a result of “special historical or other circumstances” (*Analysis of the Classes* 6).

Vietnamese Marxist-Leninist theoreticians, notably Truong Chinh and Le Duan, considered as important ingredients for the success of its revolution the harnessing of nationalism and patriotism. Earlier attempts to graft Marxism-Leninism onto the concrete situation in Vietnam had proved rather difficult. In part, this was because the Vietnamese revolution was the first communist revolution to take place in a completely colonial and semi-feudal country. Le Duan explained that the colonial and semi-feudal society produced a proletariat with different characteristics in that “the Vietnamese proletariat was born earlier than the bourgeoisie because it was a product of French imperialism” (*Selected Writings* 67).

Le Duan and other theoreticians argued that Vietnam’s economy was essentially feudal with externally created capitalism grafted upon it. What this means is that the principal class antagonism for the Vietnamese proletariat was not with the Vietnamese bourgeoisie but rather with the French colonial bourgeoisie. As good Leninists, they believed that the national bourgeoisie was a revolutionary force in colonial and semi-colonial societies, and that both the national bourgeoisie and the proletariat had similar interests in a national democratic revolution against imperialism (Kelly and Mackerras, “The Application” 205). The economic conditions of Vietnam at the time could only produce an economically weak bourgeoisie which politically compromised with imperialism and followed a policy of reformism (Duan, “Hold High” 66-67). Unlike in most other colonial countries, France did not make extensive use of locals in its administration. The French preferred to bring Frenchmen to Indochina to take up any positions of importance, and the only way for a Vietnamese to advance was to be French-educated and gain French citizenship. Hence, the Vietnamese bourgeoisie in administrative positions were for the most part Francophiles and did not identify

their interests with those of the Vietnamese people (Duiker, “Vietnamese Revolutionary” 45).

As a result, Truong Chinh and Le Duan, like Mao, believed that the national bourgeoisie undergoes a splitting process. On the one hand, there was “the reactionary comprador bourgeoisie whose interests coincide with those of the French colonialists . . . and holds the key economic and political positions . . . tends to further compromise with imperialism and applies a reactionary domestic and foreign policy.” On the other hand, there was the progressive national bourgeoisie which tended to “oppose the colonialists, the ruling feudalists and the pro-French compradors and opposes imperialism . . . wants to develop an independent economy and carry out a foreign policy of peace and neutrality” (Duan, *Selected Writings* 132; Chinh, *Selected Writings* 232). For the communists, the national bourgeoisie in Vietnam belonged to the second sub-category (Malay, *The Third Force* 48). The essential contradiction in the Vietnamese struggle, according to Marxist-Leninist theoreticians, was that between the Vietnamese people on the one hand, and the imperialist aggressors and their lackeys on the other. The Vietnamese national bourgeoisie was regarded not as the primary enemy but as the secondary enemy.

The Vietnamese bourgeoisie did not take a prominent role in Vietnam’s revolution. But the Vietnamese communists did enter, from time to time during the 1930s and 1940s, into united fronts with patriotic bourgeois elements. In the early 1970s, the National Liberation Front and the Provisionary Revolutionary Government supported the left-wing segment of the so-called “third force” in which the national bourgeoisie played a major role. Thus in Vietnam’s case, the national bourgeoisie could be both nationalist and patriotic.

In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge formulated an “indigenous” social analysis which was a product of the Communist Party of Kampuchea’s 1971 congress. It considered Cambodia “semi-feudal and semi-colonial” and subdivided its society into five classes or *vanna*, namely: feudalists, capitalists, petty bourgeois, peasants, and workers. These in turn were divided into various layers or *sratop* which closely resemble those of the Chinese

Communist Party's analysis of pre-revolutionary China (Malay, *The Third Force* 50). Though the term "national bourgeoisie" is not explicitly stated in surviving documents of this period, the Khmer Rouge nevertheless offered a veiled reference to this class, and in particular Sihanouk, in an article entitled "Who Leads the People's War?: The exploiting classes resist the people's war to the end." Therefore, they are not the ones who lead the people's war. If they use a ruse to come and take control of the people's war, it is "to kill the people and therefore to continue their oppression of the people further."² For the Khmer Rouge, the national bourgeoisie could be nothing more than an enemy of the revolution.

Prelude to the Coup

The national liberation struggle in Cambodia developed in an atmosphere of ideological confusion compounded of nationalist, traditionalist and some modern view . . . Sihanouk reflected that confusion. For a long period, he was ambivalent and vacillating, without a clear view of what he himself wanted. At times he was a paternalistic despot, at others a patriotic nationalist, and sometimes he combined both roles.

—Nguyen Khac Vien

Whereas scholarly works that appeared in the 1980s dwelt on the role of internal and external factors that led to Sihanouk's downfall in March 1970, those of the 1990s point to Sihanouk's manner of governing the country during his last days in office as being equally responsible for his downfall. His mismanagement of internal problems as well as the threat that arose from the widening war in Vietnam complicated the country's situation. In effect, the confluence of these factors precipitated the coup.

As the war escalated, Vietnam's agricultural resource base was becoming depleted and could not feed its teeming population. At the same time, more and more of the NLF and NVA regulars were stationed in sanctuaries inside Cambodia. This meant a greater demand for Cambodian rice. Instead of selling their rice to government agents, Cambodian peasants readily sold them to the black market manned by agents for the Vietnamese communists who offered higher prices. This "black marketed" rice found its way to Vietnamese communist forces. To put a stop to this practice, Lon Nol instituted expropriation measures that generated resentment among the

peasantry. This was one of the primary reasons for the Samlaut rebellion which started from 1967 and lasted until May 1968 (Kiernan, "The Impact" 216). Sihanouk's conviction that the rebellion was directed by non-Cambodian forces, his frustration with China and Vietnam for ignoring his plea to respect Cambodia's frontier areas, and his cynicism toward local leftists convinced him that it was time to alter the country's foreign policy by renewing diplomatic ties with the United States at the start of 1968.

This renewal of diplomatic relations, however, did not bring the desired results. Instead, this acquiescence to limited pursuit operations eventually resulted in saturation bombings of the countryside which further radicalized the Khmer communists. The coming of the Americans became a blessing for the small urban elite in Phnom Penh who were becoming disaffected and critical of the Prince's policies. They asked for US support—in terms of military equipment and supplies to drive away the communists from their territory and economic aid to prop up the future government—once Sihanouk was out of power, a request which was readily granted.

Faced with the magnitude which the above-mentioned problems entailed, Sihanouk turned toward his frivolous diversions instead of facing the problem. Rather than taking care of affairs of state, he spent most of his time making films, organizing film festivals, and entertaining royal guests.

The Growth of the Radical Left

Before the coup, the Khmer communists were still militarily weak and posed no immediate threat to the Prince. Their struggle was aimed mostly at gaining experience and sharpening their politico-military skills while waiting for an opening that would allow them to make a grab for power.

The Khmer communist movement metamorphosed from one that was unintellectual or rusticated, rural, and pro-Vietnamese during the 1950s to one that was urban, middle-class, Western-educated, and fanatically pro-Mao as the 1960s drew to a close. The so-called Khmer Vietminh was formed at a time when there was only one center of power in the socialist world: Moscow. Whatever differences there were between fraternal parties, whether in power or not, were negotiated and subsumed under the banner

of “international proletarianism.” On the other hand, the formative stages of the Khmer Rouge occurred in a “clouded atmosphere of heavy ideological debate” between Moscow and Beijing (Elliot, *The Third Indochina* 174). Beijing was competing with Moscow to be the center of world communism in the early 60s.³ At the same time the Cultural Revolution was sweeping China, and its revolutionary turmoil spilled over to other countries. Cambodia was no exception.

The educated Cambodian youth was, from a distance, influenced by the May 1968 events in Paris which almost toppled the government of Charles de Gaulle. The anti-de Gaulle riots were witnessed by Cambodian tertiary students studying there (Chandler, *The Tragedy* 160). The “prevailing leftist wind” of this period inspired not only the Khmer youth but also significant numbers of American, Filipino, and other youths around the world. The Cultural Revolution’s mass rustication campaign, whereby zealous Red Guard youths were summoned by Mao to go to the countryside and learn from the peasants deeply impressed Pol Pot who later adapted Mao’s tactics to subvert the intelligentsia (Flor-Cruz, “The Legacy” 10-15).

Khmer Rouge leaders schooled in France—Pol Pot, Khieu Samphan, Hou Youn and others, despised the veterans of the Indochinese Communist Party (sometimes referred to as the Khmer Vietminh and included the likes of So Phim, Heng Samrin, and Penn Sovan), considering them to be “country bumpkins” with little theoretical knowledge. On the other hand, the veterans believed the Paris Group to be totally ignorant of the real conditions inside Cambodia and equipped only with sloganeering phrases from Marx and Lenin. One of the major differences between the Paris Group and the veterans was determining whether Sihanouk or US imperialism was the greatest danger. It was Sihanouk for Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, and US imperialism for the veterans. This argument apparently lasted until March 18, 1970 (Burchett, *China-Cambodia-Vietnam* 66).

The intellectuals within the Paris Group became high government officials in Sihanouk’s cabinet when they returned to Cambodia. Between 1958 and 1963, Khieu Samphan, Hu Nim, and Hou Youn all served in Sihanouk’s cabinet. Hou Youn was in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry from

April to July 1958, in the Budget Office from July 1958 to February 1959, in the Planning Ministry from February to June 1959, and in the Ministry of Public Health from June 1959 to April 1960. He was recalled to the Finance Ministry from August to October 1962 and from there was transferred to the Planning Ministry until February 1963.

Khieu Samphan, on the other hand, served in the Sihanouk administration as Secretary of State for Commerce in 1962-1963 while Hu Nim put his French legal training to use as head of various departments and ministries (Davis, "The Men Most Likely To..." 11-12). Khieu distinguished himself as an honest and dedicated bureaucrat in Sihanouk's cabinet. As Minister of the Economy in 1965, he refused to use the ministry's official car and insisted on traveling to work using his motorcycle. On one occasion, a wealthy Chinese businessman bribed him with a brand-new Mercedes-Benz parked in the ministry's parking lot to secure government contracts. The offer was rebuffed and the Chinese businessman was thrown out of Samphan's office. Khieu Samphan worked until late at night and avoided the capital's night life while his fellow ministers reveled in Phnom Penh's "cognac and concubine circuit" (Davis, "The Men Most Likely To..." 12).

The Samlaut Rebellion

A rebellion at Samlaut and other parts of Battambang province erupted between March and May 1967 as a result of harsh expropriation measures applied to Cambodian farmers. The government wanted to control rice trading in the country in order to deprive the Vietnamese communist troops of the commodity. For a time, Cambodian farmers preferred to sell their rice to Vietnamese agents rather than to the government for they were paid higher prices. Cambodian authorities were worried that over-consumption of the commodity by non-Cambodians could result in higher prices and worse, famine. It could also be said that the expropriation measure worked for the government as well: it could earn big profits if there were no other sellers (Osborne, *Prince of Light* 191).

At first the farmers were urged to sell their rice to the government. When this proved futile, the government deployed the army to enforce

compliance. Later on, the government resorted to confiscation. It signaled the start of a major rural unrest, which was later on supported by urban demonstrations.

On April 2, 1967, 200 local inhabitants bearing anti-government banners and armed with knives and homemade weapons attacked an army camp at Stung Kranhung in the Samlaut region. The rebels killed two soldiers and captured their rifles. Later in the day, two other guard posts were attacked, additional rifles were captured, and a local official was killed. By nightfall, the rebels had seized thirteen rifles. Skirmishing continued for two days until fresh troops arrived, restored order, and rounded up some local suspects. In the meantime, some 2,000 men, women, and children had fled or been herded into the forest. By the middle of May, eight battalions of regular soldiers had been dispatched to the area, and militia units of enthusiastic vigilantes had been recruited in Battambang, armed with staves, and told to go into the region to “hunt the Reds—including those people who had fled from their villages (Kiernan and Boua, *Peasants and Politics* 171; Chandler, *The Tragedy* 165).

Sihanouk was out of the country for his usual rest cures in France when the rebellion broke out. The day after his return to Cambodia on March 9, he went to Samlaut to personally look after the rebellion (Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 219).⁴ Because of his long absence, he was faced with a situation he could not completely grasp. The peasant unrest was aggravated by student demonstrations in the capital demanding withdrawal of government forces from Pailin, dissolving the incumbent government, and calling for assembly elections. In a major policy speech, Sihanouk reminded his subjects of the divisions within the socialist world and the futility of revolutions, while expressing his sympathy for the Left:

. . . revolutions have reached complete deadlock . . . if we made revolutions where shall we go with such a revolution . . . I am not a reactionary, and I do not wish to move backwards, but I prefer evolution . . . Although I do not support the leftist citizens we must evolve towards the Left, from Right to Left but not towards Communism. Had I not been born a Prince, I would have been on the left myself (Zasloff and Brown, *Communism*; Kiernan and Boua, *Peasants and Politics* 170; Chandler, *The Tragedy* 163).

In the same speech, he threatened the rebels with a bloody backlash from Lon Nol's government alluding to Indonesia in 1965:

Do not forget either, *messieurs les rouges*, and this is a reminder to you and not a threat, that it is Sihanouk to whom you owe the privilege you enjoy at present of carrying out all your activities without fear of ending your days. Is there any need to remind you that in Indonesia there was no great difficulty in wiping out 700,000 communists, and to point out that it is not enough for me, not even to give the order but to simply remain silent and you, who are only a few hundreds, will disappear even more quickly? *We do not lack our Suhartos and Nasutions in Cambodia*" (Phnom Penh Minister of Information 252).

His speech hinted strongly of secretly authorizing the armed forces to repress the left. It may have been a salutary measure intended to make it appear that Sihanouk was the only one who could prevent a bloodshed by the military and hopefully discourage the left from pursuing their newly-launched opposition to him (Phnom Penh Minister of Information 253).

Sihanouk's harangue did not in any way discourage the rebellion. On the contrary, the rebels expanded their area of operations. He then charged five deputies—Khieu Samphan, Hou Youn, Hu Nim, Chau Seng and So Nem—with responsibility for the uprising. But he singled out the first three while naming the remaining two as "less blameworthy." Samphan told Charles Meyer, Sihanouk's long-time French adviser, that he feared for his life and left for the *maquis* two days later along with Hou Youn (Meyer, *Derreiere* 195). Hu Nim followed the two former deputies later. Rumors spread in the capital that the disappearance of the two deputies (Samphan and Yuon) was the result of an order coming from either Lon Nol or Sihanouk. In the face of the brewing political disturbance, Lon Nol resigned as Prime Minister (Osborne, *Politics and Power* 108).

The news of the disappearance, and presumably murder, of the two deputies generated further unrest particularly in their respective electoral areas. Demonstrations ranged from those which simply blamed Lon Nol for the disappearance of the deputies to those which "condemned imperialism

and Kampuchean reactionaries and sought the release of recently imprisoned workers, peasants, youths, students, academics and intellectuals” (Kiernan and Boua, *Peasants and Politics* 175).

Sihanouk then formed the “Exceptional Government of National Safety” which sought to address the rebellion within the next three months. Most of its members were Sihanouk loyalists and some left-wingers like Chau Seng, So Nem, and Keat Chhon. Immediately, he fired the military commander of the Battambang region (which supervised the Samlaut area) and replaced the Provincial Governor. He then visited Samlaut, held a dialogue with the people and distributed food, clothing, and other necessities, ordered the building of roads, a new school, and a medical center. He also offered amnesty to the local rebels but was turned down twice by the insurgents (Osborne, *Before Kampuchea*, 134).

In May and June, Sihanouk applied immense military pressure on the rebels that included aerial bombings and the gruesome display of severed heads of suspected rebels. Bounties were paid to those who produced the heads while army trucks ferried them to the capital as a stern reminder to those who were entertaining thoughts of joining the rebellion (Kiernan, *The Samlaut Rebellion* 9).

By August 1967, the fighting came to a lull. A group of about 200 “rebel returnees” who visited the Prince in his palace at Chamcar Man was lavishly entertained and given tours of Sihanoukville, Kampot, and Angkor Wat before returning to their new homes that were rebuilt for them by the army (Kiernan and Boua, *Peasants and Politics* 176).

This temporary peace, however, ended in early 1968 with renewed fighting in the same region. Many of the problems which fomented the rebellion remained largely unaddressed. Fighting also broke out in the mountainous northeast region where the Khmer Rouge was actively organizing tribal people. But more importantly, Sihanouk was convinced that the new outbreak of dissidence was well-prepared and led by his three former deputies (Kiernan, *The Samlaut Rebellion* 21, 275). The Prince also blamed foreign intervention for the rebellion: Thailand at first, and later China and North Vietnam. He also criticized the US and South Vietnam, both very

unlikely culprits, for giving supplies and support to the rebels. He brought back Lon Nol into the Cabinet as Minister of Defense and Inspector General of the Armed Forces (Vickery, *Kampuchea* 21-22).

The manner with which Sihanouk put down the rebellion was more brutal than that of 1967. At least twenty suspected rebels captured by the army were ordered shot. Sihanouk said, "I have liquidated them, I have liquidated them with pleasure, and I feel no remorse . . . it is total war" (Chandler, *The Tragedy* 176). Forty schoolteachers from Kampot who were suspected of joining the rebellion were bound hand and foot and thrown off a cliff on Sihanouk's orders (Kiernan, *How Pol Pot* 276). In April, with the capture of 180 rebels and 30 ringleaders who were subsequently executed, Sihanouk boasted, "I do not care if I am sent to hell . . . I will submit the pertinent documents to the devil himself" (Kiernan, *How Pol Pot* 274; Osborne, *Prince of Light* 195). When government troops captured suspected Vietnamese troops in the following month, he said to a group, "I had them roasted. When you roast a duck you normally eat it. But when we roasted these fellows, we had to feed them to the vultures. We had to do so to ensure our society" (Kiernan, *How Pol Pot* 275).

Fighting subsided by the end of May with the Communist Party of Kampuchea ordering a cessation of military operations and the government claiming victory. Lon Nol, the man responsible for the expropriation measures and in quelling the rebellion, became defense minister in May 1968 (Kiernan, *The Samlaut Rebellion* 12).

Sihanouk's Foreign Policy Shift

Toward the end of the 1960s, Sihanouk redirected Cambodia's foreign policy. A number of intertwining internal and external developments precipitated this major shift in policy. Since the escalation of the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s, Sihanouk had tolerated the use of Cambodian border areas by the NVA/NLF (North Vietnamese Army National Liberation Front or what was pejoratively called the "Viet Cong") troops. In part, he sympathized with the Vietnamese communists because he viewed the Vietnam War as essentially a nationalist struggle against unjust foreign intervention. Pragmatically,

Sihanouk was willing to help the Vietnamese because he believed that they were the likely victors in the war against America. By putting Vietnam in Cambodia's debt, Sihanouk hoped that it would respect its former benefactor once the war was over (Pomonti and Thion, *Des Courtesans* 60; Caldwell and Tan, *Cambodia in the Southeast Asian War* 56). But in practical terms, Sihanouk thought it wise to acquiesce to these territorial incursions, avoid confrontation, and preserve the peace in Cambodia because its armed forces were weak (Chanda, *Brother Enemy* 61; Leifer, *Cambodia* 162).⁵ Cambodian army trucks also ferried supplies from the port of Kompong Som (renamed to Sihanoukville) to communist troops in the border areas. But it was not a strictly one-sided affair. In return, China and the Soviet Union offered aid, grants, soft loans packages, and diplomatic support. He also tolerated communist troops to stave off international support for local insurgents; in other words, as long as he maintained Cambodia's neutrality, the Chinese and Vietnamese communists would dissuade the local rebels from overthrowing him. This was an arrangement favorable for China, Vietnam, and Sihanouk but certainly not for the Khmer Rouge (Duiker, *China and Vietnam* 51-57).

Corollary to this was the problem of the local insurgency of the Khmer communists. The magnitude of the Samlaut rebellion surprised Sihanouk who still thought that Cambodia was an "oasis of peace." In the absence of a visible, indigenous, and self-reliant communist organization, it was not hard for the Prince to think that the Vietnamese communist troops were training and arming the local communists against his regime. He was also apprehensive that the radicalism espoused by the Cultural Revolution in China might incite the local leftists to rebellion and thus close down the Khmer-Chinese Friendship Association. He then purged the government of leftists who later fled to the *maquis* and became leaders of the Khmer Rouge.

The Cambodian army's military equipment was already obsolete, its personnel undertrained. As a result, it could not act as a deterrent to hostile outside forces. Most of its equipment, coming from the Soviet Union and France, was of poor quality. Sihanouk was in a dilemma in upgrading the military's capability. He could not ask for better military equipment from the socialist world for they wished to see Cambodia neutral (Leifer, *The Search*

for Security, 187). For Sihanouk, the solution lay in the resumption of diplomatic relations with the United States. But there was a price to pay for this about-face.

A vital event that had tremendous effects, both immediate and long-term, on Cambodia was monitoring the presence of communist troops inside Cambodia through aerial reconnaissance by the United States. The findings of this highly classified project, code-named Vesuvius, were presented to the Cambodian government via the Australian ambassador to Phnom Penh, Noel St. Clair Deschamps, in December 1967. Cambodia responded shortly. In January of 1968, Chester Bowles, US ambassador to India, came to Phnom Penh for a four-day visit to discuss the matter (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 69).

A critic of American involvement in the Vietnam War, Bowles prepared the talking points for the meeting. He wanted to convince Sihanouk of the following:

That 1.) The growing Communist use of the border areas poses a danger for a wider war; 2.) To prevent this, there is a need to develop measures which are practical and useful to inhibit NVA/NLF troops' unauthorized use of Cambodian territory; 3.) The US is supportive of Sihanouk's proposal of reviving the International Control Commission (or ICC) observers but that this is not enough to deter the communist use of the border areas; and, 4.) That the Cambodian forces, though limited, could do rather more, and so might the United States. ("President Nixon discusses . . ." 89).

On the first day of the visit, Bowles was met separately by then Prime Minister Son Sann and Gen. Nhiek Tiouloung. Prince Sihanouk, who was outside the capital, met them the following day. True to his mercurial character, Sihanouk lambasted the delegates with his anti-American tirades and began to criticize America's presence in Vietnam. He could not understand why the United States was attacking North Vietnam and other small countries, while avoiding confrontation with Moscow and Beijing who were really to blame for the conflict. He lamented that American intervention was driving the nationalist Ho Chi Minh to China's fold. He reasoned out that Cambodia had to maintain good relations with the Vietnamese communists because the future of Southeast Asia was "red." But he wanted Vietnamese

troops out of Cambodia and asked that the US inform him about NVA/NLF presence in Cambodia (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 69-70).

But in a sudden turnaround, according to the delegation report, the Prince said that he would not object if the US engaged in hot pursuit operations in underpopulated areas. He could not say this publicly or officially, but if the US followed this course it would help him solve his own problem. Of course, if the US engaged NVA/NLF forces on Cambodian territory, both sides would be guilty of violating Cambodian soil, “but the NVA/NLF would be more guilty.” If we pursued VC forces into remote areas where the population would be unaffected, he would “shut his eyes.” (Chandler, *The Tragedy* 193)

In the absence of an official or public pronouncement of the event from both sides, the report of the delegation could be questioned for its intent to include Cambodia in the war. Yet, Sihanouk made no denial of this event. What is unquestionable though was that the Prince would like to address the problem posed by the incursion of Vietnamese communist troops inside Cambodia. And to do this, he used his time-tested trick of playing one power against another. According to Shawcross, the preservation of Cambodia’s peace was far more important for the Prince than his political consistency (*Sideshow* 41).

Charles Meyer, Sihanouk’s long-time French adviser, concedes that the Prince did tell Bowles that “just as he could not prevent the Vietnamese from usurping Cambodian territory, so he could not object to the United States attacking from there” (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 70). Meyer insists however that what the Prince had in mind were “small-scale bombings and not a massive B-52 campaign” (Meyer, *Derriere le sourire khmer* 197; Shawcross, *Sideshow* 71).

Before the end of the visit, then Prime Minister Son Sann urged Bowles to argue in Washington for the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries and assurances for the US to respect its territories. This proposal however was met with intense opposition from the US embassies in Saigon and Bangkok. Nonetheless, the US continued to supply Cambodia documents from Operation Vesuvius (Chandler, *The Tragedy* 173).

A month after Bowles, Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia visited Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge welcomed him with hostile leaflets and demonstrations. Among other things, the Khmer communists alleged that Tito's meeting with Sihanouk was to discuss a sell-out of Cambodia to the Americans. Sihanouk ridiculed the charge at first but later admitted that "we have no choice. When the US threat of invasion and war appeared imminent, I had to defuse the bomb . . . which was about to explode on the heads of my compatriots and people . . . This however, was not for a reconciliation with America" (Kiernan and Boua, *Peasants and Politics* 182).

Two months after Bowles' visit, Sihanouk wrote a letter to *Le Monde* alleging that Hanoi and Beijing were conspiring to overthrow him. He said, "It is perfectly clear that Asian communism does not permit us any longer to remain neutral" (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 71). On April 4, 1969, four months after Nixon's assumption to the presidency, Sihanouk wrote a letter thanking him for "recognizing and respecting the present frontiers of the Kingdom of Cambodia." Four months later, he again wrote Nixon asking him to visit Cambodia (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 71).⁶

The sudden shift in foreign policy by the Prince was a turning point for both the pro-Western urban elite and the Khmer Rouge. For Sirik Matak and Lon Nol, the leading non-communist oppositionists to Sihanouk, the Prince's rapport with the Americans meant that they were right all along in their desire to reestablish diplomatic ties with Washington. This feeling strengthened their resolve to oust Sihanouk and reorient Cambodia towards the US orbit. For the Khmer Rouge, the redirection in foreign policy was a go-signal for their revolution. For many years now, the initiatives of the Khmer Rouge to wage revolutionary struggle were thwarted by Vietnam and China because they found an important ally in Sihanouk for his support of the communist war effort in South Vietnam. With Sihanouk on the side of the Americans, the Khmer Rouge hoped that the two Asian communist giants would finally support the Khmer revolution.

Rise of the Pro-Western Urban Elite

By the late 1960s, the country's urban elite—some members of the royal family, politicians, bureaucrats, and high military officers—increasingly became dissatisfied and impatient with Sihanouk's governance (Osborne, "King-making in Cambodia" 169). They became critical of Sihanouk's foreign and domestic policies particularly those of the worsening Vietnamese border incursions, the stagnating economy and his tolerance of, or futility in curbing, massive corruption allegedly involving the royal family. They became more and more convinced that the solution to their country's problems lay in removing Sihanouk from power so they themselves could decide their country's future. Although they had always held some degree of power and influence during Sihanouk's time, the difference lay in their newfound economic activism and pro-Western orientation, i.e., to liberalize the economy and to redirect the country's foreign policy towards more cooperation with the United States (Chandler, *The Tragedy* 188; Kirk, "Cambodia's Economic Crisis").

The secret bombing of Cambodia which started in March 1969 did not roll back the Vietnamese troops occupying Cambodian territory as the US military would have wanted. Instead, Vietnamese forces spread deeper into Cambodia. The urban elite, informed of the border violations by the Cambodian officer corps, became alarmed at the situation and blamed Sihanouk for turning a blind eye to these incursions.⁷

By July of 1969, the urban elite were ready to confront Sihanouk at the national assembly. Lon Nol had garnered the most number of votes and became the new head of government.⁸ Lon Nol's new administration, christened "Government of Salvation," was to replace Sihanouk's "Last Chance Government." Sisowath Sirik Matak got the second highest number of votes and was appointed by Lon Nol as his deputy a few days later (Osborne, *Politics and Power* 112).

The 28th National Congress convened soon afterwards. To show his displeasure with Sirik Matak, Sihanouk asked four of his most loyal Cabinet members—Ung Hong Sath, Chuon Saodi, Srey Pong, and Tep Chhieung Keng—to resign before the congress (Chandler, *The Tragedy* 190). The Prince was

hoping that the new government would see it as their loss and hopefully forge a *modus vivendi* with him. But the ploy backfired when Sirik Matak accepted their resignations at once. During the congress, Sihanouk attacked Sirik Matak's policy for the reentry of foreign banks. To show their newfound determination to stand up against Sihanouk, the policy was affirmed by the National Assembly (Sihanouk, *L'Indochine vue de Peking* 103-104; Meyer, *Derriere le sourire khmer* 304-305).

In October, Lon Nol went to France for medical treatment and at the same time confer with Sihanouk who was then also in that country. An accident occurred while the two were cruising in the countryside. With Sihanouk at the wheel, the jeep they were riding overturned. With an injured Lon Nol who could not return immediately to Cambodia, Sirik Matak was left as the acting head of state and free to pursue his economic policies. Matak allowed the reopening of private banks in Cambodia, devalued the riel by almost 70 percent, privatized state factories in trading monopolies, encouraged foreign investments, and seriously considered improving Cambodia's export capabilities. In the words of Milton Osborne, these moves struck "at the heart of Sihanouk's Khmer socialism and at the financial interests of his entourage" (Sihanouk, *My War* 41). Sihanouk's reaction to this embarrassment and humiliation was to remount the throne. He was already planning a lavish ceremony at his installation as king when he was dissuaded by his mother, Queen Kossamak. The Queen flatly rejected the idea arguing that the Prince would make a fool of himself after promising so many times in the past that he would not mount the throne again (Thion and Pomonti, *Des courtisanes aux partisans* 142-143; Meyer, *Derriere le sourire khmer* 302-303; Osborne, *Prince of Light* 207).

The urban elite saw to it that the remaining privileges of Sihanouk, Princess Monique, and "her gang" would be abolished. A month after the Prince left Cambodia for medical treatment abroad, the National Office for Mutual Aid, allegedly a conduit for Sihanouk's largesse, was closed. Money for the National Office for Mutual Aid came from the showing of Sihanouk's films, a percentage from the state casino, and the "voluntary contributions" from government employees which were in turn used to compensate victims

of US bombings, communist depredations, and other hand-outs (Osborne, *Power and Politics* 106).

With his frustrations as a result of the sudden twist of events, and possibly from weariness with governing the country for a long time now, the Prince redirected his time and energies toward his hobbies.

Withdrawal from Political Life

Sihanouk has been fascinated with film production since his early youth. During the last years of French colonial rule in Cambodia, the young king produced and acted in two comic films though these were not exhibited for public viewing (Osborne, *Prince of Light* 177). He indulged in this fascination for film production even when he was the sovereign ruler of his country. Two of his recent films were shown during the World Cinema Centennial Celebrations held in October 1995 in Manila. The first one, done in 1992 in Cambodia after a long exile, depicts the story of a young and idealistic Russian-educated Khmer doctor (played by his son Prince Sihamoni) who volunteered for work in the rural areas to help amputees (mine victims) and other war victims. The second, done in 1995, presumably for the film festival celebrations, is the story of a male deity who fell in love with a beautiful peasant mortal. A higher deity reminds him however, oddly in the form of a long monologue replete with contemporary political phrases like Vietnamese expansionism and Khmer Rouge atrocities and excesses, that he cannot marry the woman lest he dies. Overpowered by passion, the demi-god nevertheless took the girl as his bride and sought the blessings of a wandering *theravadin* who suddenly came out of nowhere. True enough, the demi-god died peacefully on their first night together before the break of dawn.

Reacting to a film starring Peter O'Toole in 1964 entitled *Lord Jim* whose script depicted Cambodia as primitive, Sihanouk took it upon himself to portray his country through motion pictures (Osborne, *Prince of Light* 187).⁹ Between 1966 to 1969, Sihanouk produced and directed, nine films altogether, and acted in some of them. The first of these was *Apsara* (a female deity in Hinduism) whose male lead role was given to Gen. Nhiek Tioulong,

the military's chief of staff (Osborne, *Prince of Light* 181). As the motion picture was set in war time, much of the army's equipment was used in the production. Sihanouk decided to have two versions of the film. One version, intended for showing to socialist countries, would have a speech by Gen. Tioulong denouncing the imperialists while the other one, intended for non-socialist countries, would have that portion excised. To launch *Apsara*, Sihanouk prepared for a "world premiere festival." No foreign guests arrived for the occasion, with the Chinese government apologizing for not being able to send a delegation because of the chaos brought about by the Cultural Revolution (Osborne, *Prince of Light* 182).

Sihanouk tried to picture Cambodia as a center of cinematography by institutionalizing the Phnom Penh International Film Festival in 1968 and 1969. Likewise, he portrayed himself as a master filmmaker for in both festivals, he won the grand prize in the form of a two-kilogram solid gold statue of an *apsara*. In the last film festival, Sihanouk's entry entitled *Crepuscule* (Twilight) was placed in a special category as a lone entry, hence assured of the grand prize. The film's title was very apt for his political career, considering that his hold on power would be over in just four more months.

Three years after his overthrow, Sihanouk, in an interview, defended his filmmaking activities and their contribution to the country, thus: "Oh, there were many people who said that my movies were worthless, in fact that they were awful, that I did not know how to act or use the camera. But I love the movies and what do I care about what they said? I'd answer, 'If nothing else, it helps educate the people'" (Osborne *Prince of Light* 184).

As the sixties drew to a close, it was not only the political situation that was deteriorating but the economic situation as well. There was a serious drought which hampered agricultural production in 1968 and the budget deficit reached 12 percent of the annual budget. Even Sihanouk's lead actor in most of his movies, the army chief Gen. Nhek Tioulong, reported that state-owned factories had run up to debts totaling 150 million riels while the collection of taxes was running six months late (Osborne, *Before Kampuchea* 35). Sihanouk's economic advisers called for reduced expenditures, foreign loans, and "an end once and for all to improvisations, fantasies and prestige

spending” (Meyer, *Derriere le sourire khmer* 284). The Prince did not take it lightly as Son Sann, an able technocrat and his long-time friend, was forced to resign because of differences with him (Osborne, *Prince of Light* 204).

When the sense of urgency to generate revenues finally caught up with Sihanouk, his solution lay in opening up of state casinos. With the casinos raking in profits enough to cover the state’s budgetary deficits, Sihanouk continued living up to his flamboyant reputation by indulging in film-making, haute cuisine, lavish entertainment of foreign guests like Princess Margaret and the President of Niger, and building temples, hospitals, and other infrastructure projects which were named after him or members of the royal family.

The Prince’s last days in power were uncharacteristically Sihanoukian. He was an astute politician during the 1950s and 1960s, who could anticipate the moves of his enemies and make corresponding actions. But by late 1969, Sihanouk was not able to see the impending maelstrom. This was probably due in part to his overestimation of his kingly capacities and probably due to fatigue after ruling the country for such a long time. But whatever the reason, his departure from power changed Cambodian traditional life forever.

The Coup of March 18, 1970

The year 1969 recorded the highest casualties for US troops during the Vietnam War with an estimated 250 Americans killed each week (Harrison, *Endless War* 243). Most of these encounters took place not along the demilitarized zone, where US forces came face to face with North Vietnamese regulars, but along the border with Cambodia where the Ho Chi Minh trail ended. But the US was constrained to attack Vietnamese troops who fled deeper into Cambodia whenever fighting intensified because there they were technically on neutral grounds. But attacking Cambodian territory would have required congressional approval, which would have been impossible to obtain because of the strong anti-war sentiment in the US.

As the fighting intensified, Sihanouk despaired over the presence of Vietnamese troops who were by then violating Cambodian territory with impunity. Sihanouk riposted by bringing it to the attention of the communist world. During his visit to Hanoi in September 1969 to lay to rest Ho Chi Minh, he talked with Premier Pham Van Dong to express his alarm about the problem. Pham Van Dong gave no guarantees. Instead, Pham used the

occasion to complain about Cambodia's incomplete delivery of supplies like rice and medicine which were being ferried to the front from Sihanoukville, Cambodia's only port, by Cambodian troops after having paid in full. When Sihanouk confronted Lon Nol about these "perfectly straightforward commercial transactions" after his arrival in Phnom Penh, Lon Nol was at first evasive but later on denied the accusations (Sihanouk, *My War* 40).

Persistent rumors of a coup were heard in Phnom Penh during Sihanouk's absence in late February 1970. After his medical treatment in France, Sihanouk did not go directly to Phnom Penh. Instead he passed by Moscow and Beijing to try to convince Soviet and Chinese leaders to persuade the Vietnamese to at least moderate their use of Khmer territory as it was almost impossible to make them leave. Yet, Sihanouk's sudden departure from the country on January 7, 1970 was not only due to medical reasons. Neither was it solely to persuade Moscow and Beijing about the problem of the presence of Vietnamese troops. He wanted to leave the country (especially in times of trouble) to prove that he was still the indispensable leader of Cambodia—a tactic he has used several times in the past, the last during the Samlaut Rebellion. The humiliating treatment he received from the urban elite who had captured the National Assembly leadership and who had begun to reverse his policies was too much for Sihanouk. By leaving the problems of the state, presence of Vietnamese troops, and the stagnating economy to Prime Minister Lon Nol and his deputy Sirik Matak, whom he thought were incompetent, he hoped that they would bungle and in turn the people would ask him to lead the government once again:

I thought it would be a salutary lesson for Sirik Matak and his supporters to have a free hand and let them see how well they could solve our economic ills by scrapping my policies. I was convinced that within a few months, Sirik Matak would have so compromised himself through shady financial deals that the nation would be glad to go back to the lines laid down during the first years of independence (Sihanouk, *My War* 43).

However, there is evidence which at least suggests that Sihanouk may have had knowledge of the public disturbances prior to the coup. At most, the Prince may have sanctioned or even planned it with Lon Nol. This tactic

by the Prince to play one force against the other to achieve a certain goal may have been used in order to force the Vietnamese out of Cambodia as he was not able to secure a guarantee from Pham Van Dong. But his opponents used this opportunity or found an opening to stage the coup. Little did he know that he himself would be the victim of his mischief.

After returning from France to consult with Sihanouk, Lon Nol devalued the higher riel notes, much of which were in the possession of the Vietnamese communist forces on the pretext that there were many counterfeits (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 116). As a result, it was estimated that the Vietnamese communists lost around 70 million dollars (Pomonti and Thion, *Des courtisans aux partisans* 110).

Another factor that must be mentioned is the sudden “defection” of Khmer Serei troops based in Thailand and widely believed to be largely supported by the CIA (Girling, *Cambodia* 14). They also fought alongside US and South Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam. This band of Khmer fighters was headed by Son Ngoc Thanh, Sihanouk’s mortal enemy. If Sihanouk could still not persuade the Vietnamese to moderate their use of Khmer territory, he could count on the support of the Khmer Serei in addition to his army. He calculated that Lon Nol and Son Ngoc Thanh, being bitter enemies, would not forge an alliance even in his absence. Beginning in early 1969, small bands of Khmer Serei fighters started pouring into Battambang province. This was during the time that the secret bombing of Cambodia by US planes had begun. As the year wore on, the surrenderees grew in number. For his part, Sihanouk rewarded them with financial remuneration through the National Office of Mutual Aid (Sihanouk, *My War* 39; Chandler, *The Tragedy* 193).

Demonstrations broke out at the embassies of the Provisional Revolutionary Government and North Vietnam on the 11th and again on the 16th of March 1970. The violent demonstrations were unprecedented. Demonstrators entered the embassies, ransacked them, hurled furniture outside the buildings which they burned later (Vickery, *Kampuchea* 16). Both the PRG and the North Vietnamese embassies exercised restraint and remained silent on the matter.

But Sirik Matak and the urban elite had other things in mind. They were now serious in their desire to depose Sihanouk and reverse his two decades-old policies. Sirik Matak cancelled the trade agreement that allowed the Vietnamese from using Sihanoukville port as transshipment point and the purchase of supplies in Cambodia. Lon Nol apologized to the PRO and North Vietnam for the attacks on their embassies but issued a bizarre demand—the withdrawal of all their troops in Cambodia within 72 hours (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 118). What finally drove the urban elite to go on with the coup was their fear that Sihanouk would exact revenge on them for contradicting his economic policies while the Prince was away. Lastly, a secret conversation at the Cambodian embassy in Paris was tape-recorded wherein the Prince threatened to have the leaders of the Government of National Salvation killed upon his return (Chandler, *The Tragedy* 195; Osborne, *Prince of Light* 212).

The rumors of a coup were now widespread in Phnom Penh and the forces loyal to Sihanouk tried to avert them. On the night of March 16, forces loyal to Sihanouk led by Col. Oum Mannorine, Princess Monique's brother-in-law, tried to arrest Lon Nol but were the ones arrested instead (Kirk, *Wider War* 96). They must have thought that Lon Nol, being the Prime Minister and the military chief, was behind the move. But an account provided by two senior aides of Sirik Matak themselves seventeen years after the event disproves this. On the dawn of March 18, Sirik Matak and two companions—Colonels Po Chhon and Seng Sinthay—went to Lon Nol's house for him to sign a document approving Sihanouk's overthrow. Lon Nol initially declined but Sirik Matak threatened to shoot him. Lon Nol eventually signed the document but was in tears.¹⁰ The initial plan called for Sihanouk's assassination but Lon Nol vigorously opposed this. After signing the document, the army moved into position by guarding the airport and patrolling the streets of the capital in anticipation of the Prince's arrival and to prevent any possible demonstrations. Soon after, the National Assembly convened and in an almost unanimous vote (89-3), withdrew its support from Sihanouk. Cheng Heng was named chief of state until such time that an election was held (Kirk, *Wider War* 102).

Meanwhile, Vietnamese troops occupying Cambodia were warned of the impending coup. Their intelligence sources informed them that Prince Sihanouk was under increased American pressure to allow stepped-up bombing of Vietnamese sanctuaries inside Cambodia (Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir* 201). The Americans were looking for a “more formal acquiescence” to their bombings against Vietnamese bases and supply routes (Shaplen, *Time Out* 321). Aside from this, Soviet and Chinese sources with access to the Cambodian government warned the Vietnamese of a possible anti-Sihanouk coup. Such prospects worried the Vietnamese who feared a possible entrapment by US and South Vietnamese forces from the east (in South Vietnam) and Cambodian forces from the west. They drew up contingency plans that would take the PRG/NV forces deeper inside Cambodia particularly in the Cambodian northeast. The NLF would march westward toward Prey Veng province and from there would proceed north to Kratie province where it would set up its headquarters. The movement took place shortly after the coup. Thus, when the American forces attacked Cambodia’s border with Vietnam in search for the elusive PRG/NV in April 1970, their target had already fled more than a month before (Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir* 203-207).

Sihanouk was having lunch in Paris when word came that the North Vietnamese and PRG embassies in Phnom Penh were being attacked by demonstrators. Sihanouk changed his mind about going back immediately to Phnom Penh. Princess Monique, not sensing the critical situation, prevailed upon Sihanouk to visit their children studying in Prague first before flying back to the Cambodian capital (Kissinger, *White House Years* 462).¹¹

Another reason Sihanouk chose to stay out of the country instead of returning home immediately was due to American disinformation efforts. The Central Intelligence Agency, through its Khmer agents, persuaded the Queen Mother to send a telegram to the Prince to assure him that the situation was not so serious as to require his immediate return. The text of the message was never published but Queen Kossamak certainly did send such a message (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 119).¹² Later on, the agency frightened Sihanouk by sending messages intimating that he would be arrested or even assassinated if he returned to Cambodia (Sihanouk, *My War* 54).

Sihanouk learned of the coup while he was being driven to the Moscow airport for his flight to Beijing. Upon arrival at the Chinese capital, Sihanouk was undecided about his next moves but initially thought of going into exile in France. He was met at the Beijing airport by Premier Zhou Enlai who escorted him to the Cambodian embassy (Sihanouk, *My War* 56). Afterwards he was given a letter from Cheng Heng, the newly constituted head of state in Phnom Penh, dismissing him from his position. In disgust, he tore the letter and strode around the room “like a wounded tiger” shouting repeatedly that he must return to Paris (Sihanouk, *L’Indochin* 109; Chandler, *The Tragedy* 199). Later on, he asked for the French ambassador, Etienne Manac’h, and inquired if he could return to his house at Mougins in southern France. The ambassador responded that the French government would be willing to grant him asylum (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 125).

In Phnom Penh, the news of Sihanouk’s overthrow was met with approval by the armed forces, the studentry, and majority of the politicians (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 26, 1970; Osborne, *Politics and Power* 115). The urban elite could now take an active part in the country’s political life which was once monopolized by Sihanouk. Sirik Matak claimed that there was now a semblance of formal democracy unlike in the past when the government and Parliament had been reduced to an “acclamatory role” (Matak, *Reasons for the deposition* 2). Two weeks after the coup, 486 political prisoners were freed by the Government of Salvation (Matak, *Reasons for the deposition* 3). The new regime began transforming the country from a monarchy into a republic by introducing a new constitution, removing the prefix “royal” in all state institutions including the army, and removing his and the Queen Mother’s (Kossamak) huge portraits displayed in public (Allman, “Sealing their own doom” 6).

Cambodia’s neighboring anti-communist neighbors also rejoiced over the news of Sihanouk’s ouster. Thai leaders viewed the overthrow with obvious approval while Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman said that the “right-wing coup in Cambodia is a good sign if it is going to stay” (Allman, “Jittery start” 6).

In Beijing, Zhou Enlai then offered a proposal for Sihanouk to abandon his plan to go into exile and instead fight Lon Nol:

“If you engage firmly in combat, we will help you to be victorious over imperialism. But you should not have illusions: this will be your war, at first, and it will be long, hard, dangerous, sometimes even discouraging . . . But if you are determined, we will be with you . . . Are you ready for it? If you are, we shall win. Think it over. We will meet again in twenty-four hours” (Sihanouk, *L'Indochine* 109-110; Chandler, *The Tragedy* 109).

Western observers who have speculated on Sihanouk's decision offer probable leads as to why he finally decided to join his former enemies in ousting Lon Nol instead of seeking asylum in France. The reasons range from personal revenge to his genuine admiration for the communists' dedication and patriotism.¹³ These may have contributed to making a decision but what ultimately made up his mind was his patriotism. Sihanouk believed that it was his patriotic duty to fight the Phnom Penh regime and that he was the chief rallying point for the resistance in Cambodia (Schier and Schier-Oum, *Talks and Interviews* 12). He also portrayed himself as someone similar to Charles de Gaulle who rallied the French resistance during World War II against the collaborationist Vichy government (Schier and Schier-Oum, *Talks and Interviews* 13).

As we have seen, Sihanouk's immediate reaction after hearing his ouster was to seek asylum in France. He was however persuaded by Zhou Enlai to head the resistance “as a patriot,” but he adamantly told Zhou that he would retire after Lon Nol's fall had been achieved because he was sure the Khmer Rouge would not cede one bit of power to him (Schier and Schier-Oum, *Talks and Interviews* 13). In subsequent interviews, he would hold on to his position and insist that he “would retire to France once Lon Nol was ousted” (Lenart, “Now the Party Game” 8-9).

At the same time, his war against the Lon Nol regime was personal: he wanted to clear his name and restore his honor before he resigned from political life. Asked by a journalist why he went on fighting now that win or lose, the Sihanouk era was allegedly over, the Prince replied:

I cannot possibly end my career on a death sentence pronounced by Lon Nol. I must rehabilitate my name, in the eyes of history and of Cambodia. After independence from France, I was proclaimed a national hero. Then Lon Nol proclaimed me national traitor. After liberation, I will again become a national hero and that's how I want to end my career, at least by an exit, if not glorious, will be honorable (Casella, "Russians don't want" 21).

A year later, Sihanouk knew he made the right decision in not going into a life of exile. He may have enjoyed the treatment accorded to him by the Chinese and the North Vietnamese as the head of the Cambodian resistance. He recalled an incident while strolling along the beach in the French Riviera with his former commander-in-chief Nhiek Thioulong toward the end of the 1960s. One of the bystanders noticed him and said, "Look, there goes Bao Dai. Look how fat and sleek he is. He lives like a grand seigneur and it's you and I who are paying for it" (Sihanouk, *My War* 219). Bao Dai of course was another fallen monarch.¹⁴

China Plays the Sihanouk Card

The Chinese leadership was caught unawares by Sihanouk's sudden departure which dramatically altered the political equation in the Vietnam War. China and Vietnam welcomed an unexpected ally in Sihanouk, yet they were worried that Cambodia would enter the war on the side of the enemy. To repeat, Cambodia played an important, supportive role in the communist war effort in Vietnam. Aside from harboring Vietnamese troops in southern Cambodia, which juts into South Vietnam both by land and the Mekong River, Cambodia was a vital link in supplying communist troops. Likewise, military supplies could also be brought to Vietnamese communist troops by sea from Sihanoukville (Kompong Thorn) which were then ferried by Cambodian military vehicles to the front lines. China was worried that these advantages for the communist war effort would be lost if the next government is hostile.

For the North Vietnamese authorities, the immediate reaction to the coup was one of distraction from the main battlefield which was South

Vietnam. But the coup presented both a challenge and an opportunity. Lon Nol's move complicated Hanoi's plan to launch a new major offensive in South Vietnam. The Marshal would not tolerate Vietnamese communist forces in Cambodia and had asked the help of the United States and South Vietnam to raid enemy positions inside Cambodian territory. But the Vietnamese communists considered his regime weak and susceptible to insurrection. For the Vietnamese, the answer lay in extending the war in Cambodia and supporting the anti-Lon Nol forces inside the country. It had the added advantage of increasing Vietnamese troop presence in Cambodia and perhaps a greater role in shaping the political future of the country that would be more favorable to Vietnamese interests (Duiker, *China and Vietnam* 53).

Initial Hesitation

The coup came at a difficult time for China as it was reassessing its relations with the US. Since Richard Nixon assumed the presidency in 1969, the US had been sending peace overtures to China. One reason was to get China's help in ending the Vietnam War. The other was that the US wanted to strike a strategic alliance with China to counter the Soviets whom American policy makers deemed as the more likely enemy in the long-term. Moderates within the Chinese leadership were indeed looking into that direction as they saw the Soviet Union as the more dangerous enemy. Radicals however believed that the coup, allegedly hatched by the US, only showed the evil nature of US imperialism.¹⁵ The debate ended in April of 1970 when combined US and South Vietnamese forces raided Cambodia in search of the COSVN (Central Office, South Vietnam), the general headquarters of the Vietcong.

As the FUNK was still too militarily and politically weak to pose a threat to the Lon Nol regime, the Chinese tried to strike a deal with the new government on the Vietnamese use of the border areas. Thus, while they were organizing the Khmer resistance against Lon Nol, they were also laying down another track in its support for Vietnam in the war: that of getting the acquiescence of the Lon Nol government's accommodation of Vietnamese communist troops inside Cambodia (Isaacs, *Without Honor* 201).¹⁶

According to Gen. Sak Suthsakan, the newly-named armed forces commander, Chinese emissaries came to Phnom Penh a few weeks after the coup. In exchange for recognition of the new government, the Chinese were demanding permission for them to continuously supply Vietnamese communist troops inside their territory, allow the Vietnamese to keep using their sanctuaries, and propaganda support to the Vietnamese troops in the form of government statements. The Chinese envoys added that they were willing to treat the matter between Sihanouk and the Lon Nol government as nothing more than an “internal affair with which Beijing would not concern itself” (Isaacs, *Without Honor* 213; Becker, *When the War* 132).

This meant that China was willing to drop Sihanouk and not support an opposition force if the Lon Nol government was only willing to tolerate or turn a blind eye on the Vietnamese troops. China and Vietnam were willing to forego Sihanouk in order to keep the old arrangement intact rather than coping with the uncertainties of a new realignment of forces in the war.

The Chinese envoys persisted for weeks to obtain a favorable reply. Even when the Sihanouk-initiated Summit Conference of the Indochinese Peoples got underway from the 24th to the 25th of April 1970 in southern China, China did not send an official delegation. However, the American invasion of the Cambodian border areas on April 30 ended this diplomatic overture. China still did not break relations with Lon Nol until May 4, 1970. Only a day later did Prince Sihanouk announce the formation of his government-in-exile, the GRUNK that would be based in Beijing for the remainder of the war (Becker, *When the War* 133).

Similarly, Penn Nouth, Sihanouk’s chief aide, appealed to Lon Nol and Sirik Matak in a radio broadcast in Beijing on April 1, 1970 to “relinquish state and military power and to invite the Prince father to return to steer the state, to restore the balance of forces between the free world and the communist camp.”¹⁷ Such a broadcast could have been done only on China’s prodding and reflected China’s policy during this period.

Adjusting China's Two-Track Policy

China maintained a two-track policy which it had always used in Cambodia to promote its interests in the region. Later on, this two-track policy would pit Sihanouk against the Khmer Rouge until the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements in November 1989, with a pause only during the Democratic Kampuchea period.¹⁸ China played host to Sihanouk generously, and even lavishly. China played the Sihanouk card to the fullest extent possible and accorded him the honors and privileges befitting a head of state.

After disembarking from Premier Kosygin's personal plane in Beijing on March 19, Sihanouk was met by Zhou Enlai who embraced him and said, "You remain the Head of State. The only one. We will never recognize another." In addition, all the members of the diplomatic corps, totaling 41 countries with representation in China, were on hand to welcome him and his party (Sihanouk, *My War* 29). Sihanouk was likewise impressed that he could summon Pham Van Dong and other ranking Vietnamese officials to Beijing within a few hours after a request had been made. A day after his arrival in Beijing, the Vietnamese Premier arrived for a working breakfast meeting. He greeted Sihanouk with fervor and said, "From now on we are comrade-in-arms. We are proud to have you in our camp in the struggle against US imperialism. How can we help?" (Sihanouk, *My War* 30; Chandler, *The Tragedy* 200). Sihanouk replied that as the Cambodians would provide the necessary manpower and the Chinese the arms, they needed military advisors or cadres to train his supporters. Sihanouk also asked support for a "summit conference of Indochinese peoples" as a precondition for leading the alliance. Pham Van Dong promised to tell his defense minister Vo Nguyen Giap to send a couple of thousand instructors.

Three days later, on March 23, Sihanouk announced the formation of a National Khmer United Front (or FUNK: Front Uni National Khmer) against the newly-installed Lon Nol-Cheng Heng government. In his speech, he "dissolved" this government on grounds of high treason and announced the formation of a national liberation army (the Cambodian People's Liberation Armed Forces or CPLAF) whose activities "were to be waged in common with other popular and anti-imperialist forces of brother countries." He

also enjoined all anti-American elements, regardless of political predilection, to flock to the banner of the new government.¹⁹ Among those states which recognized the FUNK were China, North Vietnam, the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, North Korea, Yugoslavia, Romania, Albania, Cuba, Algeria, and several other Arab and African countries (Sihanouk, *War and Hope* 32).

The Chinese refurbished the former French embassy villa to serve as headquarters for the FUNK (aptly located at the Anti-Imperialist Avenue). The adjoining tenement, a whole block, was given as accommodations to FUNK personnel. The Front's daily needs, including transportation which consisted of a fleet of cars, were also taken care of by the Chinese government. Sihanouk's compound was furnished with a heated swimming pool, a rarity in Beijing in those days. Zhou Enlai gave long audiences to the Prince. And Zhou's wife accompanied the royal couple for outings to seaside resorts on several occasions (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 256).

In order to popularize the resistance against the Lon Nol regime, the Front was given free use of Radio Beijing to broadcast Sihanouk's messages to the Khmer people. These ranged from critiques of Phnom Penh, Saigon and Washington, GRUNK operations, to news of support given the united front by China and North Vietnam (Sheldon, *War and Politics* 71). Sihanouk's hours-long harangues against the Phnom Penh regime were "non-stop virtuoso performances" and became "compelling entertainment especially for rural Cambodians in the absence of theatres and dances" (Osborne, *Prince of Light* 179).

The Chinese did not forget either that their guest was a gourmand, a lover of haute cuisine. He had at his disposal nine chefs who prepared Cambodian, French, Chinese, and other international dishes. His table was one of the best in Beijing, loaded with gooseberries, guinea fowl, and *foie gras* that were gifts to him from his good friend Kim Il-sung (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 256).²⁰

In contrast, the Khmer Rouge were not accorded such hospitality. They were billeted at the Friendship Hotel which was located several kilometers from the Front's headquarters. As they were not provided with cars by the

Chinese government, they had to use public transportation in going about their daily activities (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 255).

There were even occasions, according to the Prince when, while taking a walk in Beijing's parks, he would be approached by people who recognized him and would tell him: "You are rendering a great service to our country, to Asia and the world. You helped the Vietnamese resistance heroes. Now the Cambodian people have joined in the fight and you are their leader" (Sihanouk, *My War* 32). If indeed these Beijing strollers genuinely recognized Sihanouk and believed in what they said could be questionable. But whatever, these incidents served their purpose—to make Sihanouk feel that he is the undisputed leader of the Khmer resistance.

The Chinese disapproved the idea of setting up two headquarters for the front—one in Beijing and one in Moscow. Sihanouk broached this idea for practical considerations. Moscow, where he intended to stay longer, was to be the diplomatic capital as it was nearer Europe and the United States; and Beijing, as it was nearer Vietnam and Cambodia, would be the Front's operational headquarters (Agence France-Presse dispatch, March 24, 1970). This plan was shelved, however, as it was realized that the not-so-warm relations between China and the Soviet Union might result in enmity. As it turned out, Moscow recognized the Lon Nol regime only a few months after the coup.

On May 1, 1970, Sihanouk was given a special audience by Mao Zedong at Tiananmen Square. This meeting could be considered as the affirmation of China's policy towards Sihanouk and Cambodia. When Sihanouk told Mao that the united front had burdened China, Mao said: "Burden us some more, ask for more . . . the more adherents you have, the more I will be happy." Then to Sihanouk's surprise, Mao justified his establishment of state casinos which had been roundly condemned in Cambodia, saying that "it is better to have an alternative source of finance than accept US aid." When Sihanouk raised the issue of repayment for the Chinese arms, Mao replied, "We are not arms merchants . . . for some services you can call it a loan and there can be some bookkeeping—but not for arms" (Sihanouk, *My War* 207; New China News Agency dispatch, August 17, 1970).

The talks between the two leaders lasted more than an hour after the evening fireworks display should have started. When Mao's aides reminded him that everyone, including the diplomatic corps, was waiting for him to start the celebrations, he dismissed them, saying that they were having an important conversation. Pleased with the attention and importance accorded him, Sihanouk returned the compliment. When Mao urged him to be a communist and study Marx and Lenin, he replied, "But Monsieur le President, I prefer to read the works of Mao Tse-tung" (Sihanouk, *L'Indochine* 162).

On May 5, 1970, Sihanouk announced the formation of the Royal Government of the National Union of Kampuchea (or GRUNK). Whereas the FUNK was the national united front of all anti-Lon Nol groups, the GRUNK was the legal organization of the resistance movement. The FUNK was dominated by the Khmer Rouge whose officers were mostly inside Cambodia doing the spadework for the resistance. On the other hand, the GRUNK was staffed with mostly Sihanoukists and was involved in popularizing the resistance at the international level. The GRUNK's political program was drafted by Thioun Mumm, a dedicated Communist Party of Kampuchea member who had been living in France since 1955. He was sent by the party to "oversee" Sihanouk and provide the intellectual ballast to the Front's headquarters in Beijing. The son and grandson of powerful court officials during Sihanouk's time, Thioun Mumm fitted well into Sihanouk's retinue. He was by then the only Khmer *polytechnicien*, or graduate of France's polytechnic university (Pomonti and Thion, *Des courtisans* 83).

Giving his imprimatur to the Cambodian resistance movement, Mao Zedong made a public declaration on May 20, 1970 supporting "the fighting spirit of Samdech Norodom Sihanouk, the Head of Cambodia" (Sihanouk, *My War* 210). This was official confirmation on the part of China that it was now placing its bet on Sihanouk and the Front as far as the Cambodian conflict was concerned.

Yet Sihanouk remained ambivalent about his future post-war role. He knew that he must work with the Khmer Rouge to oust Lon Nol from power despite their past differences. But he warned: "Once the Khmer Rouge wins,

I resign. I can't cooperate with them. I will reside in Siem Reap and serve as a purely nominal chief of state of Cambodia . . . only because the resistance forces in Cambodia, particularly the 'Marxists', insisted that I do so" (Poole, "Cambodia in 1971" n2).

Internal Developments After the Coup

Sihanouk's call to arms, as contained in his March 23 speech, was well received by Cambodia's rural populace. Several thousand Khmers commandeered trucks and buses from rubber plantations and tried to get to Phnom Penh to show their support for Sihanouk. They were however stopped at the city's approaches and were fired upon by paramilitary units who killed about a hundred. There were demonstrations also in the provinces of Takeo and Kampot. In Kompong Cham, Lon Nil, Lon Nol's brother who owned a rubber plantation in the area, was hacked to death. Such was the fate also of two members of the National Assembly who had been sent to negotiate with the demonstrators. Afterwards, the demonstrators burned the local courthouse (Chandler, *The Tragedy* 202).

Khmer Rouge cadres played tapes of Sihanouk's speech, urging peasants to join them if they wanted Sihanouk restored to power. On April 6, many Cambodians were surprised when the three former ministers who were rumored to have been killed by Sihanouk—Khieu Samphan, Hou Youn, and Hu Nim—suddenly announced their support for the Front. This was their first public announcement since 1967. Soon CPK cadres in Cambodia stopped attacking Sihanouk and started pointing out that he was Chairman of the Front (Frieson, "Revolution and Rural Response" 37-42).

In July 1970, Sihanouk and his family were put on trial in Phnom Penh. Sihanouk was condemned to death and stripped of his citizenship for "inciting the communists to commit aggression and inciting Cambodian soldiers to join the enemy." His wife Monique was given a life sentence. Objections to the charges, like the court's lack of jurisdiction and his immunity from suit as head of state when he allegedly committed those crimes, were nullified. To add insult to injury, his former enemy Son Ngoc Thanh was named counselor by his new-found enemy Lon Nol (Osborne, "Effacing the God-King"

73-75). Sihanouk's hatred for the Lon Nol regime grew to such an extent that a proposed negotiated settlement in the future would remain impossible.

Racial enmity between Khmers and the *yuons*²¹ reached a high point after the coup. Using anti-Vietnamese hysteria as a rallying point to solidify Khmer nationalism, the Lon Nol government supported pogroms of Vietnamese living in Cambodia, particularly in the southwest (Lenart, "The third phase" 17-18).

In spite of the mass appeal of Sihanouk's call to arms, the organizational structure of the Front was still skeletal by the middle part of 1970. It was the Vietnamese communists and the Khmers working closely with them who organized the revolutionary administration at the district, sub-district, and village levels. Some of the surviving Khmer Rouge cadres recalled that:

An assembly was first called by FUNK cadres in each village to announce the establishment of a new government which would be constituted through elections. All the candidates were local residents and none were FUNK or Khmer Rouge members. The newly-elected village chief was empowered to choose the remainder of his staff—a deputy, a secretary, and commissioners for economics, culture and health and social welfare (Kiernan, *How Pol Pot* 316).

But majority of rural Khmers at that time were sympathetic to Sihanouk. Their sympathy remained even when the Khmer Rouge was denigrating the Prince later in the war ("Sihanouk's campaign" 21-22). And it was the nationalist supporters of Sihanouk who were prepared to work with the Vietnamese communists and who filled most of the positions in local rural administration. It was from these ranks that the Vietnamese communists and their Khmer partners recruited members for the Front for military training. They were later christened *Khmer Rumdoh* or Liberation Khmers by Lon Nol, or sometimes they were called Sihanoukists (Thu-huong, *Khmer-Viet relations* 68). Afterwards, when the Khmer Rouge-Vietnamese rivalry intensified, this group together with the Khmer Vietminh²² were called the *Third Force* by the Khmer Rouge. This was indicative on the part of the Khmer Rouge that it saw the Sihanoukists (and Sihanouk as well) and the Khmer Vietminh as enemies of the revolution. Thu-huong Nguyen Vo suggests that

the Vietnamese organized the Khmer Rumdoh as a result of the agreements reached between Sihanouk and Pham Van Dong in Beijing immediately after the coup (*Khmer-Viet relations* 70). But the Vietnamese had other things in mind: they wanted to use the Sihanoukists to counter Pol Pot's influence in the rural areas.

The Front was gaining victories steadily against the forces of Lon Nol. Militarily, Lon Nol's forces, even with South Vietnamese and American support, were no match against the battle-hardened North Vietnamese and NLF troops who were doing most of the fighting in Cambodia. The strength of the Front also increased dramatically. In September 1970, there were 20 Khmer battalions and five mixed ones (Khmer and Vietnamese) with a total strength of around 15,000 troops. By early 1971, the Front had already 12 well-trained regiments with a total strength of 125,000, probably inclusive of militia forces (Kirk, "Revolution and Political Violence" 89). With their victory over Lon Nol's forces after the Chenla I operation, the Khmer Rouge steadily gained the upper hand and never lost it until the remainder of the war. Named after a semi-legendary kingdom, the operation was conducted in October 1971 to relieve government troops besieged in Kompong Thom. They were able to enter Kompong Thom only after the enemy withdrew but not without heavy losses. Lon Nol declared Chenla 1 a success and organized an even bigger expedition, Chenla 2, to drive away the Vietnamese from Cambodia once and for all. It proved to be a decisive rout.

The republican army was never able to launch an offensive again after this defeat. However, the political war had already been won in the countryside by the Front. But such was not the case for the Khmer Rouge who believed that Sihanouk was the main enemy of the revolution instead of US imperialism.

The Rise of the Khmer Rouge

At this point, it would be useful to distinguish between the tendencies, or factions, present within the Khmer Rouge organization during the anti-Lon Nol resistance period.

The first tendency consisted of members of the so-called Paris Group, or those who were able to pursue higher education in Paris. Its members included Pol Pot, Ieng Sary and their wives—the sisters Khieu Thirith and Ponnary—Khieu Samphan, and Son Sen. These young intellectuals wanted to build Kampuchea rapidly into a developed industrial country with great emphasis on national defense. This could be done, they felt, if there was a strong agricultural component and a vast reserve of labor drawn from a mobilized peasantry. Essential to this formula, they believed, was the militant and selfless patriotism of the peasant youth. Like Lon Nol, they believed in Khmer (or national) chauvinism—i.e., superiority of the Khmers over the “yuons” and other peoples. David Chandler referred to them as the CPK Center.²³ In this group, Pol Pot was considered the leader, Khieu Samphan the ideologue, and Ieng Sary the implementor.

The second tendency, sometimes called the revolutionary independents, included leaders from the Khmer-Chinese Friendship Association such as Hu Nim, Phouk Chhay, and Tiv Ol. Like the first group, they were well-educated and were also attracted by the “mass democracy” ideology of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. They were committed to rapid and radical social changes and regarded Vietnam as revisionist. But whereas they saw themselves clearly as part of an international revolutionary movement, Pol Pot’s group did not. The CPK Center insisted on sending one of their members, Ieng Sary, to Beijing as it feared that China might become too close to members of the Khmer-Chinese Friendship Association.

The third group, the most numerous at this point, was composed of veterans of the Kampuchean communist movement. They shared a long revolutionary experience dating back to the *Pracheachon* days in the 1950s and most came from modest backgrounds. They included the likes of Heng Samrin, Penn Sovan, Keo Moni, So Phim, Chou Chet, and Non Suon. They were attracted by the Vietnamese socialist model and shared Hanoi’s view of the need for a coordinated Indochina-wide struggle for independence and socialism. Like the second group, they saw the struggle in Kampuchea as part of an international struggle. Hou Youn, who straddled the third group and the “revolutionary independents,” eventually ended up joining the latter

group and was killed by the CPK Center as early as 1975 (Kiernan *Peasant and Politics* 215).

While the last group saw US imperialism as the main enemy, the first and second groups believed that it was Sihanouk who was the number one enemy of the revolution.

Sometime in July 1971, the Khmer Rouge held an important congress in Phnom Santhuk, near Pol Pot's headquarters in the Northern Zone. The significance of this meeting lies in the fact that it was during the 1971-1973 period that the Khmer Rouge launched their national democratic revolution. The collectivization of Cambodia's farms and the necessary adjustments to the social structure required of this objective, which became a national policy during the Democratic Kampuchea period, was a direct result of this congress. But there were two other developments, even more important than the decision to collectivize. The first was the decision to send Ieng Sary to Beijing to replace Thioun Mumm as the Front's liaison officer which in reality was meant to check Sihanouk. The second was the adoption as a matter of policy the elimination of the so-called third force—Sihanoukists and the Khmer Vietminh. In retrospect, the Khmer Rouge's 1971 Congress ended the honeymoon period for all the forces within the Front and their Vietnamese allies. For Pol Pot and the first faction (or the CPK Center), it was now time to assert themselves and take over the leadership of the resistance from other forces within the Front.

The two-week congress was attended by some sixty members of the Kampuchean communist party. It included Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Vorn Vet, Non Suon, Ney Sarann, Urn Neng, Chou Chet, So Phim, Son Sen, Ta Mok, Khieu Samphan, Hou Yuon, Hu Nim, and some ethnic minority representatives. A new set of elected members to the Central Committee consisting of about thirty members was chosen—more than double the size of the previous committee. Khieu Samphan became a new member while Hu Nim and Hou Yuon became candidate members. None of the Khmer Vietminh won a seat while Keo Meas, a long-time member of the party, lost his seat in the central committee. The name Communist Party of Kampuchea, provisionally adopted in 1966, now became official (Kiernan, *How Pol Pot* 327).

For a whole day, Son Sen read the resolutions on the economy which meant collectivization of land, moving people out of towns, elimination of markets, among others. But the resolutions were criticized heavily by those not belonging to the first faction. Hou Yuon and Hu Nim were against collectivization and were advocating mutual aid teams or cooperatives.²⁴ It was during this meeting that Hou Yuon dared to scold Pol Pot.

Ieng Sary's mission to Beijing was to make sure that Sihanouk followed the dictates of the party. Designated as "Special Representative of the Interior," he had the task to make sure that Sihanouk did not undermine the image of a united front fighting against Lon Nol or, as an observer wrote, to make sure that the "hall of mirrors did not collapse" (Becker, *When the war* 215). Unlike Thioun Mumm who was diplomatic and accorded Sihanouk some degree of respect, Ieng Sary was, in Sihanouk's opinion, rigid, dogmatic, and personally offensive. For a time, the two contained their differences but in 1973, Sihanouk, during a visit to Algeria, commented publicly that certain personalities within the Khmer Rouge, particularly those that were around him, were "Stalinists" (*New York Times* August 12, 1973). For his part, Ieng Sary at one time became vocal about his feelings, as well as the Khmer Rouge's intent, on Sihanouk. "Sihanouk is one of those aspects of Cambodian tradition, like Buddhism and the monarchy, which we believe unnecessary for the larger union. In the future, we will phase out those aspects we do not consider to be progressive and revolutionary."²⁵

To get even with Ieng Sary's abrasiveness, Sihanouk played a joke on the "special representative" by borrowing *risque* or slightly pornographic films from the French embassy. He then summoned Ieng Sary to watch those films. Sary could not resist the invitation because of protocol. When his guests had left after the film showing, the Prince broke into wild laughter and told his aides, "Ieng Sary would have to undergo a terrible self-criticism tomorrow" (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 218). But Ieng Sary was successful in putting a leash on the Prince. In an interview given by Sihanouk five years after his exile, he complained bitterly at how he was treated by the Khmer Rouge:

During the five years of my stay in Peking, I had no say in anything, none at all—I even did not know what agreements had been entered into between

GRUNK and other countries, though I was the head of state! It is only through Zhou Enlai that I heard of the existence of such agreements. Even my Prime Minister, Penn Nouth, had been forbidden by the Khmer Rouge to keep me informed of the agreements entered into by the government . . . Those five years I passed in Peking were an unprecedented abasement and degradation (Schier, *Interviews* 14).

But months before the congress decided to purge the Sihanoukists from the ranks of the Front, the Khmer Rouge had already begun downplaying the role of Sihanouk. An undated party circular stated that, “with regard to Prince Sihanouk, it is not necessary to display his picture. All achievements have been gained by our people’s armed forces, not by Sihanouk. We should not deny his contribution flatly, but should tactfully explain to the people that the success was not due to Sihanouk, but it is due to our party” (Chandler, *The Tragedy* 217).

Neutralizing the Sihanoukists was done gradually. After the party congress, the party policy was to win them over. A case in point was Region 25 which was located in the Eastern zone close to the Vietnamese border. It was not a Khmer Rouge area. Vorn Vet, one of the Khmer Rouge’s highest leaders, supported the rise of his protege Non Suon as regional Party Secretary over that of the Hanoi-trained So Phum. Vorn Vet’s instructions to his loyal men were: “Don’t take action, it could endanger the war effort. Draw them over, and decide later . . . Wait for independence, and then we’ll settle that. Now we must instruct them to remain with the revolution and fulfill their tasks according to their capabilities. Don’t let the Vietnamese draw them over.” (Kiernan, *How Pol Pot* 318). Things came to a head between the two contending cadres. To resolve the conflict, Non Suon offered So Phum to be his deputy; the latter declined. After a few months, So Phum abandoned the resistance: he crossed the Mekong and disappeared in the Eastern Zone (Kiernan, *How Pol Pot* 333). But Vorn Vet was politically more sophisticated in handling the Sihanoukists. In other areas, members of the Front wearing Sihanouk badges, presumably Sihanoukists, were executed by roving Khmer Rouge bands. It was in late 1973 after the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops and the cessation of US bombings that the Khmer Rouge embarked on the

execution of those forces still loyal to Sihanouk as a matter of policy. Fearing execution and having no refuge to turn to, thousands of Sihanoukists surrendered to the Lon Nol regime in 1974. An initial batch of 742 Sihanoukists from Region 37 surrendered on March 1974. They proposed to bring in 10,000 more Sihanoukists if they could be allowed to fight the Khmer Rouge. The Lon Nol government however did not follow up on the offer for lack of trust (Thu-huong, *Khmer-Viet relations* 75).

As for the Khmer-Vietminh, many of these technically-competent cadres were transferred to menial jobs like growing pepper, raising hogs, and supervising cattle after the Khmer Rouge had finished using them to train their forces. And in the liberated areas where Vietnamese communist presence was strong, the Khmer Rouge organized large-scale demonstrations. The demonstrators did not come from the local populace who were on good terms with the Vietnamese. They were hill-tribe people coming from the Northeast, Pol Pot's stronghold (Chandler, *Brother Number One* 97).

The 1973 Visit to the Liberated Areas

Isolated in Beijing, Sihanouk wanted to visit Cambodia to rally the people around him. He wanted to resume his contact with the Sihanoukists to regain power in the coalition. In addition, he wanted to show the world that he was still in charge of the Khmer resistance; to gain international support for the Front and eventually a seat in the United Nations (Dalby, "Four fangs" 11). But the Khmer Rouge would not approve of it, citing security reasons for the FUNK's nominal head. But Sihanouk pleaded with China and North Vietnam. China persuaded the Khmer Rouge to accede to the request while Vietnam did the actual preparations for the visit (Smith, "Cambodia" 72-79). It was time for both China and North Vietnam to demonstrate to the outside world that the Prince was indeed on top of the resistance movement.

In early February of 1973, Sihanouk, accompanied by his wife and Ieng Sary, left southern China silently for a tour of Cambodia's liberated areas. Accompanied by an entourage of 150 Vietnamese, including an ambulance truck equipped to perform surgical operations, they travelled aboard eight Soviet-made jeeps down the Ho Chi Minh Trail for eight days (Chandler, *The*

Tragedy 247). At night, they were housed at pre-arranged “very pretty little chalets” complete with plumbing (Sihanouk, *My War* 87). The royal entourage experienced the ferocity of US bombings first-hand and was shocked to know the extent of the damage it had caused.

Upon reaching the Lao-Cambodia border, they were met by Hu Nim and Son Sen. Two days later, they were met by Khieu Samphan and the “Chief of the Army” Pol Pot. After two more days, the royal entourage stopped at Phnom Koulen, north of the Angkorian ruins and were met by Hou Yuon and Khieu Ponnary (Pol Pot’s wife) after fifteen days on the road. They stayed in a house specially for them. It likewise included a study room, a little salon, and a curtain separating these from the bedroom; there was even a carpet on the floor, curtains in the windows, and a big silver bowl containing water. “Truly, we are spoilt by our brothers in the interior . . . I would love to be able to stay here with Samdech until liberation!”²⁶

After his tour of the liberated areas, Sihanouk embarked on an eleven-nation tour in the Middle East and Africa to seek diplomatic support for the Front. The Front aimed at unseating the Lon Nol regime from the United Nations and being recognized as the true representative of the Khmer nation. By doing so, the Front would have further isolated the Lon Nol regime and severed a crucial factor legitimizing the Phnom Penh government—that of international recognition. This Sihanouk did with panache. But Sihanouk also used his travels abroad to seek for a negotiated settlement to the war which was contrary to the Khmer Rouge position of a military victory. For the Khmer Rouge stood to lose in an open political atmosphere such as the coalition government that a negotiated settlement seemed to imply.

The Search for a Negotiated Settlement

I am too weak to be conciliatory.

—President Charles de Gaulle’s reply to Prime Minister Winston Churchill when chastised for being too intransigent during trade negotiations between the two countries in the 1940s.

Even though China was playing the Sihanouk card to the hilt in the war against the Lon Nol government, Sihanouk was still wary of Chinese motives especially in 1972 and 1973. It was a time when China was reassessing its strategic relationship with that of the United States. Sihanouk was preoccupied with the warming relations between the US and China and worried that China might prod him and the resistance to come up with a negotiated settlement that would include the Lon Nol-Sirik Matak group in a coalition government.

On the other hand, the US thought that Sihanouk was overly influenced by the communists. Washington did not want to negotiate with Sihanouk and the communists unless there was a clear sign of a military advantage for the Lon Nol regime. The US became open to the “controlled solution” only in early 1975, which was by then too late.

As early as the summer of 1972, Zhou Enlai told the Americans through Henry Kissinger of China’s desire to see a negotiated settlement in Cambodia. The premise given by Zhou to the Cambodian settlement problem was that a

“completely red Cambodia would result in even greater problems” (Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* 343). Kissinger could not agree more. However, he did not understand the dynamics involved. He concluded that it would spell doom for Sihanouk and assure Hanoi’s hegemony over Indochina (Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* 347).

The Americans, particularly Kissinger and Nixon, thought that since the Vietnamese were doing most of the fighting in Cambodia and supplying the insurgents, the Vietnamese communists could bring the Khmer insurgents to the negotiating table. At the conclusion of the Paris peace talks, Kissinger claimed that the Vietnamese were open to receiving US aid in the postwar period, i.e., after the Americans would have withdrawn from Vietnam (Kissinger, *White House Years* 1412). This being the case, the Americans thought they could use the aid to influence the outcome of any negotiations to the war in Cambodia on terms that they saw fit, one of which was the inclusion of Lon Nol and his group in any coalition government that might arise.

Chinese and Vietnamese efforts at persuading the Front for parallel peace talks with the Lon Nol regime were initially futile. Sihanouk stubbornly refused the condition imposed by the US that negotiations must be between the two warring parties—the Front and the Lon Nol regime. This was the American position until late 1974 when the Lon Nol regime was on the verge of collapse. For Sihanouk, there was no way for him to negotiate with those he considered traitors. Negotiations could only commence once the “seven traitors”—Lon Nol, Sirik Matak, Cheng Heng, Long Boret, In Tam, Sosthene Fernandez, and Son Ngoc Thanh—were out of the country along with another condition—the cessation of US saturation bombings of Cambodia (Girling, “The Resistance” 549-563). For the Khmer Rouge, the pains of solving an Indochina-wide conflict which proved disadvantageous for Cambodia as what happened during the 1954 Geneva Agreements were still embedded in their memory and thus would aim nothing less than win the war independently from Vietnam.

On October 28, 1972, two days after Vietnam announced publicly the draft agreement of the Paris peace agreements, Sihanouk went to Hanoi to

secure from the Vietnamese a joint statement affirming that “the war of each Indochinese country should be settled by its own people . . . which is a sacred and inalienable right” (Chanda, “Battle for Hanoi’s Mind” 8-9; New China News Agency dispatch, October 30, 1972). When he returned to Beijing, the Prince announced over the radio that the “Cambodian people would never compromise, hold talks or enter into any ceasefire with US imperialism and its allies . . . and that the insurgents would launch stronger attacks against Lon Nol and his associates—the evil souls of President Nixon’s foul doctrine—and trample them underfoot” (New China News Agency dispatch, November 7, 1972).

As US involvement in Vietnam drew to a close at the end of January 1973, the Lon Nol government reluctantly offered the Front a bilateral ceasefire agreement as a result of US prodding (Porter, “America’s Engagement” 213). The Front’s reply was both swift and wrathful. It branded the ceasefire proposal as a “conjurer’s trick to mislead national and international public opinion.” It also demanded

the total, definitive and unconditional cessation of bombing and strafing by US aircraft and all other acts of aggression, the withdrawal from Cambodia of all US military and civilian personnel, the cessation of all US support and aid to the fascist Phnom Penh regime, and the total elimination of the entire traitors’ clique of Lon Nol and Sirik Matak (Pfeiffer, “Phyrric ploy” 522).

Fearing a backlash in the negotiation efforts, China and Vietnam tried to persuade the Front to adopt a more conciliatory tone. As a result, Sihanouk was pressured to announce that there “was no question of his government’s signing joint military and political ceasefire and peace agreements with the Washington and Phnom Penh governments” (Duiker, *Vietnam and China* 14-15). Sihanouk also agreed to meet Kissinger in Beijing in time for his visit to pave the way for the resumption of Sino-American diplomatic relations.

It was Chinese deputy foreign minister Chiao Kuan-hua, while having dinner with Kissinger at the Century Club in New York in March 1972, who raised the possibility of a meeting between the two leaders in Beijing. This time, it was Kissinger who was intransigent. He stated that, “I would

have been interested in a meeting with Sihanouk to arrange a cease-fire, but negotiations with him could not succeed so long as he was titular head of the Communist forces insisting on total victory” (Kissinger, *White House Years* 1414). Other efforts to arrange a meeting between Kissinger and Sihanouk became futile. Kissinger refused to meet Sihanouk unless a military stalemate could be achieved to give the Americans and the Lon Nol regime a vantage point in the negotiations. After being snubbed by Kissinger, Sihanouk decided to leave China in time for Kissinger’s arrival and secretly slipped into Cambodia to visit the liberated areas.

With Vietnam in their minds, the Americans wanted to produce a military stalemate before any negotiations could begin. At this point, the FUNK had the military upper hand and the Cambodian army on the defensive. For Kissinger, failure to produce a stalemate in the battlefield could only mean intransigence on the part of Sihanouk and the FUNK at the negotiating table, or worse spurning American peace proposals. But such a stalemate was premised on sustained air support, or massive B-52 bombings, and continuous flow of military supplies in order for it to succeed (Poole, “Cambodia” 79).

There were efforts in 1973 for a negotiated settlement even after the Paris peace agreements had been signed. Upon Sihanouk’s return from his visit to Cambodia’s liberated areas, the Chinese welcomed him back triumphantly. In a press conference and banquet, he said that American claims that North Vietnam was still fueling the war were untrue and that the resistance was no longer receiving aid. He criticized “peace-loving” countries that sought to impose a ceasefire in Cambodia and American peace proposals that involved the partition of the country.²⁷

Towards the end of the banquet, Zhou Enlai approached French ambassador Etienne Manac’h’s table and pulled him aside. He told Manac’h that the longer the war in Cambodia continued, the more extreme and exacting would be the final victory be. He asked the French to persuade Kissinger of this since they were in the best position to explain the reality of the situation to Washington. In the absence of diplomatic relations between the US and China, the French embassy had been the Americans’ listening post in China.

Central to the search for a negotiated settlement in Cambodia was the French ambassador to China, Etienne Manac'h. Although Sihanouk used the media to convey his thoughts to the outside world, his principal contact was through his personal friend Manac'h. Etienne Manac'h was an able career diplomat but had earned the ire of the Soviet Union and the United States for his uncompromising decisions. In the early fifties, he was expelled from Czechoslovakia when he made plain his dislike of Soviet brutality after the Soviet invasion. In 1966, he drafted President Charles de Gaulle's speech in Phnom Penh praising Indochinese neutrality that infuriated the Johnson administration. As a result of his views, he was always regarded with some suspicion in Washington even after he became head of the Asia Department of the Quai d'Orsay (the French Foreign Ministry). In 1968, he played a vital role in setting up the first secret round of talks between the US and North Vietnam. When he became ambassador to China the following year, he won the admiration of the entire diplomatic corps and Zhou Enlai himself for his integrity, knowledge of Asian affairs, and his profound understanding of the Indochina war. His views were widely sought.

He regretted the destruction of Cambodia's neutrality and believed that Sihanouk, for all his faults, was still the best ruler Cambodia had had and was likely to have (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 256-257).

The Khmer Rouge Takes Command of the Resistance

Internal developments in Cambodia were not conducive to a settlement. The bombings had increased tremendously in 1973. Even if the US had withdrawn its ground forces in Vietnam, it merely redeployed its air force to Cambodia. Despite the congressional ban on bombing Cambodia, the total tonnage dropped was staggering. From 53,500 tons of bombs used during the whole of 1972, it reached roughly 257,500 tons for the period between February 1 and August 15, 1973, the deadline set by the US Congress for the bomb halt. The total tonnage dropped on Cambodia during this time period alone is 50 percent more than the amount used by US planes to bomb Japan in the whole of World War II (Shawcross, *Slideshow* 264; Kiernan, *How Pol Pot* 350).

The bombings resulted in tipping the political balance inside the coalition in favor of the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge greatly benefited from US bombings. It used the devastation of the country and massacre of civilians as recruitment propaganda. Many of the targets that were given by Lon Nol's army to the US embassy, which were then forwarded to the US air force, were not always military targets but included political education sessions held in villages as well. The bombings were able to kill a few rebels but civilian deaths were far greater. It also resulted in the massive movement of populations away from the villages into the cities. Some observers said that the numerous skulls found around Phnom Penh after 1975 belonged to those victims of US bombings. In other areas, the Khmer Rouge scared the villagers to flee with reports of renewed bombings in order to implement their collectivization program (Kiernan, *The Impact* 216-229).

At the about the same time, the Khmer Rouge started a new phase in purging Sihanoukists, pro-Vietnamese cadres, and dissenters within the coalition during this period. In the Southwestern Zone, it was "Ta (Old Man) Mok" (real name—Chhit Choeun) who rounded up hundreds of these supposedly "third force" elements and forced them to perform hard labor before executing them (Kiernan, *The Impact* 225). In the Southwestern Zone, another Pol Pot base, the purges were to become models for other zones to replicate in the coming months.

On July 19-21, 1973, the Khmer Rouge held a congress to undertake the so-called "Democratic Revolution." Among other things, it meant the collectivization of land, confiscation of the peasants' produce to be used for the war effort, communal eating and issuing directives concerning the destruction of religion and family life (Kiernan, *How Pol Pot* 368). With regard to the war, the Khmer Rouge issued a definitive statement of their aims, to wit:

First, to force US imperialism and all its foreign lackeys to stop the aggression against Cambodia, withdraw their troops and military personnel . . . and let the Cambodian people settle their own internal affairs without any foreign interference. Second, with regard to the traitorous Phnom Penh gang headed by arch-antipeople, extreme fascist, and most corrupt gangsters Lon Nol, Sirik Matak, Son Ngoc Thanh, In Tam, Cheng Heng and

Sosthene Fernandez, the Cambodian nation and people will seal their fate and overthrow them under the circumstances of no foreign interference”; and, third, the National United Front of Kampuchea with Head of State Samdech Norodom Sihanouk and the Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea with Samdech Penn Nouth as prime minister and Mr. Khieu Samphan as deputy prime minister will control Phnom Penh and lead the genuinely independent, peaceful, neutral, sovereign and democratic state of Cambodia on the basis of territorial integrity (Isaacs, *Without Honor* 238).

The first statement reveals the Khmer Rouge’s contempt for a negotiated settlement. In China, Ieng Sary used Radio Peking in affirming the Khmer Rouge statement. “The ‘Cambodian people’ are perfectly aware that these maneuvers, conceived and executed by the Nixon administration and its lackeys, seek only to get them to lay down their arms and go to a negotiating table and rob them of the fruits of total victory” (Isaacs, *Without Honor* 239). Of course, it was not the US who was pushing for these maneuvers. Perhaps, the Khmer Rouge knew that one of its proponents were the Chinese. But nevertheless, the Khmer Rouge thwarted attempts for a “Sihanouk solution” to the war wherein a coalition government with Sihanouk as head would emerge. Yet, they still saw the need for Sihanouk’s presence particularly in the diplomatic arena, that is, to unseat the Lon Nol government from the United Nations.

While in Algeria on a diplomatic tour to expand the solidarity network of the Front, the Prince publicly exposed his exasperation with the Khmer Rouge in an interview with Oriana Fallaci:

“The Khmer Rouge do not love me at all. I know it! I understand very well they keep me with them because they stand to gain by it, because I am useful to them. I understand very well that when I shall no longer be useful to them they’ll spit me out like a cherry pit” (Schier, *Interview* 27).

The second statement hints at military victory of the indigenous rebels without the presence of Vietnamese troops. Anti-Vietnamese in nature, the Pol Pot faction did not want eventual sharing of military victory with the “hereditary enemy.” The Khmer Vietminh suffered the same fate as that of the Sihanoukists as they were purged during the middle of the war. The pro-Vietnamese faction within the Khmer Rouge were executed a couple of

years later, immediately after the fall of the Lon Nol regime. The year 1973 was indeed auspicious for the Khmer Rouge. The Paris peace agreements made the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops possible. The Congressional halt to the bombing meant a stop to the pestering US aerial bombings. America's withdrawal of its military forces from the war also accelerated the Lon Nol government's irreversible decline.

Kissinger's Attempts at Negotiated Settlement

Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger had justified the continued use of US airpower in order to produce a military ceasefire leading to a negotiated settlement in Cambodia. In his memoirs, Kissinger blamed the Congressional halt to the bombing in August 1973 as the most important reason for the failure to produce a settlement (Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* 353). Subtitled *The Lost Opportunity*, Kissinger lamented that the US tried its best to produce a settlement in 1973 which, he alleged, was close to fruition. He claimed that US efforts to arrive at a settlement hinged initially on Sihanouk and later on, on the massive use of US airpower.

Kissinger recalled that in late January of 1973, Sihanouk held a press conference in Hanoi stating that China and North Vietnam had told his government-in-exile not to maintain its intransigent stance. He was willing to talk to the Americans but pointed out two conditions: he would never enter into any negotiations that would involve Lon Nol's presence and that the solution would not resemble that of South Vietnam's (Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* 362). Two days later, still in Hanoi, Sihanouk spoke of willingness for exploratory talks with the United States. This time Kissinger claimed that he was open to meeting Sihanouk in time for his trip to China in 1973. But Sihanouk, according to Kissinger, chose to time his visit to Cambodia's liberated areas to coincide with his visit. It implied that the Prince was still adamant when it comes to negotiation (Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* 355; see also Kirk "Cambodia in 1973" 94).

In Sihanouk's later statements regarding the peace effort, he stressed his subordinate role inside the Khmer Rouge. He said that he had not yet received the definitive green light for the reevaluation of the GRUNK's

policy from the leaders of the domestic resistance, the Red Khmers led by GRUNK Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Khieu Samphan, who has the last word. Two days later, Radio Peking aired an official statement insisting on March 23, 1970 (founding date of the FUNK) position which was a military solution to the war. It added that the “Cambodian nation and people are obliged to continue their struggle against the US aggressors and the traitors Lon Nol, Sirik Matak, and Son Ngoc Thanh in order to liberate the people . . . and that it is necessary to obstruct and oppose the diplomatic maneuvers of the US imperialists” (New China News Agency dispatch, February 3, 197). Even after Sihanouk arrived from a visit to Cambodia’s liberated areas, he echoed the same line—”that the interior resistance would not accept a ceasefire nor compromise” (Agence France-Presse dispatch, April 19 and 28, 1973). These pronouncements, he said, ended the hope for a Sihanouk solution to the war.

Kissinger and the American policy makers were probably baffled that the Cambodian resistance was talking of peace on the one hand and yet insisting on a fight to the finish on the other. In any case, this explicit account of Kissinger’s peace efforts as contained in the second volume of his memoir only serves to affirm his earlier account in the first volume that he would not “speak to Sihanouk of negotiations while insisting on total victory.” Kissinger, *White House Years* 1034). What was ironic is that in spite of massive resources the US government was pouring on intelligence-gathering operations, the top leadership of the US could not distinguish Sihanouk from the Khmer Rouge. They did not understand that Sihanouk’s tone of helplessness in pushing through with the negotiations reflected his desire for the outside powers to act decisively rather than let the FUNK and the Lon Nol government decide the outcome in the battlefields. Kissinger’s attempt to blame the Khmer Rouge, and not Sihanouk, for the intransigent behavior of the resistance was written years after the publication of documentation pointing to his and Nixon’s responsibilities for expanding the war. It is no wonder then that he and Nixon would attempt to rewrite history through their self-serving memoirs in order to wash their hands of the Cambodian tragedy.

As the Sihanouk solution did not materialize, Kissinger alleged that he looked for other means to end the war. He believed that the “Khmer Rouge would agree to a negotiated settlement only if deprived of hope of a military victory” (Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* 361). Thus, he saw the need for a sustained aerial bombing campaign to produce a stalemate that would force the Khmer Rouge to see the wisdom of going to the negotiating table. Kissinger claimed that he and Zhou Enlai were of the same thinking and in agreement with this strategy (Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* 362).

According to Kissinger, the US gave a proposal to China’s ambassador to the UN, Huang Hua, on May 27, 1973 which proposed the following: the US would halt the bombing and arrange for Lon Nol to leave the country for ‘medical treatment’ if the insurgent side would agree to a temporary ceasefire and talks between the “Sihanouk group and the remainder of the Lon Nol group.” The American proposal added that the United States would not oppose the return of Prince Sihanouk as the head of a new Cambodian regime that would include Khmer Rouge representatives and “key elements of the Lon Nol structure.” At the end of his memoirs, Kissinger lamented that “we nearly made it . . . this was the most promising negotiating opportunity if not the only one, with the Chinese and us working actively in parallel, and it was torpedoed by the United States Congress” (Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* 364).

The American proposal was unrealizable and would not stand up to reason if subjected to scrutiny. First, the proposal was given to the Chinese instead of being presented to the two warring factions. Both sides of the warring Cambodians were not aware of the proposal. It was only in July 6, 1973 when Long Boret announced the Phnom Penh government’s willingness for a call to a ceasefire but was nonetheless laced with conditions (Allman, “Deeper into the mire” 18-20). As it turned out, the proposal was not passed on to the insurgents by the Chinese because they believed that the insurgents would not accede to it, therefore it was not feasible (see also Isaacs, *Without Honor* 236).

Secondly, it was premised on a military stalemate that did not exist. In June and July of 1973, the Khmer Rouge launched suicidal attacks on Phnom

Penh in the hope of winning the war ahead of their Vietnamese and Lao counterparts. Lacking in protective cover from American B-52 bombings, the Khmer Rouge lost about half of its frontline troops or about 20,000 troops (Dalby, "The tide turns" 12-14). The expected fall of Phnom Penh did not occur until two years later. Yet, despite the heavy losses, the Khmer Rouge did not concede a stalemate. On the contrary, the bombings made the Khmer Rouge militarily and politically stronger. The massive bombings that claimed the lives of many civilians and destroyed rural villages and farms became the most compelling issue the Khmer Rouge used in recruiting new members. Troop casualties, though heavy, could easily be replaced by those who became victims of the bombings.

Thirdly, the principles of the proposed negotiations were objected to by both sides. As mentioned earlier, the Prince could not enter into negotiations with the "Seven Traitors." Yet, the Phnom Penh regime could not accept a Sihanouk solution either. For them, Sihanouk was guilty of treason. An execution of a death sentence awaited him in Phnom Penh. Lon Nol once said that with the March 18, 1970 coup, "Sihanouk has been ousted for good" (Allman, "And on the third day" 17-18). Once back in Phnom Penh, the Lon Nol clique feared a terrible revenge the Prince might exact on them. As Sihanouk's former commander-in-chief, Lon Nol was aware of the Prince's capacity for vengeance like the one he displayed during the Samlaut rebellion.

Kissinger's insistence on an impossible peace formula and his attempts to blame everyone for the fiasco did not augur well for a man who had been awarded the 1973 Nobel Peace Prize. But more importantly, his intransigence toward a negotiated settlement in Cambodia in 1973 changed China's stance on the war. In early 1974, China discarded the Sihanouk card in favor of the Khmer Rouge. From a coalition government, the Chinese became prepared to support a military solution that would establish a communist state that looked upon China as a model. Sihanouk, once the symbol of Khmer resistance, was now relegated to the sidelines. It was now Khieu Samphan who was touted as the leader of the insurgents. Sihanouk showed signs of self-pity when he said that, "he is of the past, Lon Nol the present

and the Khmer Rouge the future” (Peter Schier, *Interviews* 30). But the Prince had still one more task to do—to make the GRUNK the representative of the Khmer people in the United Nations, in the process isolating the Lon Nol regime from international support. The year 1974 also saw changes in Washington. Richard Nixon was no longer president as he was impeached in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal. He was replaced by his vice-president, Gerald Ford, whose policy was to extricate America from its involvement in Indochina. It meant abandoning America’s allies in a war which the US deemed was over for them. It also meant doom to a negotiated settlement where a strong US presence and resolve was required.

The Lao Model of Negotiated Settlement

John Gunther Dean was the last US ambassador to Phnom Penh before the Khmer Rouge took power in 1975. Prior to this assignment, he was the second secretary of the US mission in Laos where he distinguished himself by forestalling a rightist coup d’etat as a consequence of the signing of the 1973 Vientianne Agreement. The rightists claimed that the agreement establishing the coalition government was disadvantageous on their part. The creation of the National Political Consultative Council (NPCC), which took over the powers of the legislative assembly, was given to Prince Souphanouvong of the Pathet Lao. In appreciation for Dean’s efforts, the State Department made him a full-fledged ambassador to Phnom Penh where it was hoped that he can duplicate this feat. In 1968, he was stationed at the US embassy in Paris and had come to know and like Etienne Manac’h. His entry into Phnom Penh was widely welcomed as there was hope that an end to the fighting could be achieved (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 256). Likewise, Etienne Manac’h had found an important ally in the pursuit of a negotiated settlement.

The negotiated settlement in Laos grew out of the desire of both the US and North Vietnam to a cessation of the war in anticipation of US withdrawal in Indochina as stipulated in the 1973 Paris peace agreements. North Vietnam persuaded the Pathet Lao to negotiate in the same way as the US persuaded the rightist forces under Yang Pao. North Vietnam could not

however persuade the Khmer Rouge to negotiate when Kissinger asked Le Due Tho for a similar arrangement for Cambodia.

Negotiations for the Third Coalition government started on October 17, 1972 after the US and North Vietnam reached an agreement on the major components of the Paris peace accords. Prior to this, Kissinger had warned the rightists that US withdrawal in Indochina meant that they could not expect further support. Hence, there was pressure on them to negotiate with the communists (Dommen, *Laos* 216). The reverse was true in Cambodia and in Vietnam where the US supported the Lon Nol and Van Thieu governments to the very end and dashed any hopes for a negotiated settlement. At the same time however, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party concluded at their 1972 Congress that the "time was ripe for a new political initiative." Thus, the Pathet Lao stepped up pressure for a parallel settlement in Laos by offering to engage in negotiations with the rightist-neutralist coalition government without preconditions (Stuart-Fox, *Laos* 105). The negotiations ended with the signing of the Vientiane Agreement on February 21, 1973. King Savang Vathana then signed a decree dissolving the previous government—the rightist-neutralist government under Souvanna Phouma. He then appointed Souvanna Phouma to head the new coalition and formally installed Souphanouvong as head of the NPCC. The composition of the 12-member cabinet was divided into the following: five ministers from the Pathet Lao, five from the rightists, and the remaining two to be named by both parties. The Agreement likewise asked both parties to respect the 1962 Geneva Agreements, the basis of the second coalition government. It also adopted Article 20 of the Paris peace agreements, i.e., cessation of all military activity by foreign powers and withdrawal of all foreign troops within sixty days after the signing of the Agreement (Gunn, "Resistance" 316-340).

But the terms of the negotiated settlement took time before it could materialize. It was not until September 1973 that the Protocol establishing the third coalition was signed. And it was only on April 5 of the following year that the new government was sworn in.

Unlike in Cambodia, a negotiated settlement in Laos was not that difficult to achieve. For one, there was already a precedent. The First Coalition

government was established in late 1957 as a result of the signing of the 1954 Geneva Agreements. The Second Coalition government was established in 1962 after a *coup d'état* was launched by the neutralist Capt. Kong Le of the Second Paratroop Battalion of the Royal Lao Army. Incidentally, Capt. Cong Le was a graduate of the Philippine Military Academy.

Another factor would be the presence of a monarchy above politics—neither identified with the leftists nor rightists even when members of the royal household had become deeply involved in partisan politics. Though Prince Souphanouvong became the figurehead of the Pathet Lao while Prince Boun Oum became a leading figure of the rightists, King Savang Vatthana maintained his neutrality, or at least a semblance of it yet effectively portraying the monarchy as above partisan politics. Lastly, the neutralists comprised a significant portion of the population and had a strong influence in society. Aside from the King, Souphanouvong's half-brother Souvanna Phouma was a well-known neutralist whose personality was acceptable to both the left and the right. It also included respected politicians like Quinim Pholsena as well as other prominent members of society. In Cambodia, there was no known neutralist other than Prince Sihanouk. The Cambodian monarchy, too, was powerless to influence the warring factions as it had been divided after the coup. The Norodoms came under persecution because of Sihanouk while the House of the Sisowaths cast its lot with Sirik Matak on the opposite side of the political fence.

Ambassador John Gunther Dean arrived in Phnom Penh in April 1974, replacing Tom Enders, a Kissinger protege. The former ambassador, Emory Swank, had left the country months before for another assignment because of his differences with Kissinger (Isaacs, *Without Honor* 262).²⁸ Inspired by his negotiating success in Laos, Dean poured his tremendous energy in reforming the Cambodian government to save it from collapse and hopefully replicate a similar kind of political settlement. A military stalemate could soften up the insurgents' intransigence toward negotiations, hence he sought to deprive them of an outright military victory. Dean's actions were unconventional and controversial. Immediately upon arrival, he checked on the status of the massive inflow of US aid which had become a milking cow

for Cambodia's military and government officials. He was appalled by the fact that America's aid was being used to enrich government officials. While on a visit to Battambang province, he made his displeasure for the notoriously corrupt governor known by refusing to attend a dinner being given for him. Dean demanded that they be told about the status of a large amount of missing aviation fuel. The following day, Dean proudly announced that he received a cheque in the amount of US \$310,000 as refund for the missing fuel (Snitowsky, "Ambassador Dean" 26-27).

But Dean was more obsessed with the military situation. He tried to minimize the practice, common among senior military commanders, of padding their payrolls with ghost or non-existent soldiers. The US was providing for the salaries of around 225,000 soldiers when in reality they were only about a hundred thousand. US-supplied arms and ammunitions were up for sale in the market and many found their way in the hands of the insurgents. Faced with discouraging results in the battlefield, Dean then asked Lon Nol to replace senior commanders with US-trained, reform-minded, mid-level career officers. But Lon Nol would not accede to this demand. This loyal senior officer corps was Lon Nol's main instrument in governing the country.

However, higher authorities in Washington were not keen on drastic changes in the military which might upset the country's "stability" for Lon Nol was an important player in America's endgame in Indochina. Unyielding, Dean turned his attention to improving the battlefield situation. He visited frontline troops and gave military advice to field commanders even when there was a prohibition on US officials to conduct such activities. The House Foreign Affairs Committee sent two consultants, John Brady and John Sullivan, to investigate the internal situation in Cambodia. Speaking of Dean, the two described the ambassador as "energetic in carrying out his own mission." Clearly, they did not see what the ambassador was up to (*New York Times*, August 4, 1974, A13).

But time had ran out for Sihanouk and the proponents of negotiated settlement. In the spring of 1974, China changed its policy in relation to Cambodia. China adjusted its two-track policy in favor of the Khmer Rouge.

By then, Khieu Samphan and Ieng Sary, along with Hu Nim and Hou Youn, were being presented to the outside world as the leaders of the resistance in the interior, in contradistinction to that of the resistance based in Beijing. The signal in this policy shift came when Khieu Samphan visited the Chinese capital in April and was accorded state honors. No less than Zhou Enlai met him at the airport, while Sihanouk was just one of those at hand to greet his arrival (Lenart, "Perfunctory homage"¹⁷). At a banquet given by Chinese officialdom for Khieu Samphan, the latter symbolically presented Zhou Enlai with a rocket launcher which Zhou pointed towards the ceiling. In his speech, Khieu Samphan reported the status of the war inside Cambodia. "We have already liberated more than 90 per cent of our territory with upward of 5.5 million people. The Liberated Zone in Cambodia is vast in expanse, whereas the areas temporarily occupied by the enemy are small and ever contracting" (Kiernan, *Peasants and Politics* 179).

Then in reference to efforts to reach a settlement, Khieu Samphan emphasized, "it was to prevent our people's complete victory that they increasingly resort with cunning and obduracy to such maneuvers as sham ceasefire, sham talks and sham peace" (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 13, 1974, 26-27). Toward the end of the banquet, Samphan appealed for more military aid which Zhou assured would be delivered to the insurgents inside Cambodia. Moreover, a few days later, Samphan was met by Mao Zedong. In the photograph that appeared of the meeting, Samphan was placed on the right of the Chairman while Sihanouk was on the left. Finally, Khieu Samphan embarked on an eleven-nation tour as representative of the Khmer resistance, a task that was once exclusive to Sihanouk (*Peking Review*, April 5, 1974, 4; see also; Kirk, "Cambodia" 215; *New York Times* April 28, 1974, 14 and April 30, 1974, 2).

With the military situation turning against the Phnom Penh regime and with US prodding, it was now the turn of the Lon Nol government to sue for peace talks. In early July of 1974, Lon Nol proposed talks that would lead to a ceasefire with "communist-led Cambodian rebels without prerequisite or condition" (*New York Times*, July 9, 1974, A6). He said that this peace proposal is different from the one he made in 1973 which set conditions for

the beginning of peace talks. He hoped that the proposed ceasefire, which was the result of two weeks of discussion between Ambassador Dean and Cambodian leaders, would lead to withdrawal of foreign troops (in apparent reference to Vietnamese communist troops) and national unity and reconciliation (alluding to a coalition government between them and the insurgents or elements among the insurgents). Lon Nol proposed further that the peace talks be held at a place and time agreeable to both parties. Still unaware of the insurgents' uncompromising attitude of excluding any of the "Seven Traitors" in any negotiations, Long Boret added that the government's offer of unconditional peace talks was the maximum offer it could make and that they were ready to negotiate with anyone who had a mandate from the rebels to enter into such talks (*New York Times*, July 10, 1974, A9).

As expected, this overture was flatly rejected by the FUNK. Sihanouk stated that there could never be any negotiations between the Cambodian resistance and the Lon Nol government (*New York Times*, July 14, 1974, 5).

The "Controlled Solution"

One final attempt by the outside powers to arrange for a political settlement was made in December 1974. It was an effort involving the active participation of France, China, and the United States. The occasion was the US-Franco summit to be held in Martinique. This was the first time that the newly-installed presidents of both countries would meet.

As preparations for the summit were being made three months before, the French took interest in discussing the fate of Cambodia. French Prime Minister Valery Giscard D'Estaing cabled Etienne Manac'h in Beijing asking if a negotiated settlement could still be achieved at this stage of the war. Manac'h told the President that he was convinced the Chinese would still like to see Sihanouk leading Cambodia again. With Sihanouk in power, the Chinese could be assured of a friendly regime in Phnom Penh. The same could not be said if the Khmer Rouge took power because China feared that this communist party could still be won over by Moscow. But Chinese policy towards Cambodia had changed in early 1974 because of Kissinger's refusal to negotiate. Yet the Chinese were still amenable, though very reluctantly, to

a negotiated settlement at this stage. Even if Sihanouk's personal friend Zhou Enlai was by now confined to a hospital suffering from cancer, Manac'h was assured by Foreign Minister Chiao Kuan-hua of Chinese support for the plan.²⁹

Manac'h realized that Kissinger's proposal that the two sides negotiate with each other was impossible. Neither did he want to see the prospect of the Khmer Rouge marching triumphantly in the capital ahead of Sihanouk because he believed that they would not share power with him. Hence the plan called for a *fait accompli* between China, France and the United States. Sihanouk would be made to return to Phnom Penh before the Khmer Rouge arrived. But that could be achieved only if the United States removed Lon Nol and his clique from power and made arrangements for their departure. Massive demonstrations would then be organized clamoring for Sihanouk's return. Upon his arrival from Beijing, Sihanouk would then form a broad coalition government. Manac'h calculated that this was plausible because many of Lon Nol's opponents, his commander-in-chief Sak Suthsakan, and even Sirik Matak, had given him word that they would welcome the Prince's return. Cambodia's ambassador to the US, Urn Sim, had been asking Sen. Mike Mansfield to try to find out on what conditions the Prince would come home.

This proposal became even more promising when a prominent group of Phnom Penh politicians made their own initiatives for a peace agreement earlier in the year. Son Sann, a one-time member of Sihanouk's cabinet, presented a five-point peace plan during a national Buddhist convocation which immediately received wide support from several academics and student groups. His proposals were: 1) that Lon Nol should leave Cambodia as a precondition for initiating meaningful overtures; 2) Cheng Heng should head an interim government in his absence; 3) a *mouvement populaire* should be set up to seek out negotiations with the Khmer Rouge; 4) an immediate ceasefire to be put into effect; and lastly, 5) the great powers should agree to help work for peace in Cambodia (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 3, 1974, 27) This was however quashed by the Lon Nol regime which considered the proposals foolish. Nonetheless, the proponents of the "controlled

solution” could count on a growing number of Phnom Penh residents receptive to the idea. Sihanouk even referred to this urban segment of Lon Nol oppositors as a “third force” in obvious reference to the South Vietnamese reformers during this time period.

Nevertheless, Manac’h calculated that once a coalition had been established, half the population, the bureaucracy, the religious, and the army would accept the new government and go over to Sihanouk’s side. With such a force under him, Sihanouk could then unilaterally declare a ceasefire. Manac’h expected that the Khmer Rouge would be enraged initially but he believed that they had no recourse but to accept this *fait accompli*. Once inside the coalition, the Khmer Rouge would then be balanced or neutralized by other figures and forces.

On October 31, 1974, Giscard made his move by sending a telegram to Sihanouk who was then in Algiers. The French ambassador to Algeria, Jean Marie Soutou, delivered the message to Sihanouk and told the Prince that Giscard was willing to help end the war. Soutou touched a raw nerve. Sihanouk reportedly complained about the negotiated settlement with the Americans by saying that “the Americans lack realism. I had a white handkerchief, the Americans soaked it in blue ink. Absurd! The handkerchief turned red. Now they want to dye it white again. Well, it’s not possible” (Shawcross, *Sideshow* 338). He was nonetheless amenable to the plan, saying that the part of the plan calling for the integration of Lon Nol’s Phnom Penh opponents into the united front might work.

As an assurance, Manac’h talked with Chinese Foreign Minister Chiao Kuan-hua on November 20 to ask once more if Chinese policy toward Cambodia remained the same. Chiao Kuan-hua said that it did remain the same at the moment but added that it may change soon. He explained that China’s attitude was that it was amenable to the “Sihanouk card” so long as the Khmer Rouge were denied arms supplies necessary to achieve a decisive military victory. Vietnam was withholding supplies intended for the Khmer Rouge in the Ho Chi Minh Trail because of its differences with the group. It is probable that the Vietnamese withheld the arms supplies to make sure that the liberation of Saigon would not be made after that of Phnom Penh. But if

a Khmer Rouge military victory became imminent, Chiao Kuan-hua emphasized, China could no longer play the Sihanouk card. And China would have to accept a rigid communist government under the administration of the Khmer Rouge (“The Peking approach” 12). Five days later, on November 25, Manac’h visited Sihanouk at his residence in Paris to finalize the details of the “controlled solution.” Sihanouk agreed to the proposal that if the United States would remove Lon Nol and his clique (the so-called seven traitors), he would be willing to return to Phnom Penh and allow various politicians, both opponents and allies of Lon Nol, to join the GRUNK. He would establish a government of national unity but was convinced that the Khmer Rouge would still be the dominant force within the coalition. However, he favored a government that would be less radical rather than a government that the Khmer Rouge completely controlled and he had no participation in. He believed that the Khmer Rouge would resist any such schemes bitterly and insisted to Manac’h that the plan be kept secret. If the plan could be implemented without the Khmer Rouge’s knowledge, they would be forced to accept the *fait accompli* and more so when they saw China, its patron, as a plotter in the plan.

Manac’h then flew to Paris to inform Giscard of the plan. Over a four-hour lunch on the 29th of November, he outlined the proposal to the French president and stressed the need for speed and secrecy. Giscard accepted his proposal and on December 2, the Quai d’Orsay informed Washington that the French side would like to discuss the issue of Cambodia during the summit at Martinique. There was no objection from the other side and Manac’h returned to Beijing optimistic that the plan would be carried out. On December 12, Manac’h visited Sihanouk once more to give him updates of the plan. He told the Prince that the Khmer Rouge was still short of arms and was thus incapable of launching an offensive. In return, Sihanouk thanked Manac’h for his efforts to make him return to Cambodia as its leader again. He feared for his life as he believed that the Khmer Rouge would kill him if they had the chance once they had taken power.

On the second day of the summit, Giscard, together with his foreign minister Jean Sauvagnies, introduced Manac’h’s proposal to Ford and

Kissinger over lunch. Kissinger made no objections. He simply asked that they send someone from the French foreign ministry over to Washington to work out the details. The French side took it to mean that the proposal was well received by the Americans. But that was not the case.

Before the summit ended the following day, the two sides met media for the customary press conference to announce developments arising from the talks. Instead of being silent on Cambodia, as should have been done if the French proposal had been adopted, a communique was released to the press which read in part, "Regarding Cambodia they (the two presidents) expressed hope that the contending parties would enter negotiations in the near future rather than continuing the military struggle" (Agence France-Pressé dispatch, December 22, 1974). It was Kissinger's previous peace proposal which had always been rejected flatly by Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge, and the Chinese. The French had not brought an Asian specialist to understand the ramifications of the American-prepared communique when it was presented to them the night before. In effect, the communique sabotaged Manac'h's plan even before it could begin. It also placed Sihanouk in a precarious position vis-a-vis the suspicious Khmer Rouge in Beijing.

When the French realized the fiasco, Giscard went on television to explain that they had in fact committed an honest mistake. "Quite frankly, the communique imperfectly reflects what I had in mind . . . Other forms of political evolution of a different type and that we ourselves consider in this field and at the same time of our ideas regarding a type of political solution that does not exactly consist of negotiations between the two parties" (*New York Times*, December 23, 1974, 4). In Beijing, Chinese foreign ministry officials summoned Manac'h to explain the outcome of the communique which had placed them in an embarrassing situation vis-a-vis the Khmer Rouge. Manac'h assured the Chinese that it was indeed an honest mistake on the part of the French. Sihanouk told Manac'h that the Khmer Rouge discovered what was going on and in order to save face issued a press release to denounce France's "inadmissible interference" in Cambodian affairs (Peiris, "Peace deal from Sihanouk" 12-13; "We refuse, and shall refuse" 12-14).

A few days after Christmas, Manac'h cabled the Quai d'Orsay to advise them to abandon the plan as it had been much compromised. The failure of the planned negotiated settlement signaled the exit of France and China as far as determining the outcome of the war was concerned. Being the only foreign country still actively engaged in the Cambodian conflict, it was now the Americans who were suing for a "controlled solution" as the war drew to a close in early 1975.

Etienne Manac'h ended his tour of duty on the first week of February 1975 and was about to retire from the French foreign ministry. Before leaving Beijing however, he visited Sihanouk for the last time. The Prince was extremely dispirited. At the beginning of January, the Khmer Rouge told Sihanouk that they did not expect to take Phnom Penh this year but they moved so fast that an imminent victory seemed likely. He said he would have to reject any further attempts the Americans made to reach him. It was too late for negotiations and the Khmer Rouge had complete control of the situation.

But publicly, Sihanouk was not prepared to break with the Khmer Rouge. Throughout February and March, he issued statements discounting fears of a bloodbath, stressing that the insurgents were only after the "seven traitors." In subsequent interviews, he claimed that the new government had no intention of making Cambodia a socialist or a popular republic like what the other communists had done ("The Growing Tragedy" 8-13; Laurie, "Cambodia gasps for life," and Davis, "Death-grip on Phnom Penh" 10-12).

On the first hour of the New Year, at exactly one o'clock in the morning of January 1, 1975, the Khmer Rouge launched what was to be their last offensive. From the liberated areas in the countryside, the Khmer Rouge sped towards the fringes of the capital to tighten its noose. Like a house of cards, the defenses of the Lon Nol army collapsed one by one. By February, the Khmer Rouge had laid siege on Phnom Penh and blocked a very vital supply route to the capital: the Mekong River. They also established a 'rocket belt' that showered the capital with its daily dose of rocket and artillery fire aimed at the airport and the city's crowded quarters. The stream of refugees heading towards the capital with their stories of Khmer Rouge brutalities in

the liberated areas added to the panic gripping the capital (“The controlled solution” 11; Laurie, “Spelling out” 12-13; Laurie, “Washington” 24-26).

Worried at these developments, Ambassador Dean made frantic efforts to come up with a compromise settlement. Other countries, notably China and France, had given up on a negotiated settlement because of stubborn American insistence in not disposing of Lon Nol and his clique earlier. At first, their plan was to hold out the city’s defenses until the monsoon sets in June in order to halt the insurgent’s dry season offensive. The US hoped that the Khmer Rouge, unable to take the city by 1975, might see the wisdom of negotiating with the Long Boret government.³⁰ But this stalemate was premised on continued US supply and large Khmer army reserves. Unfortunately for the Lon Nol government, the US Congress blocked additional military aid to the Khmer army which was by then running out of ammunition. Desertions in the army were widespread as the soldiers, seeing the futility of fighting the insurgents further, threw away their weapons, herded their family members and headed toward the capital (Davis, “Maneuvering” 10).

As the situation deteriorated, Marshal Lon Nol started entertaining the American proposal for him to leave the country to pave the way for a negotiated settlement to the war. When a visiting team of American congressmen called on Lon Nol on March 10, 1975, the Marshal told them that he was willing to do anything that may bring about the resumption of US military aid and negotiations with the insurgents. Ambassador Dean told the congressmen privately that Lon Nol was willing to resign and leave the country. Stepping past the bounds of propriety, John Dean then reprinted the message of Lon Nol hinting at resignation to force him out of the country and hopefully improve chances of negotiations with the insurgents. Japan and other Asian nations were also urging the Marshal to consider a ‘tactical visit’ to Hawaii. As added incentive, the Marshal was given half a million dollars by the US government. His Socio-Republican Party also issued a manifesto baptizing him as a “national hero who has made a brilliant contribution to the nation and ‘controlled solution’ to the war.” This time however, the United States was all alone in its efforts to all of us.” (Chanda,

Brother Enemy 40). Immediately, Long Boret called on the insurgents for negotiations but was immediately rejected by the FUNK.

The Marshall did leave on the first of April 1975. But in the afternoon, the Khmer Rouge was able to penetrate the defenses to the city's southwest and captured the strategic ferry town of Neak Luong along the Mekong River. As a result, there was no other way in and out of the capital but by air. It was only on April 11, 1975, when Dean informed Washington that they might evacuate Phnom Penh sooner than expected, that Kissinger decided that Sihanouk should be brought back to Cambodia. Kissinger made a formal offer to fly him back to Phnom Penh on a Chinese plane and take over the political leadership of the country. The United States government guaranteed his personal safety.

Kissinger instructed George H. Bush, the head of the US Liaison Office in Beijing, to seek a meeting with Sihanouk and convey the message. Bush asked his assistant, John Holdridge, to meet with Pung Peng Cheng, the GRUNK's representative to China, at the French embassy. Holdridge told Pung that President Ford and Kissinger had finally realized that Sihanouk should be brought back to power as the Prince was the only one who could end the crisis. Holdridge asked Pung to tell the Prince to ask from the Chinese an aircraft that would take him straight to Phnom Penh. For its part, the US would stay in the capital until the Prince had arrived. Holdridge emphasized that Kissinger imposed no conditions for Sihanouk's return. Pung shook Holdridge's hand and said he would relay the message to the Prince (*Debre, Revolution*).

But while Pung and Holdridge were talking, the Khmer Rouge had moved to within a mile of Pochentong airport. It was now under constant fire from rockets and artillery and the airlift of rice and ammunitions had to be suspended.

The following day, April 12, 1975, Holdridge met again with Pung at five o'clock in the morning. Pung told Holdridge that Sihanouk had already issued a statement rejecting and denouncing Kissinger's peace plan. By this time, the Phnom Penh perimeter was degenerating so fast that the Americans were pulling out at once. Dean sounded the evacuation call to a helicopter

carrier waiting at the Gulf of Thailand. By nine in the morning, the first batch of Sikorsky transport helicopters landed in Phnom Penh to pick up the American embassy staff and some Cambodian officials, including the acting president Saukhanthoy. The rescue operation which took only an hour to finish, ended America's bloody, expensive, and controversial involvement in Cambodia.

Epilogue

The negotiated settlement was bound to fail considering the considerable support it required from the United States. In the first place, the attitude of Pres. Richard Nixon towards Prince Sihanouk was negative and pessimistic. As vice-president in 1956, Nixon visited Cambodia on an official tour and his recollection of Prince Sihanouk was that of being “vain, flighty and out of touch with reality” (Nixon, *The memoirs* 125). The impression created by the Prince when he hosted the visit of the future American president prevented Nixon, and consequently Kissinger, from taking seriously the planned negotiated settlement with Sihanouk as the main player. They only took Sihanouk seriously when they saw the gravity of the situation on the last days of the war. It should be added that Sihanouk’s anti-American rhetoric and his insistence to keep away from the orbit of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) while maintaining close rapport with socialist countries during the sixties angered Washington policy makers.

In spite of the massive intelligence gathering capability of the United States, its policy makers were not able to distinguish the Prince vis-a-vis

the other factions inside the Khmer insurgency movement. They saw the insurgents in the initial stages of the war as nothing more than Vietnamese lackeys. That perception changed only by 1973 when the Vietnamese could not deliver the Khmer insurgents to the negotiating table. Even when the Prince had taken a backseat role in the coalition by late 1974, US analysts still thought of Sihanouk as the leader of the resistance. By then, Khieu Samphan was being propped up by China as the new leader of the Khmer resistance.

Another factor that hindered the proposed negotiated settlement was the Americans' insistence that the case of Laos and Vietnam represented the 'ideal' negotiated settlement. In the case of Laos, a coalition government involving both the American-sponsored Vientiane government and the Pathet Lao was created in 1973 to help bring about the end of the war. Although it was not without its share of problems, the diplomacy of John Gunther Dean brought about the successful implementation of the peace accords for the next two years.

In the case of Vietnam, the United States was able to extricate itself from the war on conditions that were satisfactory to them. It should be noted that the Paris Peace Accords was signed by the Vietnamese only after intensive US bombings of Hanoi during Christmas of 1972. For Kissinger, the proposed peace proposal in Cambodia could only come about as a result of a military deadlock and not in a situation where the insurgents were holding the upper hand. His dictum 'to lose honorably is still to lose' (Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* 366) reflected this Cold War predicament which was premised on an 'all-or-nothing' attitude.

Both Nixon and Kissinger became convinced that Sihanouk should be brought to Phnom Penh to head a government only when the Khmer Rouge was about to enter the capital in a few days. By then, it was too late. What eventually made them decide to look for a 'controlled solution' was mainly the refugees' report on the viciousness that the Khmer Rouge inflicted on the populace in the liberated areas.

The two leaders were likewise adamant in instituting changes necessary for a negotiated settlement. In 1974, in a bid to improve the battlefield situation in order to force the Khmer Rouge to the negotiating table, Ambassador

Dean was frantic to oust the army's senior commanders who were mired in corruption and incompetence. To Dean's disappointment, Kissinger rebuffed his recommendations and sided with Lon Nol in retaining those senior officers in the belief that any drastic changes in the army might bring about long-term instability. Ousting Lon Nol and the six other 'traitors,' a precondition for any negotiated settlement with the insurgents, was also postponed until the last days of the Khmer Republic. When the US decided to seriously consider the 'controlled solution' by March 1975, it was left alone to do the job. Even if other countries—notably China and France—wanted a negotiated settlement in ending the war, they were no longer in a position to pursue it. Their integrity and capacity to broker such a deal have been severely compromised as a result of Kissinger's shrewdness during the Martinique summit.

Lastly, it should be noted that the American public considered the Cambodian conflict "not their war" (Young, "The Vietnam War" 48). When US forces invaded Cambodia in 1970, the initial public reaction was that of indignation. Since then, the American public had always advocated for a stop to US intervention in the Cambodian war which was due largely to the weariness, frustration, and divisiveness brought about by the Vietnam War. By 1975, when media fed images of the tragic situation in the capital to the American public, the reaction was one of disgust. They urged for the immediate cessation of congressional aid to the Khmer Republic in order to stop the war regardless of the outcome. For the American policy makers who were contemplating on negotiated settlement, reactions coming from the citizenry and Congress were a stumbling block to any negotiating efforts.

China's initial hesitation to support Sihanouk and the Khmer insurgents came about at a time when it was reassessing its strategic relations with the US. During this time, the Chinese leadership wanted to forge a long-term relationship with the United States to counterbalance the Soviet Union which they saw as the more dangerous enemy. China was wary that Soviet influence was becoming uncomfortable, and therefore threatening, as Vietnam was moving toward the Russian orbit. Even when the United States moved against Cambodia in April 1970, Sino-American relations were

headed toward rapprochement even as they were supporting the opposite sides of the warring parties in Cambodia. Their differences in support for the warring factions however were relegated to the sidelines while talks to foster strategic relations were underway.

China was likewise initially hesitant to support an insurgency whose military capabilities to face the US-supplied Lon Nol army were doubtful. Its “two-track policy” was a reflection of its caution in its support of the war effort in Cambodia. It favored supporting Sihanouk because he had the reputation as the leader of the Khmers at the international level. Support for Sihanouk indirectly meant support for efforts toward negotiated settlement because China still wanted to see a Cambodia ruled by Sihanouk. China feared that the Khmer Rouge could possibly go the way of Vietnam, i.e., to enter the Soviet orbit. The people inside the Khmer Rouge whom the Chinese trusted, members of the Khmer-China Friendship Association like Hu Nim, were forbidden by the Party Center from holding key posts. The deployment of Ieng Sary to China to oversee the Front was meant to prevent the FUNK from being influenced too much by the Chinese, a fear the Party Center’ harbored should Hu Nim be placed in Beijing instead.

China’s generous support for Sihanouk was also made possible by the personal friendship between him and Zhou Enlai. Both leaders had struck a friendship during the Summit of Non-Aligned Countries in Bandung, Indonesia in 1956. Sihanouk admired Zhou’s statesmanship and charisma while Zhou respected Sihanouk’s resolve to keep Cambodia neutral in the war. Such neutrality blended well with Chinese foreign policy towards Indochina at the time. Nonetheless, China’s warm reception of Sihanouk and their support for the Front was made possible, up to a large extent, by the friendship that existed between the Prince and Zhou Enlai.

Conclusion

Sihanouk indeed resembled the conceptual “national bourgeoisie” during this time period. Before his departure from political power in 1970, Sihanouk could be considered a ‘progressive’ leader with ‘democratic aspirations.’ He veered away from the influence of the United States by staying out of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). He chose to side with socialist countries instead. He spurned US aid, citing the onerous conditions attached to it that could compromise his country’s neutrality.

But by 1968, it became clear to him that Cambodia should dramatically alter her foreign policy directions toward rapprochement with the United States. The socialist countries he had befriended all along could not guarantee checking that there were no Vietnamese troops inside Cambodia’s territory. It was then evident that Sihanouk would make a pact even with the ‘devil’ for the sake of the country, that is, to court the Americans whom he hoped could counterbalance the communists and eventually keep Cambodia out of the war. This vacillation reflected the progressive nature, premised

on nationalism, inherent in the national bourgeoisie because it is premised on patriotism.

The widening war in Indochina made sure that Sihanouk's pacifism and his notion of an "independent" state would not prosper. The polarization between the imperialists and their local lackeys on the one hand and the revolutionaries on the other made sure that there was no middle ground. This was after all, according to communist theory, an illusion of the national bourgeoisie.

The coup made him a victim of oppression at the hands of 'foreign imperialism' and 'local compradores.' He dared challenge these forces but in the process coalesced with the communists with whom he was not at ease, thus placing him in a precarious and awkward situation. Sihanouk's initial reaction when he learned of the coup was to retire from political life and seek refuge in France. But after four days, and with still no sleep, he changed his mind. It was not easy for Sihanouk to decide to fight the Lon Nol regime. Aside from having no army to fight with and stationing himself in distant Beijing, he might have been worried about his countrymen's perception about his alliance with the communists whom he loathed before he was ousted from power. But why did he ally himself with them? Partly, it was because of his extreme disappointment that his trusted Lon Nol betrayed him; the personal attacks against him and his family; and the death sentence handed to him for being a traitor to the republic. On the other hand, it was also his admiration for the communists' commitment and idealism. It may also be due to his sense of patriotism, to stay linked to men whom he knew despised him in their fight against a common enemy. He likewise believed that he was the rallying point of the Khmer nation in much the same way as Charles De Gaulle was to France during the Second World War. Sihanouk gave weight to the fact that the communists were the sole force ready to confront the Lon Nol regime. It was the only 'battering ram' available to him that could dislodge his present enemies. No matter how difficult it was for him to ally with the communists, he did enter into a coalition with them with the eventual end in view of taking over the leadership of the Front. Thus, when he spoke to Pham Van Dong in Beijing, he asked

for cadres to train his 'Sihanoukist' army, hoping that in the near future he could command his own army and direct the war effort independently of the Khmer Rouge. Unfortunately for him, this group was eliminated by the Khmer Rouge before it could become a serious threat.

During the early stages of the war, Sihanouk was already dubious about the future course of an alliance with dedicated communists. While Thioun Mumm represented the reasonable face of Khmer communism to him, he loathed, and also feared, the hardliners like his 'handler' Ieng Sary and three former deputies. The Prince's wariness and apprehension surfaced in his statements during this time period. When asked about his role after the war, his reply was that he would like to retire from active politics, live outside the capital, and probably just represent the country in international gatherings. But when his differences with the Khmer Rouge became even wider, he exposed his fears to the public by saying that the Khmer Rouge would 'spit him out like a cherry pit' when he would no longer be of use to them.

Sihanouk thus favored a negotiated settlement over a military solution to the war as it would pave the way for him to play a major role in post-war Cambodia. A negotiated settlement would, in theory, make possible the entry of other political forces and personalities that could serve as a counterweight to the Khmer Rouge. Furthermore, the Khmer Rouge would be constrained to push the revolution to its ideological conclusion or limits as the settlement would have the guarantee, and if necessary, the intervention of the outside powers. A total victory for the FUNK that would result in leaving the Khmer communists and Sihanouk alone in the national arena without other local factions or international guarantees for that matter, could only ensure the Khmer Rouge's control of post-war Cambodia. If the Chinese and French governments favored Sihanouk's plan for a negotiated settlement to the war, the Khmer Rouge made sure such initiatives were scuttled at all costs—for the Khmer Rouge stood to lose in an open political contest.

Thus, they prepared for an inevitable confrontation. But the Khmer Rouge had the advantage in that they were in command of the resistance in Cambodia. Sihanouk's advantage however lay in China's and Vietnam's official recognition of him as the leader of the Khmer resistance. It trans-

lated into funneling Chinese arms to the Sihanoukist army, plus training it received from Vietnamese cadres. It also meant that Sihanouk was assured of being Cambodia's leader had a negotiated settlement been arranged. That is, if the Khmer Rouge were still not militarily capable of defeating the Lon Nol regime.

The Khmer Rouge patiently tucked itself under the imposing figure of Sihanouk in Beijing during the initial stages of the war. As China played the Sihanouk card, the Khmer Rouge were contented to provide the spadework for the resistance. In contrast, Sihanouk was in the limelight popularizing the resistance at the international level by entertaining numerous media interviews and traveling to friendly countries to solicit support. Inside Cambodia, the resistance was factionalized as it was dominated by Sihanoukists, moderates, and pro-Vietnamese communists. Through a combination of persuasion, intimidation, and persecution, the Khmer Rouge were able to take control of the united front in only a couple of years. The FUNK could have won over the emasculated republican army earlier but was not able to do so. While fighting Lon Nol's army head on, the Khmer Rouge were simultaneously sparring with the Sihanoukists and Vietnamese communist troops to strengthen its hold on power inside the Front. In hindsight, the Khmer Rouge decided to solidify its control of the FUNK first before going in for the 'kill' in order to implement its revolution in a more manageable way.

The signing of the Paris peace talks in January 1973 was providential for the Khmer Rouge. Its relatively short route towards seizing state power was ensured as a result of this event. For one, it made sure that Vietnamese troops inside Cambodia were withdrawn. This left a vacuum in the resistance which the Khmer Rouge were only too willing to fill. Equally important, the American bomber fleet which became idle after the cessation of the war in Vietnam was immediately redeployed to Cambodia. The devastating effects of the bombing became the most compelling issue the Khmer Rouge used in winning over the local populace to its side. As the resistance in Cambodia became increasingly modeled under the control of the radical faction of the Khmer Rouge, the planned negotiated settlement would have smaller chances of success had it been implemented.

The American insistence on a peace formula whereby both the warring factions should settle the conflict among themselves made the chances for a negotiated settlement even less promising. For one, Sihanouk was not amenable to it. There was no way that Sihanouk would form a coalition government including any of the “seven traitors.” One problem with Lon Nol’s Khmer Republic as far as leadership was concerned was the absence of competent and credible leaders outside of the so-called “seven traitors.” In short, there were no “second stringers” who could fill the gap should the US decide to dump the seven in order to pursue the negotiated settlement seriously. Many of Cambodia’s political leaders had either fled the country or joined the resistance. Long Borel, a young and promising politician *cum* technocrat, was thrust into power only after Lon Nol was forced to retire in the US in April 1975. With its string of military victories, the prospects of the Front heading into the negotiating table were nil.

In retrospect, the vacillations and indecisiveness Sihanouk displayed during this time were brought about by the terribly complicated position he found himself in. On some occasions, he voiced his option for negotiated settlement. This was his personal preference. But on several other occasions, he sounded intransigent by calling for a halt to negotiations and a military settlement against the Lon Nol regime. This represented his accommodation to the dictates of the Khmer Rouge who were by then more powerful inside the Front. To some observers, this ambivalence would appear as irrational and confusing. But this was quite within the nature of the national bourgeoisie.

As the Cambodian tragedy dragged on to the 1990s, the “national bourgeoisie” traits in Sihanouk’s character would appear and reappear time and again as if in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Notes

1. It should be noted that the study does not in any way state that Sihanouk is a national bourgeois. Rather the study asserts that Sihanouk's actions during this time resembles that of the conceptual national bourgeoisie in Marxist-Leninist discourse. The author is likewise aware that strictly speaking, Sihanouk does not "fit" into the category of the national bourgeoisie as he was a member of the autocracy which makes him an outright enemy of the Khmer communist revolution both in terms of the theoretical class analysis and the treatment accorded him by the Khmer Rouge leadership. Yet, as events of this particular period will show, Sihanouk could be seen in the dualistic character of the national bourgeoisie—his intense patriotism, his leading role in the revolution while but at the same time "desiring to gain the status or the big bourgeoisie," i.e., to snatch the country's political power in the postwar.
2. This analysis appeared in an undated Khmer Rouge organ/publication *Pracheachon Padevat* edited by Thuch Rin and captured by Lon Nol's forces in late 1972; see Kiernan, *How Pol Pot* 322.
3. It may be recalled that conflict between the two communist powers had its roots during the start of Korean War in the 1950s. At the time, the Chinese communists, still euphoric from their seizure of state power a year before, favored more radical options in supporting North Korea in the war. Moscow was more moderate in its approach as they were still reeling from the ravages of the Second World War and at the same time was terrified that expanding the war may lead to an atomic war with the United States. China criticized the Soviet Union for not doing enough to help North Korea. Again, during the mid-1950s, China criticized the Soviet Union as "revisionist" for embarking on an economic policy that allowed peasants to own limited plots of farm lands as a result of the resounding failure of its collectivization program. And in the early 1960s, the Chinese inserted the phrase, "Mao Tse-tung Thought" to Marxism-Leninism in recognition of his theoretical contributions. Moscow vilified it by saying the Chinese communist party was resorting to "personality cult."
4. Jaime Flor-Cruz discusses the impact of the Cultural Revolution outside of China on its 30th anniversary.
5. Sihanouk admitted his unannounced trip to France in a speech he gave at Prey Totoeng on April 10, 1967.
6. For further discussion of Cambodia's foreign policy during the Sihanouk years, see also Roger M. Smith, *Cambodia's Foreign Policy*, Cornell UP, 1965.

7. For a firsthand account of Vietnamese troops stationed in Cambodia during this period, see Truong Nhu Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985.
8. At this time, Lon Nol was already the acting prime minister; he replaced Penn Nouth who stepped down because of poor health.
9. Provides an account of Sihanouk's filmmaking activities.
10. An account provided by Cols. Po Chhon and Seng Sinthay as told to David Chandler. See *The Tragedy*, 167.
11. This account was provided by Jean Saintaney who was having lunch with Sihanouk when they received news of the attacks on both embassies.
12. This account can be found in Sihanouk's unpublished article, "*La calice jusque a' lie.*"
13. Milton Osborne suggests that it was personal revenge which drove the Prince to join the resistance. On the other hand, William Shawcross believes that the virulent attacks against his personality and the royal family which were encouraged by the CIA, fueled his resolve to unite with the insurgents. David Chandler, however, believes that Sihanouk had genuine admiration towards the insurgents for their dedication and patriotism.
14. The former Emperor Bao Dai expired peacefully on July 31, 1997 at an undisclosed hospital in Paris at the age of 87 because of an unspecified illness.
15. Zhou Enlai and his protege Deng Xiaoping favored improved relations with the United States, emphasizing that it was the Soviet Union which was China's enemy. The radicals inside the Politburo, led by Mao's wife Chiang Ching, Wang Hung-wen, and the other members of the so-called "Gang of Four" argued to the contrary.
16. This was presumably also Hanoi's reference.
17. Penn Nouth's message over Radio Peking, Foreign Broadcast Information Service 1 April 1970, 59.
18. For a study of China's two-track policy, see Hood, Steven J. "Beijing's Cambodia gamble and prospects for peace in Indochina," *Asian Survey*, vol. 10, no.10, October 1990, 62- 78.
19. For a complete text of the speech, see Appendix 2 of Lek Tan and Malcolm Caldwell, *Cambodia in the Southeast Asian War*, Monthly Review Press, 1973.
20. It should be noted that many of the Prince's pronouncements, interviews given to media and other social functions were done during banquets. Sihanouk was accorded such luxuries at a time when the Cultural Revolution was at its peak.
21. Also known as savages, a pejorative term the Khmers used to describe the Vietnamese.
22. Also called the Northern regroupees, or those who were sent for training to North Vietnam during the 1960s.

23. This categorization was drawn mainly from Kiernan and Boua 228-229; see also Burchett, Wilfred. *The China-Cambodia-Vietnam Triangle*, Zed Press, 1981, 66-67.
24. For a discourse on the proposed agricultural policies, see Hu Nim's "Land Tenure and Social Structure in Kampuchea," Hou Yuon's "The Peasantry in Kampuchea: Colonialism and Modernization," and "A Socialist Program to Safeguard the Nation" which was translated by Kiernan and Noua, 34-63, 69-77, 134-150.
25. Sylvana Foa's interview with Ieng Sary in Beijing in September 1973 and appeared in *New York Times*, October 11, 1973.
26. From Princess Monique's unpublished diary of their visit to Cambodia in 1973 entitled "Voyage Historique au Cambodge en 1973" which appeared in Chandler, *The Tragedy* 331.
27. There were proposals made, coming from the Russians, in 1972 to prulition? Cambodia similar to that of Vietnam.
28. Emory Swank did not go along well with Kissinger's policy of propping up the faltering Lon Nol regime. His replacement, Tom Enders, proved to be a willing and loyal bureaucrat.
29. This sub-chapter was drawn mainly from Chapter 22 (*The Negotiators*, 335-343) from William Shawcross' *Sideshow* unless otherwise indicated. (For a similar account of the "controlled solution," see also Francois Debre, *Revolution dans IE foret*, Flammarion P, 1976).
30. At this time, Long Baret had assumed the post as prime minister of the Khmer Republic while Lon Nol was just relegated to the role of Marshall but still wielded considerable power and acted as the country's de facto leader.

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