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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Report

Communism and Cambodia

(Reference Title: ESAU LV/72)

~~Secret~~
RSS No. 0057/72
May 1972

SECRET

COMMUNISM AND CAMBODIA

MEMORANDUM FOR RECIPIENTS

This in-depth, background study of the development of Communism in Cambodia indicates that over the past two-and-a-half decades this Hanoi-directed movement has built a more extensive political and military structure than has generally been appreciated. In particular, the training of large numbers of ethnic Khmers in North Vietnam, a phenomenon which came to light in early 1971, has given the Communists in Cambodia a respectable base on which to build.

The study also finds that Hanoi, abundantly aware of the antipathy that most Cambodians feel towards Vietnamese, is giving the Khmer Communist (KC) Party an increased measure of autonomy, particularly at the local level; and that the KC political-military apparatus, backed by the power of the Vietnamese Communist Army, poses a serious threat to the Phnom Penh government.

This study has profited from the assistance of a wide number of Cambodia specialists in the CIA, with whom this study has been coordinated.

Comments on this paper are welcomed, and should be addressed to the Chief or Deputy Chief of this Staff.

Hal Ford
Chief, DD/I Special Research Staff

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Introduction

This study, based on an exhaustive review of available information, examines the development of Communism in Cambodia. It covers the Vietnamese Communist attempts since the late forties to create a native Khmer Party amenable to Hanoi's direction, the training of a Cambodian cadre structure in North Vietnam, and the reintroduction of Khmer cadres into Cambodia starting in the early sixties. The study brings together the evidence on the current Communist structure in Cambodia, including the Cambodian Liberation Army, the movement's Khmer political apparatus, and the Communist Party of Cambodia.

COMMUNISM AND CAMBODIA

Summary

The story of Communism in Cambodia began in 1945, when a group of Cambodian patriots, called the Khmer Issaraks, took to the hills to start a rebellion against the French. Within two years, they were in contact with the Communist Viet Minh in neighboring Vietnam. In short order, the Viet Minh attempted to take over the Khmer independence movement. Their effort split the rebels in two. One faction consisted of the old Khmer Issaraks. The other became the Khmer Viet Minh, controlled by the Indo-China Communist Party under the direction of Ho Chi Minh.

By 1950, the Communists had set up a Central Office of Cambodia, located in the southwestern province of Kampot. Although the Office was under the titular leadership of a Khmer with the alias Son Ngoc Minh, Vietnamese advisors actually ran it. They reported to Nam Bo (the "Southern Department"), an early version of today's Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN).

In late 1950 Ho Chi Minh dissolved the Indo-China Communist Party, which supposedly encompassed Laos and Cambodia as well as Vietnam. Early the next year he formed the Vietnamese Lao Dong Party, with the understanding that the other two countries would get their own parties shortly thereafter. Despite frequent attempts, the Viet Minh were unable to get a Cambodian Party going for several years.

Meanwhile the Viet Minh effort in Cambodia ran into heavy weather. The root of their problem was threefold. First, they gave Cambodia their lowest priority. Second,

most Khmers were reluctant to follow a movement so closely identified with their ancient enemy, the Vietnamese. And third, Sihanouk, Cambodia's leader under the French, was undercutting the Communists' appeal by his own increasingly vocal demands for independence.

Nonetheless, by early 1953 the Communist structure in Cambodia had reached its height. The French Order of Battle for Cambodia stated that the "Cambodian Liberation Army" had some 7,000 soldiers, including Main Forces, Local Forces, and Guerrilla-Militia. The Army was a mixture of Khmers and Viet Minh "volunteers." "Cadre Affairs Committees" (Ban Can Su) acted as the structure's political arm and were in operation in most Cambodian provinces. But the Communists were unable to stem the unfavorable tide, particularly when France granted Cambodia virtual independence in late 1953.

At the Geneva Convention of mid-1954, the Viet Minh tried to get at the conference table what they had failed to gain on the battlefield. Sihanouk's representatives put up a stout resistance, however, and the Communist efforts came to nothing. The final version of the Accords called for the complete withdrawal of all Communist forces from Cambodia.

The Vietnamese "volunteers" left Cambodia openly. Except for a handful of stay-behinds, the Cambodian "Khmer Viet Minh" departed in secret. Together with a group of tribesmen drawn from Cambodia's northeast, they went to North Vietnam. There they entered training camps or the army, with the understanding that they would become the nucleus of the "Cambodian Revolution." The total number of Hanoi-bound Cambodian nationals -- both tribesmen and Khmer Viet Minh -- may have been in the neighborhood of three thousand. They hold the most important positions in the Khmer Communist cadre structure of today.

Sihanouk emerged from Geneva a national hero, and got on with the job of consolidating power. In elections in September 1955, his national party, the Sangkum, swamped the opposition, including the Communist-supported Pracheachon Group, which received only 4% of the vote. The Pracheachon never recovered from this defeat.

Meanwhile, Cambodia's foreign policy embarked on a course of "neutralism." Hanoi mended its fences with Phnom Penh and halted its propaganda and financial support for the Khmer Communists in Cambodia, even as it continued training Khmers in the north. Instead, Hanoi concentrated its efforts on the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, while heaping praise on Sihanouk. By 1957, North Vietnam was so confident of its position that it stationed Nam Bo -- its advance headquarters for the south -- in the heart of Phnom Penh. There it remained for two years.

In early 1959, the Lao Dong Party Central Committee in Hanoi ratified an earlier Politburo decision to topple South Vietnam's President Diem by force. The decision's Cambodian clause had three parts. First, an alternate infiltration corridor was planned for Cambodia's northeast. Second, the Vietnamese Communist organization in Cambodia was to be oriented towards the war in Vietnam. And third, the reserve of Khmer cadres in North Vietnam was to be improved and expanded. By 1961, Hanoi-trained cadres had started filtering into the northeast, and additional Khmer recruits were on the way north. Training in North Vietnam was upgraded and more Cambodians entered officer candidate schools.

After the "armed struggle" kicked off in South Vietnam, Saigon's position grew progressively worse. Convinced that Hanoi would eventually win, Sihanouk looked the other way when the Viet Cong began to operate from Cambodian soil. Furthermore, he left the Vietnamese Communist organization in Phnom Penh and elsewhere more or

less alone. America's entry into the fray in 1965 did not change his mind about the final outcome of the war. In early 1966, Cambodia began to deliver rice to the Communists. With Sihanouk's permission, Viet Cong-bound munitions deliveries began to arrive in the port of Sihanoukville that December.

Even as the Communists were negotiating for arms with Sihanouk, Hanoi was sending Khmer Communist cadres down the trail towards the COSVN area in Cambodia's southeast. Most of these early cadres were civilians who served along the frontier to organize a political base. A defector who served on the infiltration corridor during the period has claimed that the number of Khmers to have arrived at COSVN by late 1967 was in the neighborhood of 3,000 including many who had gone north after Geneva -- but such an estimate is most uncertain. At the same time -- just as Sihanouk was beginning to have doubts about the Communists ability to conquer the south -- Hanoi was laying plans to open a military front in Cambodia, using the native Cambodian Communist Party.

The front opened in early 1968 as the Communists started an armed rebellion in the Cambodian countryside. Although they did their best to keep participation a secret, it is still far from clear why they made the decision, which seemingly flew in the face of the Viet Cong need for Cambodian bases and for a continuing arms flow from Sihanoukville. Three reasons have been advanced to explain the decision. First, Hanoi may have felt it necessary to take out insurance in case the Cambodian government reneged on its commitments. Second, rural unrest was already on the rise in parts of Cambodia, and the Communists may have wanted to preempt its leadership. And third, Hanoi may have thought the time had come for a major step towards its long range goal of putting a Communist government in Phnom Penh. (A captured Khmer Communist document has since characterized 1968 as the end of its Party's "years of resistance" and the start of

the "politico-military" struggle, which continued until Sihanouk's fall.) In addition, the Cambodian Army was beginning to move into some of the border base areas.

Whatever the reason, the number of Khmer cadres to come down the trail towards COSVN increased dramatically in 1968, according to a well-placed Vietnamese Communist defector. Other military infiltrators, from sources unknown, reportedly began landing on Cambodia's west coast. Fighting broke out in both the northeast and the west in early 1968. The rebellion spread to the southeast late that summer. Captured documents and prisoner/defector reports have since shown the Communists were heavily involved in all three areas, and that the various insurgents were in contact with one another.

The tribal uprising in the northeast, usually called the "Khmer Loeu" rebellion, was controlled by a Cambodian Communist headquarters with the cover designation "YU." According to captured documents, the headquarters by 1969 had an extensive political apparatus, and ran a modest army which had both mobile infantry units and locally-based guerrillas. Although it received little overt material support from the Vietnamese Communists, "YU's" leaders were Hanoi-trained, and in touch with the Viet Cong's B3 Front headquarters in the neighboring western highlands of South Vietnam. By late 1969 the rebels, who were also in league with the Pathet Lao, controlled much of Cambodia's northeast.

The organization of the "Red Khmer" insurgents in the west is less well documented. However, the evidence points to the existence of a Communist regional headquarters in the Elephant Chain mountains, perhaps supplied by men and material coming over the western beaches. The rebellion in the west was never particularly bloody.

The insurgents in the southeast were under the aegis of a Cambodian Communist region designated "203." (Region 203 still exists.) Beneath the southeastern region served several local commands, each charged with a distinct geographical area. The rebel leadership in the southeast, as elsewhere, had been trained in North Vietnam. By late 1969, the northeastern, western, and southeastern insurgents had formed battalions, few in number, but fairly well armed.

Meanwhile, the Cambodian Army G-2 had long since decided the uprisings were Communist-run. The G-2's opinion that the insurgents were a threat to "the future internal stability of the country" came to be shared by politicians in Phnom Penh, including Lon Nol and Sirik Matak. The unrest, along with the continuing presence of Viet Cong bases on Cambodian soil, were major contributing factors to the politicians' increasing distrust of Sihanouk's leadership.

The Viet Cong knew of the split developing in the Cambodian government, and viewed with dismay the growing strength of the "right-wing clique." Therefore Sihanouk's overthrow on 18 March 1970, although startling perhaps in the immediate sense, was not for the Communists a strategic suprirse. Within a few days of the Prince's fall, COSVN had activated its contingency plans, and was distributing detailed marching orders to its subordinate commands.

COSVN's orders had four main parts. First, Vietnamese Communist regulars were to invade Cambodia. Second, the Khmer Communist Party, Army, and political apparatus were to be expanded as rapidly as possible. Third, the Vietnamese Communists were to supply to Cambodian Communists with large numbers of advisors. Finally, a countrywide command structure was to be perfected from national through hamlet levels.

The Vietnamese Communist invasion of Cambodia began in early April 1970. Simultaneously, Muoi Cuc, who had been head or deputy head of COSVN since 1954, became the Viet Cong's chief advisor to the Khmer Communists. By mid-summer, according to enemy statistics, the Communists claimed to control some two-and-a-half million of Cambodia's seven million people. The buildup of the Viet Cong advisory system grew apace, so that by the end of the year the Communists had a large-scale training program underway which was turning out thousands of graduates from newly-created military and political schools. Vietnamese Communist advisors were serving in the Cambodian Liberation Army and the Khmer political structure at national through district levels.

The Cambodian Liberation Army (CLA)* of today follows the model set in 1953. The main difference between then and now is that today's army is much larger. As with the earlier army, overall direction of the CLA is vested in Hanoi's Ministry of Defense, which also runs the Communist military organization in Vietnam and Laos. Like the 1953 model, the current CLA consists of Main Forces, Local Forces, and Guerrilla-Militia. The Main Forces are subordinate to two sets of regions. One set comprises five Vietnamese Communist-run regions, designated C10, C20, C30, C40 and the Phuoc Long Front. These regions are directly under COSVN's military command and consist of headquarters, staff, and service troops and a number of Vietnamese Communist-led regiments, battalions, and companies which contain Khmer troops as fillers. Some of these units are largely Khmer, others mostly Vietnamese. The second set of regions is closely tied to the Khmer

**The CLA's formal title is the "Cambodian National People's Liberation Armed Forces."*

Communist political apparatus. The KC regions run battalion-size units of their own, and supervise the KC military forces of the lower echelons.

The CLA Local Forces are under Khmer Communist subregions and districts. Like the Main Forces, the Local Forces have staff and service troops assigned to their headquarters, often with Viet Cong advisors attached. The Local Force combat units consist of battalions and companies, usually well-equipped with small arms but short on heavier weapons.

The largest category on CLA books, the Guerrilla-Militia, operates in the villages and hamlets. Like those in Vietnam, guerrilla-militiamen in Cambodia stand guard, collect taxes, and serve as a manpower pool for higher-level units. Although most have received a week or two of military training, they seldom fight. Guerrillas are lightly equipped in most areas, but well-armed in some, particularly those near the Vietnamese border.

The CLA's overall quality is mixed. Many of its Khmer officers have graduated from first-rate military academies in North Vietnam, but most of the rank-and-file have been recruited since Sihanouk's fall. The majority of CLA soldiers are unenthusiastic, almost all resent their Vietnamese advisors, and large numbers go over the hill. The CLA's main asset is that the bulk of its forces are in the countryside close to the people, while its opponent, the Cambodian government army (FANK), has many of its units garrisoned in the larger towns and cities or along the main roads.

The Khmer Communist (KC) political apparatus, relatively small prior to March 1970, mushroomed after the Viet Cong invasion of Cambodia. Now is consists of the Central Office of Cambodia, located near COSVN headquarters, and at least five regions, designated Northeast,

Southeast, Northwest, Southwest, and a "Special Zone," apparently Phnom Penh. Under the regions are subregions, districts, villages, and hamlets. Information on the higher levels is still spotty, but a fair amount of evidence, including captured documents, describes the lower echelon committees. Although the committees govern under the name of "National United Front of Kampuchea" (FUNK), their leading cadres are Khmer Communists. FUNK's titular leader is Sihanouk, now in Peking.

The Khmer Communists have most of the same components found in the Communist organization in Vietnam. These are concerned with such matters as propaganda, finance, and security. The most important is the security component. Together with the Guerrilla-Militia, it is responsible for controlling the people who live in Communist territory.

The KC political apparatus is becoming increasingly effective. Although trained cadres are still scarce, particularly in the villages and hamlets, the KC's machinery of control is improving in many places simply because the Cambodian government has failed to molest it. Even in areas where restive peasants have kicked over the traces, the Communists have reasserted control because of Phnom Penh's omission to fill the vacuum. In other areas, KC political cadres have come to blows with their Vietnamese mentors. The Viet Cong response has usually been to roll with the punch, and to shift additional responsibilities to the Cambodians.

The recipient of power is the so-called "Communist Party of Cambodia." Apparently created in 1961 in Hanoi, the Party is North Vietnam's client, not its puppet. Numbering perhaps ten thousand or more, the Party is already something to reckon with, even considering its youth. Although reports on its quality vary, the weight of the evidence suggests that most of its Hanoi-trained members

are reasonably competent and dedicated, while recruits recently enlisted in Cambodia are somewhat less so.

Just as the Lao Dong Party aims to rule in Saigon, the Cambodian Party's goal is to control Phnom Penh. Since it still lacks the strength to effect a takeover by itself, the Khmer Party's short-term interests remain with Hanoi. However, the signs point to future friction. For example, a recent COSVN assessment suggests that in some areas relations between the Cambodians and Vietnamese Communists had grown "steadily worse." It would not be surprising if at some more distant time, the ancient enmities between the Khmers and Vietnamese were to reemerge, cast in Communist terminology.

PART I: THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE (1945-1954)

The Rebellion Begins

Cambodia first declared independence from the French while occupied by the Japanese. Sihanouk, then King, made the declaration on 12 March 1945, three days after Hirohito's Imperial Army seized and disarmed wavering French garrisons throughout Indo-China. Japan acted because of its alarm at the imminent collapse of the Third Reich in Europe, and fear that the garrisons, which had been pro-Vichy for most of the war, might switch sides. In June, Tokyo installed a Cambodian nationalist, Son Ngoc Thanh, as Foreign Minister of the newly-made state.

The "independence" was short-lived, because Japan capitulated to the Allies on 14 August. As the surrender was being signed, Son Ngoc Thanh declared himself Cambodia's premier, and proclaimed his intent to keep the country sovereign. French, British, and Indian troops cut short his bravado seven weeks later by marching into Phnom Penh. The French arrested Thanh as an Axis collaborator, and packed him off to jail in Paris. The more prudent Sihanouk, who had collaborated as much as Thanh, swore fealty to France (to the disgust of many Khmers). He stayed on as King.

Thanh's arrest made him a Cambodian hero, and sent other Khmer patriots to the hills or to Thailand, then a focal point for Southeast Asian nationalism. Fighting broke out in Western Cambodia. The French managed to contain the unrest, but failed to wipe out the widely scattered rebel bands, who fought under the name of "Khmer Issarak."

For some time the Cambodian insurrection sputtered along independently of the more virulent Communist-led rebellion against the French colonial regime in neighboring Vietnam. In 1947, however, the Viet Minh made contact with several rebel groups. By the end of the year, some Khmer bands had accepted the Communists' aid and sponsorship. Thereafter, the French Army's Cambodian Order of Battle (OB) carried two sets of rebels on its rolls: "Khmer Viet Minh," who were in league with the Vietnamese Communists and "subordinate to the Indochina Communist Party" and "Khmer Issaraks," who were non-Communists "with many diverse tendencies, acting as best they can in their interests of the moment."

Viet Minh Influence Increases

In 1949, the Viet Minh stepped up their efforts to direct events in Cambodia. First, they created special teams staffed by Vietnamese "familiar with Cambodia" to promote the development of a political base. Second, they sent "volunteer" military units to campaign with the pro-Viet Minh rebels. And third, they set up a Central Office of Cambodia in the southwestern province of Kampot. The Central Office was put under the Foreign Affairs Section of Nam Bo (the "Southern Department"), then the main Viet Minh controlling authority for southern Vietnam. The number of Vietnamese cadres and "volunteers" at first numbered in the low hundreds. They were never to exceed 2500.

In extending the aid, the Viet Minh were intensely conscious of the racial frictions between the Khmer and Vietnamese peoples. They therefore sought to conceal their Vietnamese origin by setting up front organizations with Cambodian names. For example, in April 1950, they convened a conference of "105 Buddhist bonzes," who put

together a "Central Committee for the Khmer Liberation." The Committee thereupon created the so-called "Issarak Front." The Front's name was clearly designed to attract adherents from the Khmer Issaraks.

The Front's announced leader was Son Ngoc Minh, "a high-ranking bonze of great prestige." Although someone going by that name clearly existed, the name itself is almost certainly an alias.*

The Communists apparently chose it because it resembled that of the exiled hero, Son Ngoc Thanh.** They even bruited it about that Minh was Thanh's younger brother -- a rumor that Thanh has indignantly denied. Viet Minh advisors were also given Khmer names. For example, the chief advisor to the Cambodian Central Office, Viet Minh Colonel Nguyen Thanh Son, used the Cambodian alias of "Hanilakiri."

The Viet Minh realized from the first that this Potemkin-like arrangement would not do. Therefore that summer they opened several military and political schools in southwestern Cambodia to train an ethnic Khmer cadre structure. By August, at least 250 students were in training. More important, the Viet Minh began thinking seriously about creating a native Cambodian Communist Party.

**French police records claim the person in question was an ethnic Cambodian born in the Vietnamese Delta province of Tra Vinh. (GVN Vinh Binh). A recent report states that his real name is Achar Mieu.*

***It has been speculated that the name Son Ngoc Minh is a combination of the names Son Ngoc Thanh and Ho Chi Minh.*

The Attempt to Make a Cambodian Party

The Viet Minh's first serious discussions concerning the creation of a Cambodian Communist Party took place in late 1950. The results of the talks came to light at the Indo-China Communist Party's Second Congress, which met on 11 February 1951 at the Viet Minh's mountain headquarters northwest of Hanoi.* One of the Congress's first acts was to change the name of the "Indo-China Communist Party," which supposedly encompassed Laos and Cambodia as well as Vietnam, to the "Vietnamese Workers' (Lao Dong) Party."

A Top Secret directive captured by the French later in the year laid out the reasons behind the change. The directive explained that if the name "Indochina" were kept, Khmer and Laotian nationalists -- who were well aware that the Party was run by Vietnamese -- might "suspect Vietnam of wishing to control" their countries. This was not the case, the directive indicated, since Laos and Cambodia were to have their own Parties.

However, fine print in the directive's later clauses showed that the new Parties would be less than fully independent. One clause stated that the Vietnamese Party reserved the right to supervise its "brothers." Another indicated that Vietnam had set up bureaus "to assist the revolutionary movement" in Laos and Cambodia. A third stated that "if conditions permit," the three national Parties would eventually merge. The theme of merger also appeared in the twelfth plank of the Lao Dong Party platform, published in March 1951. The

*The First Party Congress was held in Macao in 1935.

plank stated that Vietnam sought eventually to bring about a "federation of states of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, if the three peoples so desire." Other evidence suggests that the Viet Minh were sincere in their desire to give the Cambodians and Laotians a greater measure of autonomy.

Shortly after the Congress broke up, a draft set of Party Statutes was hastily drawn up and dispatched to the Central Office of Cambodia, where its "Cadre Affairs Committee" (Ban Can Su) "unanimously" approved them, even though they were still in Vietnamese. The Statutes stayed in Vietnamese at least until 5 August when the Central Office forwarded them to the lower echelons, requesting their translation into Cambodian. Whether or not the translation was made, we don't know. In any event, a Cambodian Party did not come into being for several years.

The Rebellion Progresses

Despite the palaver over a Party, the Viet Minh's efforts to make headway in Cambodia ran into heavy weather. Although the French had relatively few troops in the area, these were enough to keep the local Communists at bay. By mid-1951, the French had succeeded in splitting southern Cambodia in two. The Viet Minh, together with their Khmer allies, could do little more than conduct low-level guerrilla warfare.

The Viet Minh's problems were compounded by their uneasy relations with the Khmer Issaraks, many of whom were anti-Communist as well as anti-French. Some Issaraks even cooperated with the French against the Viet Minh -- much to the latters' dismay.

Into this pot later in October dropped Son Ngoc Thanh, back from his exile in France. He briefly stopped by Phnom Penh to receive a tumultuous welcome, then fled to the northwestern hills, pursued by the French police. There he joined the Issaraks, and was denounced by Sihanouk as a traitor. Thanh's arrival in northwest Cambodia perked up the rebellion there, and the Khmer Issaraks thereupon became a "respectable military factor."

By early 1953, the Cambodian rebellion had considerably expanded. In a letter to the president of France dated 5 March, Sihanouk went so far as to claim that three-fifths of Cambodia "was occupied by the Viet Minh." Although the claim was greatly exaggerated to scare the French into granting Cambodia a greater measure of sovereignty, it reflected the increased sophistication of the Communists' Cambodian organization.

Communist Organization: 1953

The Communist structure in Cambodia was at its height in early 1953. Geographically, it was divided into regions, provinces, districts, and villages. Administratively, it had both military and political arms. The organization varied in strength from place to place and fared better among Cambodia's minorities than among the Khmers themselves.

The Central Office of Cambodia had a twelve-man command committee, Son Ngoc Minh its titular chief, with some half a dozen subordinate bureaus. The real power lay with the Viet Minh's chief advisor, Colonel Nguyen Thanh Son, who headed the committee's political bureau and who was concurrently chief of Nam Bo's Foreign Affairs Section. The twelve committee members included no more than five ethnic Cambodians; the rest were Vietnamese.

The Khmers included Son Ngoc Minh, President, Chanh Samay, chief of finance,* Sieu Heng, head of the military bureau, and Tou Samouth, a "commissioner." In 1953, Cambodian Central got its orders -- always in Vietnamese -- from Nam Bo where Le Duc Tho, whose prime concern was southern Vietnam, handled Cambodia as a sideline.

Cambodian Central directed the activities of the principal regions, three at first, then four. Then as now, the main four were called the Northwest, Southwest, Southeast, and Northeast Regions. Like Cambodian Central, the regional committees contained a large proportion of Vietnamese. So did those of the provinces.

At each echelon below Central, the main political organ was the "Cadre Affairs Committee," (Ban Can Su) whose composition varied by locale. The one in Phnom Penh, for example, had components charged with security, common-liaison, propaganda, and Chinese proselyting. Committees in other areas had sections which ran the Issarak Front. The "Cadre Affairs Committees" were to remain the Communists' primary political mechanism in Cambodia until well into the 'sixties. They even pop up in reporting today.

The Communists' main military arm was what came to be called the "Cambodian Liberation Army," whose strength the French Cambodian OB carried at about 7000 in early 1953. Then, as now, the Liberation Army had three categories of troops: main forces, local forces, and guerrilla/militia. The main forces, some thousand strong, were well armed, with a heavy leavening of Vietnamese "volunteers." The local forces, had about 3000 well-armed troops, a mixture of Cambodians and Vietnamese. The lightly-armed guerrilla-militia, 3000

A recent report claims that Chanh Samay is now deputy head of the Khmer Communist Party.

strong, were largely Cambodians. Vietnamese commanded most of the bigger units. Those headed by Cambodians had Vietnamese advisors. The army was a prototype of the one today.

The Communist organization was naturally strongest in areas peopled by the 500,000-odd ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. For example, the Chup plantation -- where most workers were Vietnamese -- reportedly provided the Viet Minh army in southern Vietnam with more than 1500 soldiers. Many other Vietnamese communities sent drafts of recruits to Vietnam -- so that it is likely that Cambodia provided Nam Bo many more Vietnamese troops than Nam Bo sent to Cambodia as "volunteers."

The structure also made modest inroads among Cambodia's 400,000 ethnic Chinese. Although there is evidence of an untidy jurisdictional dispute between the IndoChinese and Chinese Communist Parties over who should control the area's overseas Chinese, the squabble was resolved in favor of the Viet Minh. Their principal mechanism of control was the "All-Cambodia Committee for Winning Over the Chinese." Peking sent a small number of political advisors to IndoChina to help. The Top Secret directive dispatching the advisors south cautioned them against Vietnamese food.

The Rebellion Winds Down

As 1953 waxed, the Communists' fortunes in Cambodia waned. The main cause of the decline was Sihanouk's increasing success in extracting concessions from the French. To many Cambodians he seemed to be getting peaceably from France what the Vietnamese Communists next door were buying with blood.

Sihanouk increased the Communists' problems by making a series of public demands -- from Phnom Penh, New York, Ottawa, and Tokyo, among other places -- that the French bow to what he now called "The Royal Crusade for Independence." By October the French had given enough ground so that Sihanouk could claim, almost with justification, that Cambodia was fully sovereign. The King held an Independence Day parade on 9 November, having robbed the Communists of their greatest issue.

He added to their torment in mid-December by personally leading the royal Cambodian Army against the Khmer Viet Minh. Two battalions of Vietnamese Communist regulars thereupon invaded northeastern Cambodia from Laos and Vietnam. Although the Royal Khmer Army "stopped them at the gates of Kratie," the Viet Minh controlled much of the northeast by the time the Geneva Conference opened on 26 April 1954. (See Map on page 10.) Eight days later came the surrender of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu.

COMMUNIST TERRITORIAL CLAIMS: MARCH 1954

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PART II: GENEVA AND THE CAMBODIAN REGROUPMENT

Geneva

Pham Van Dong, the head of the Vietnamese Communist delegation at Geneva, tried to get at the conference table what the Khmer Viet Minh had failed to gain on the battlefield. Claiming that his Cambodian colleagues controlled huge "liberated areas," he demanded that a delegation from the "Cambodian Resistance Government" be seated to take part in the work of the conference. Sihanouk's representative to Geneva, Sam Sary, sarcastically denied knowledge either of the Resistance Government or of the location of the "vast and unspecified territory where its writ was alleged to run." He might also have asked Pham Van Dong where the Resistance delegation was. Son Ngoc Minh, Sieu Heng, and Tou Samouth -- the leading Khmer Communists -- were all in or near Cambodia. The closest thing to a Cambodian Communist at Geneva was Nguyen Thanh Son (alias "Hanilakiri"), the top Vietnamese advisor to Cambodia Central.

In any case, the Cambodian seating question -- together with the related one of Laos -- tied up the conference from early May until mid-June. It was not until June 16th that Pham Van Dong acknowledged that the situations in Cambodia and Laos "were different from that in Vietnam and that therefore the solution would have to be different." The conference then shut down for three weeks as Sihanouk's Cambodian delegation closeted itself with the Viet Minh -- from 19 June to 11 July -- to see if they could come up with something mutually acceptable.

Basically aware of their weakness in Cambodia, the Viet Minh finally caved in. At Sam Sary's insistence, the Communists agreed to withdraw all Viet Minh troops from Cambodian soil within 90 days after the Accords were

signed. Sihanouk's delegation signed them on 21 July 1954, having got virtually everything it demanded. Its resolve impressed even Molotov, the Soviet Union's dour representative at the conference. Observing the Cambodian delegation in the early hours of 21 July, he is said to have allowed himself a small smile.

The Cambodian Regroupment

The Viet Minh thereupon set about salvaging as much as they could of their Cambodian structure. They used the same method in Cambodia that they employed on a much larger scale in South Vietnam. That is, they shipped cadres and sympathizers to North Vietnam, leaving behind a few Party members to mind the store.

The number of Cambodian nationals who went to North Vietnam in 1954 was probably not many more than 3000, perhaps even fewer. They are nonetheless important, since they form the leadership of the Khmer Communist organization in Cambodia today. The northern-bound Cambodians were of two main types: ethnic Khmers, from the "Khmer Viet Minh," and mountain tribesmen from Cambodia's northeast.

The Khmer Viet Minh

Shortly after the Accords were signed, Viet Minh headquarters in northern Vietnam instructed the Central Office of Cambodia to prepare for the regroupment. Reports concerning the number of Khmer Viet Minh to go north are fragmentary. A North Vietnamese Lieutenant Colonel said early last year that he knew of 300 Cambodians who "regrouped" to Hanoi in 1954. A Viet Cong captain reported

that at least two 400-man Khmer "Battalions" went north. A third source said recently he knew of more than 1100 Khmer regroupees. A piecing together of the evidence suggests some 2000 Khmer Viet Minh, including dependents, left Cambodia. One report states many sailed north aboard a Polish ship. Some of the senior cadres are reported to have flown to Hanoi by plane.

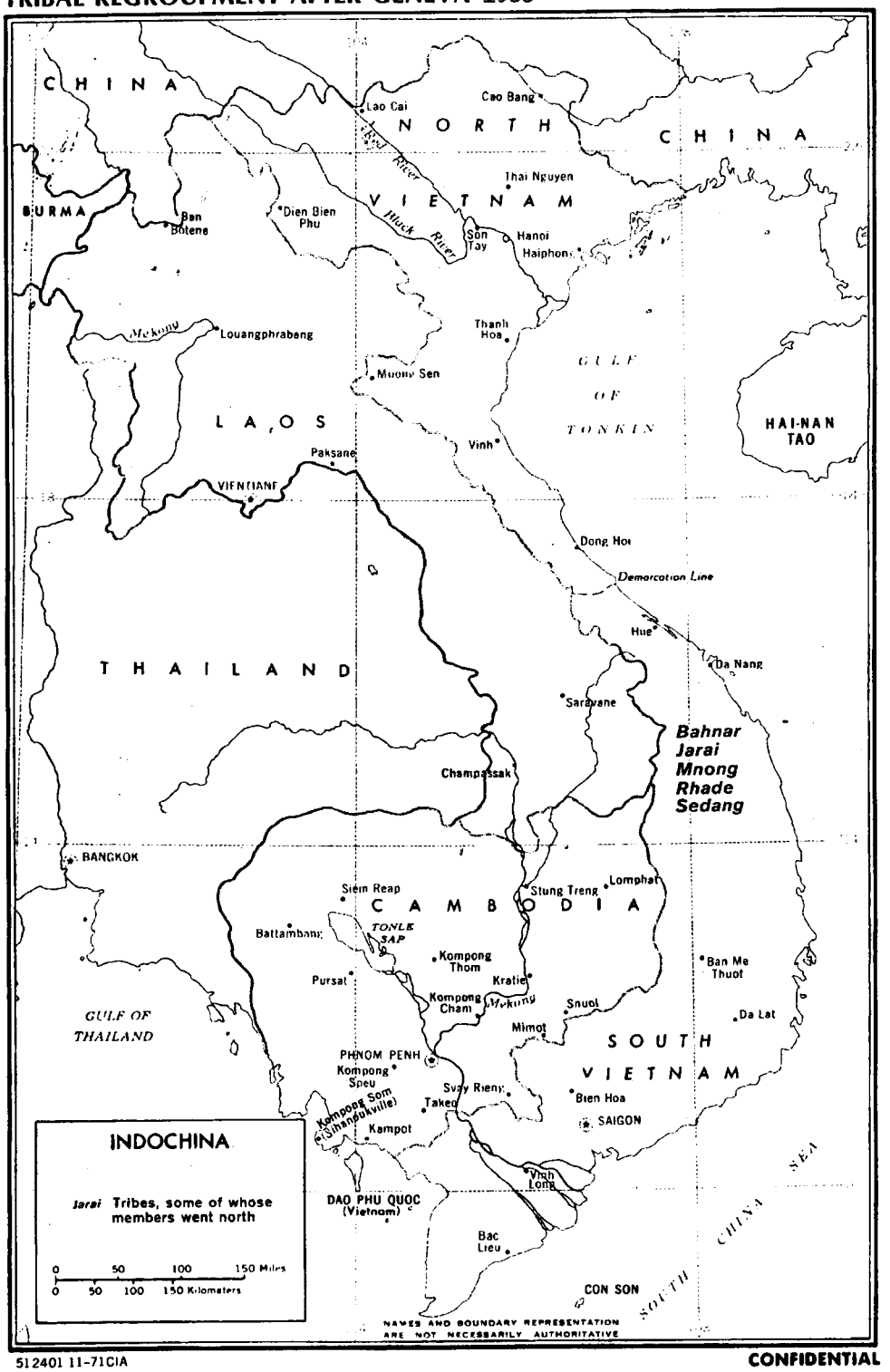
The Viet Minh tried to keep the Khmer regroupment a secret. They were in a good position to do so. The head of their delegation to the Joint Armistice Commission in Phnom Penh, which supervised the evacuation, was their chief advisor to Cambodian Central, Nguyen Thanh Son. Although records kept by the armistice officials indicated that 2384 Communist soldiers checked out of Cambodia, these were presumed at the time to be Vietnamese "volunteers."

The Cambodian government would have been delighted to hear of the Khmer rebels' departure. Sihanouk regarded them as troublemakers and complained to the Armistice Commission that too few Communists were on the way out. His intelligence service, which got the names of only a handful of departing Khmers, was unaware so many were leaving. Later reports suggested that the number of Cambodian (as against Vietnamese or Chinese) Communists staying in the country after the regroupment was in the neighborhood of 100.

The Northeast Tribesmen

The Communists found it even simpler to hide the regroupment of tribesmen from Cambodia's northeast. Since the Viet Minh were in effective control of much of the area -- regarded by the Cambodian government as a remote land peopled by savages — the Communists were able to effect the tribesmen's departure at a leisurely pace.

TRIBAL REGROUPMENT AFTER GENEVA-1955



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The main body of tribal regroupees started north in early 1955. They included Bahnar, Sedang, and Jarai, who inhabit both sides of the Cambodia-South Vietnam frontier. Although most Jarai live in Vietnam, they still form a majority in Cambodia's Ratanakiri Province. Other tribesmen going north included Rhade -- mostly from Vietnam, some from Cambodia -- and Mnong, the main inhabitants of Mondolkiri Province. (See Map)

The number of tribesmen the Communists took from Cambodia is impossible to determine, because of the elusive nature of tribal allegiance. Many northern-bound tribesmen didn't know what country they technically belonged to, most didn't care. Intelligence reports of 1954 and 1955 showed that considerably more than ten thousand tribesmen from South Vietnam and Cambodia regrouped to Hanoi from South Vietnamese ports.

Orders which selected the tribes for regroupment specified the regroupees should be "preferably women." The preference apparently stemmed from the Communists' knowledge of the women's place in tribal society. The standard work on southeast Asian tribes states that the Jarai, among others, "have a matrilineal kinship system in which descent is in the female line, and the women own the houses, domestic animals, produce from farming, gongs, and jars, and also hold title to the land."

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PART III: THE QUIET YEARS (1954-1959)

Sihanouk Takes Hold

King Sihanouk emerged from Geneva a national hero. His diplomats had outmaneuvered the cold warriors of East and West. The royal claim to have won independence was now indisputable.

So he got on with the job of consolidating power. The disarray of the opposition made his task simpler. With the French gone, Son Ngoc Thanh found himself in the northwestern wilderness, a rebel without a cause. On his return to Phnom Penh under an amnesty granted after the Accords, Thanh demanded an audience with Sihanouk, but received instead a contemptuous rebuff. "You would not serve His Majesty The King at the critical hour when he was accomplishing his royal mission," Sihanouk said loftily, and left Thanh to his own devices. Thanh became an inveterate schemer.

Son Ngoc Minh went to Hanoi. Although five days after the breakup of the Geneva Conference Minh had proclaimed that the "political struggle was about to begin," he left the dirty work to cadres staying behind, poorly organized and few in number. Another Cambodian Communist leader, Hou Youn, was still in Paris superintending Khmer students for the French Communist Party.*

**At the time, he was working for the Cambodian Language Branch of the French Party's Colonial Section.*

Sihanouk decided in early 1955 to put his popularity to the test, and called a nationwide referendum on his policies of the two previous years. He won 99% of the vote. Shortly thereafter, he abdicated as king, took on the title of "Prince," and formed his own political group, the Sangkum, to compete in elections due in September.

In July, the Communists announced the formation of a political front to take part in the elections. They named it the Pracheachon ("People's") Group. Running on a strong anti-Communist platform, the Sangkum won in a landslide, with 82% of the vote. Despite (or perhaps because of) strong propaganda support from Hanoi, the Pracheachon Group got only 4%, mostly from the Chinese and Vietnamese minorities. A third party, the Democratic, got the remaining twelve percent.

The Pracheachon Group never recovered from its September drubbing. Although Hou Youn returned from Paris in 1956 to become the Group's leader, it failed to catch fire among ethnic Khmers. By 1958, its fortunes had sunk so low that its candidates withdrew from scheduled elections. Apparently on the theory that Hou Youn was more dangerous as an out than an in, Sihanouk admitted him into the Sangkum Party in 1958 and put him in the cabinet. There he carped and schemed in various roles through the early sixties, all the while maintaining a discreet liaison with Vietnamese Communists in Phnom Penh. A recent report alleges that his principal contact was a North Vietnamese newspaperman who in reality was a case officer for Hanoi's Ministry of Public Security.*

Meanwhile, Up North

More important for the Communists in the long term was what was going on in North Vietnam. The Vietnamese

Hou Youn dropped out of sight in 1967. A number of reports state he is now with the rebels.

Communists had begun the long and tedious process of turning a gaggle of Khmers into an effective cadre structure, something they had neglected to do in the just-finished struggle against the French. The Cambodian régroupees were split into at least three main groups.

The largest stayed in a training camp some 70 miles south of Hanoi. According to a recent report from a Vietnamese who was stationed there, the camp contained some 1200 Cambodians in early 1955, including about 600 soldiers, and 400-odd political cadres. (Apparently the remaining 200 were dependents, including 75 teenagers.) Following the structural pattern set in the south, the camp -- like Cambodian Central -- was put under the wing of Hanoi's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It had a command committee, Son Ngoc Minh at the head, a detachment of Vietnamese advisors, and a "Cadre Affairs Committee" (Ban Can Su) with subordinate bureaus to take care of such matters as security and health. One of its first tasks was to teach the Khmers to speak Vietnamese. The camp's existence and whereabouts were "closely guarded secrets."

A second group of Cambodians joined the North Vietnamese Army. The group consisted of at least three one-hundred man Cambodian companies, which were attached to Vietnamese regiments. A North Vietnamese Lt. Colonel who defected in 1968 recently stated that in 1955 one such company served with the 90th Regiment of the 324th Division. The company was made up of officers and noncoms, who received the same training as other members of the regiment, but who understood that they would eventually be used as a "nucleus of revolutionary forces" in Cambodia. Like the Cambodians in the training camp, this group's first job was to learn Vietnamese. Similarly, its "presence in North Vietnam was to be kept secret."

The third group, of which little is known, consisted of tribesmen from the Cambodian northeast. In line with their usual practice, the Communists grouped them by tribe rather than national origin. Thus Jarai from both sides

of the Cambodian-Vietnamese border were put together in the same "Ethnic Minority" training camp.* The camps' language instruction went two ways. Tribal students learned Vietnamese. Vietnamese instructors learned tribal dialects. In some cases, the Vietnamese went even further. A US Army handbook concerning the tribes reported that some cadres "filed their teeth" to gain the tribesmen's confidence.

The progress of the tribal training was monitored in the camp south of Hanoi by Son Ngoc Minh's Command Committee. The Committee included a tribesman from Cambodia's northeast, who held the position of "Minister of Ethnic Minority Affairs."

Sihanouk and the Two Vietnams

Perhaps unaware that Hanoi was schooling Cambodians in rebellion, Sihanouk committed his country to a policy of "neutralism". The policy was set in concrete at the Bandung Conference of April 1955. There, Sihanouk exchanged pleasantries and promises with Chou En-lai, who stated that China, for one, "had no intention whatsoever" of interfering in Cambodia's internal politics. By 1956, Sihanouk was accepting aid from both the Bloc and the Free World, but was allied to neither.

His relations with the two Vietnamese took different paths. At first openly hostile to the north, Prince Sihanouk gradually came to establish contacts, which if nor cordial were at least correct. North Vietnam stopped its overt support for the Pracheachon Group after the

Other groups of tribesmen were integrated into the North Vietnamese Army.

debacle of the 1955 elections. Thereafter, Hanoi's emmissaries shook hands with the Prince, and vowed not to meddle in Cambodian affairs. Although Sihanouk was still saying in early 1958 that "he knew the Communists were out to cut his throat," the threat was distant. Two hundred miles of Laotian jungle lie between North Vietnam and Cambodia. The Ho Chi Minh trail was then nonexistent.

On the other hand, his relations with neighboring South Vietnam went from bad to worse. As early as December 1954, Sihanouk and South Vietnamese President Diem were squabbling over money and border matters. In March 1956, South Vietnam stopped boat traffic on the Mekong River -- an act which effectively isolated Phnom Penh from outside trade, since the port of Sihanoukville was still unbuilt. Whatever goodwill Saigon got by reopening the Mekong some months later dissolved when Diem began harboring Sihanouk's bugbear, Son Ngoc Thanh. In 1957, Thanh organized the so-called "Khmer Serei," a group of partisans -- mostly ethnic Cambodians from South Vietnam -- which intermittedly harrassed the Sihanouk government for the next thirteen years.

Hanoi and the Communists in Cambodia

In fact -- except for its propaganda support for the Pracheachon Group in 1955 -- Hanoi dealt circumspectly with the few remaining Cambodian Communists. So concerned were the North Vietnamese over the need for secrecy that they used clandestine operatives of their Ministry of Public Security to maintain contact with the Khmer comrades.*

The reasons for Hanoi's discretion are clear. In the first place, North Vietnam knew the weakness of the native Communist movement. Not only had the Khmer Viet Minh failed to get off the ground in the struggle against the French,

North Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security, like the Soviet Union's KGB, is charged with carrying on espionage, counterintelligence, and subversive operations in foreign countries.

but the vast majority of Cambodian Communists were in North Vietnam. Secondly, Cambodia was a poor fourth on Hanoi's list of priorities in Indochina. North Vietnam came first, South Vietnam and Laos were second and third. Cambodia was on a far horizon, better left alone. Finally, Hanoi was coming to think of Sihanouk as a person with whom they could do business.

The Communists were less discreet in their dealings with Cambodia's half million Vietnamese. Over the years the minority had become more and more sympathetic to the Communist cause, and by the late fifties included several thousand Lao Dong Party members, some of whom had come from South Vietnam after Geneva. The Vietnamese Party structure in Cambodia was correspondingly complex. It had the normal committees, chapters, and cells, which ran a host of social organizations, including dance groups and basketball teams. In places thick with Vietnamese -- like the Chup plantation -- the Party exercised de facto though secret control

However, the Vietnamese Communists did their best to placate the Prince. An Australian intelligence study of the period stated that the Communists "avidly supported Sihanouk's policy of neutrality, and sought every opportunity to further Vietnamese-Cambodian friendship." Their quiescense served them in good stead.

By 1957, Hanoi felt sure enough of its position in Cambodia to put Nam Bo's front office in the heart of Phnom Penh. The chief and deputy chief of Nam Bo -- which still encompassed the southern half of South Vietnam -- held forth in the city until 1959, unmolested

by the Cambodian police.* The deputy was Muoi Cuc -- later head of COSVN, now Hanoi's chief advisor to the Cambodian Communists. Nam Bo's main occupation at the time was a political campaign to unseat President Diem. In retrospect, Diem's embrace of Son Ngoc Thanh seems a mere peccadillo.

Intelligence reports of 1957 and 1958 indicated that Hanoi's political struggle against Diem had run into trouble. In early 1958, the Communists began to think seriously about upping the ante. When they finally did so, their decision affected the balance of power throughout Southeast Asia, including Cambodia, and eventually drew the United States in the Vietnam war.

Recent reports indicate that Hanoi's Ministry of Public Security officials operating under cover in Phnom Penh had many contacts in the Cambodian government's police Special Branch.

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PART IV: CAMBODIA AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM (1959-1967)

The Decision to Overthrow Diem

Following an earlier decision made by the Hanoi Politburo, the Lao Dong Party Central Committee decided in early 1959 to change its policy in the South. The new policy abandoned the attempt to unseat Diem primarily by political means and called instead for "armed struggle."

Ho implemented the decision slowly. In January, orders went out to make South Vietnam's central highlands "a base for the revolution." In early May 1959, work started on the Ho Chi Minh trail. By the end of the year, Muoi Cuc had left Phnom Penh for War Zone C in South Vietnam. On his arrival in the zone, he doffed his deputy hat, and became chief of Nam Bo. Shortly thereafter, Nam Bo -- with some modifications -- became the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN).

Its Cambodian Clause

Hanoi's strategic planners had to decide what to do about Cambodia. We do not have the Cambodian clause of their overall plan, but its thrust seems fairly straightforward.

First, Hanoi decided not to build the main infiltration corridor in Cambodia, but to run it through South Vietnam's western mountains instead. However, the evidence shows North Vietnam determined to construct an alternate corridor in Cambodia's northeast. Communist cadres began filtering into Stung Treng Province later in late 1960. Some were Pathet Lao -- northern Stung Treng is full of Laotians. Others were probably local tribesmen and Khmers from Hanoi's training camps.

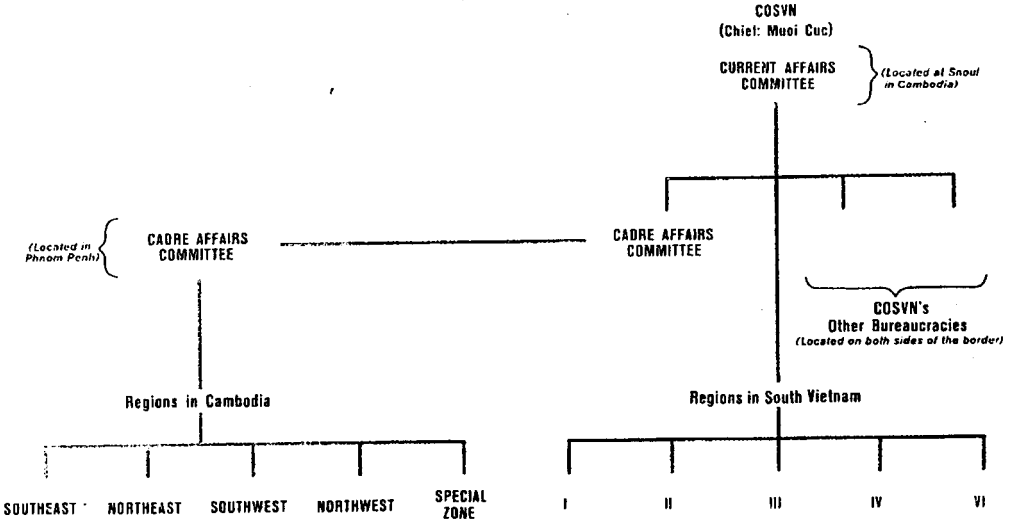
VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST ORGANIZATION IN CAMBODIA: CIRCA 1962

Second, Hanoi decided to devote its Vietnamese Communist structure in Cambodia to supporting the war in the south. Social groups which had dabbled in dancing and basketball became recruit centers or procurement detachments. Cadres exhorted young men to join the Viet Cong Army. Elderly ladies were engaged to wrap bandages, or buy penicillin in Phnom Penh drug stores. As in Vietnam, Front Associations sprang up in Vietnamese communities throughout the country.

To handle the added load, the Vietnamese Communist organization grew bigger and more complex. Its main "Cadre Affairs Committee," located in Phnom Penh, had subordinate commands throughout the country. There were four regions -- the same as those in the war against the French (see Map) -- which ran province and sometimes district headquarters. As might be expected, the structure was strongest where Vietnamese dwelled. The "Cadres Affairs Committee" in the Cambodian capital reported to and took orders from a "Cadre Affairs Committee" subordinated to COSVN. (See Chart "Vietnamese Communist Organization in South Vietnam and Cambodia Circa 1962, p.28.) The chief of the Phnom Penh Committee visited COSVN regularly to brief Muoi Cuc.

Third, Hanoi decided to expand and improve the reserve of Cambodian cadres it held in North Vietnam. Since new material was hard to come by, Hanoi first undertook to better what it already had. By mid-1960, some 800 Cambodians were training at a site near North Vietnam's Son Tay Military Academy. According to a Vietnamese defector once connected with the school, most Khmer students were expected to become officers. Some of the abler Cambodians were sent on to the Lao Dong Party's most prestigious training establishment, the Nguyen Ai Quoc School for senior Party cadres. Other Khmers went to specialized schools run by the Ministries of Public Security, Education, and Health.

VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST ORGANIZATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA CIRCA 1962



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We do not know when Hanoi began adding to its Cambodian reserve. Since Communist recruiters were probably in Stung Treng Province in late 1960, however, students from the northeast may have been Hanoi-bound by 1961. Cambodians from the southeast started up the trail in early 1962.* Still other recruits came from Paris, where the French Communist Party was a predominant influence among Cambodian students. A high level defector reported that some 4000 ethnic Khmers were training in North Vietnam -- apparently in 1967 -- even after fairly large numbers had already gone South.**

Finally, Hanoi determined to keep its fences mended with Sihanouk, at least in public. During the Third Party Congress of September 1960 -- convened in Hanoi to inform the Party rank-and-file of the Politburo's decision to overthrow Diem -- Le Duan called for the "full implementation of the Geneva agreements" with respect to Cambodia, whose policy of peace and neutrality, he said, was being "sabotaged" by the United States. Pham Van Dong, who had been Sihanouk's chief antagonist at Geneva, added beneficently a short time later that Cambodia was bound to achieve "further successes...under the leadership of the Prince."

Among those attending the Congress was Son Ngoc Minh, who came incognito. Kept under wraps to avoid alarming the Cambodian government, he was accompanied by a small coterie of Cambodian Communists. He probably

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A recent POW report indicated that Cambodians began going north as early as 1960. The report did not specify what part of Cambodia they came from.

**The defector was Dr. Dang Tan, a Nguyen Ai Quoc graduate who came into Allied hands in late 1969. The most important Communist ever to rally, he has been a prolific and generally accurate reporter.*

knew, as he listened to the praise of Sihanouk, that Khmer Communists were already stealing into the Cambodian northeast.

The War Proceeds

In response to Hanoi's call, the Viet Cong launched their first big attack in January 1960. It took place in Tay Ninh Province near Muoi Cuc's seat in War Zone C. In early 1961, he predicted "two to three" years would suffice to gather the forces to overwhelm Diem. As the months passed, his prophecy looked better and better.

Diem's hold had slackened so much by the end of the year that alarms sounded in Washington. In early 1962, the US began sending advisors and helicopters to Vietnam in fairly large numbers. These and Diem's strategic hamlet program held the Viet Cong for a time in check. But not for long, because the Communists regained their momentum in early 1963, and South Vietnam resumed its downhill slide. The decline quickened with Diem's assassination on 1 November.

Thereupon Hanoi decided that the time was nearing for a coup de grace. It sent North Vietnamese troops to hasten the expected collapse. They began arriving in 1964, along with Nguyen Chi Thanh, a Politburo member who joined Muoi Cuc at COSVN. Although technically Thanh became Cuc's superior, they shared the COSVN command. Cuc continued to be COSVN's Number One man on Cambodia, and the person to whom the Phnom Penh "Cadres Affairs Committee" chief gave his regular briefings.

The Communists' Use of Cambodia

The Viet Cong employed Cambodia more and more as the war went on. They used it as refuge, a depot, and a messenger route.

The first Viet Cong base area formed inside Cambodia in early 1960. COSVN headquarters moved to Snoul in February 1962, having crossed into Cambodia the previous year. Thereafter COSVN bureaucrats scurried to and fro over the border almost at will.* Phnom Penh became COSVN's mailbox, and a way station for Viet Cong executives en route to Hanoi. When Muoi Cuc went north each year to the Lao Dong Party's Central Committee's annual meeting,** his plane flew from the Phnom Penh airport. He got there by car from Snoul, a half day's drive to the east. (See Map opposite Page 27.)

The enthusiasm of Cambodia's Vietnamese community for the Viet Cong grew with each new tale of Communist success.*** Several thousand Vietnamese youths trooped to the Viet Cong colors. Most served along the frontier, often with COSVN. They came to form a majority in some COSVN components -- for instance, its Border Defense command. Likewise, the Viet Cong smugglers became increasingly adept. Throughout the early sixties, their most valuable export was potassium chlorate, used for Viet

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**COSVN's political and administrative sections eventually had 9000 members. They worked on both sides of the frontier.*

***Cuc was one of the Central Committee's "unacknowledged" members. He was admitted to the Politburo in 1967.*

****The Communists had a virtual monopoly on the Vietnamese-language news media in Cambodia. COSVN's Propaganda and Training Section directed the effort.*

Cong bombs. Within a few years, COSVN came to depend so heavily on Cambodia for supplies that its operating budget was carried in riels.

Sihanouk's Growing Discomfort

Prince Sihanouk's unease grew as the war progressed. Had he been called on to judge the Vietnamese adversaries, he would surely have wished a plague on both their houses. But he was never asked.

He brooked no trouble from local Communists. When Pracheachon Group newspapers attacked him in 1959, he summarily shut them down, asserting they were run from Hanoi. In 1962, he complained of the Communists in Cambodia's northeast, disclosed the existence of a "spy network" directed by North Vietnam,* and broke up the Pracheachon, arresting 15 of its leaders. This made his Sangkum Party the only functioning Cambodian political organization left in the country.

Nevertheless, Sihanouk continued to tolerate the Vietnamese Communists in Cambodia -- partly because they were bent on overthrowing Diem, not him. His police left the Phnom Penh "Cadre Affairs Committee" alone, and allowed Viet Cong revenuers, buyers, couriers and recruiters to operate more or less freely. Although the Royal Army clashed occasionally with Viet Cong units inside the border, such incidents were relatively rare. Whether a formal agreement existed between Sihanouk and the Viet Cong over such matters is moot. One way or another, they had worked out a modus vivendi.

Not so with the South Vietnamese. Aware of the Viet Cong's use of Cambodia in general if not in detail, the GVN became increasingly indignant over Sihanouk's traffic with its enemy. The GVN's embrace of Cambodian exiles and dissidents grew correspondingly tighter. In

Such a network actually existed, but Sihanouk was probably unaware of its extent. Recent reports suggest the Vietnamese Communists were in covert contact with large numbers of Cambodian officials, including police functionaries, and military intelligence and security officers.

1963, it increased its support for Son Ngoc Thanh's Khmer Serai. By early 1965, 383 border incidents were reported between South Vietnam and Cambodia in a five-month period.

The Communists, naturally, sided with Sihanouk. In early 1962, Communist propaganda berated South Vietnam for "provoking its neutral neighbor." By the middle of the year, Viet Cong units were fighting the Khmer Serai. A captured document indicated that during this period, and at least through 1967, the Viet Cong were "providing intelligence to Cambodia, and helping it intercept the schemes" of the US and Vietnam against the Sihanouk government.

By Diem's fall in 1963, the Prince had become convinced that Hanoi was the winning horse. In comparison, the GVN seemed a faltering nag kept in the race by prods from the United States government. So early the next year, he dispatched a mob of Cambodian students to attack the US Embassy in Phnom Penh.

The US Intervention and the Arms Deal

The American bombing of North Vietnam in February 1965 did nothing to change Sihanouk's mind about the outcome of the war. The rubble had scarcely begun to collect before he called for an "IndoChina People's Conference" in Phnom Penh, hopefully to promote a negotiated settlement. Convened in early March 1965, the conference was attended by representatives of North Vietnam, the Pathet Lao, and the Viet Cong's National Liberation Front (NLF), and ended up condemning "US aggression." The NLF envoy gave Sihanouk a revolver said to have been seized in an attack on the Khmer Serai. The Prince announced he was "deeply moved" and promised to put the revolver in the Sihanouk museum in Phnom Penh.

Although intensely suspicious of the Communists, Sihanouk felt obliged to emphasize where he stood. So in April he sent the Cambodian students for another bash at the US Embassy. The Royal Government severed diplomatic relations with the United States in May.

It soon became clear that the Communists hoped for more from the Prince than moral support and his forebearance from arresting the Phnom Penh "Cadre Affairs Committee." The Viet Cong made their first overtures for material assistance in Phnom Penh in August. These were repeated during Sihanouk's trip to China a month later. One speculation runs that the person making the pitch in China was Chou En-lai, perhaps during a two-day boat trip he took with Sihanouk down the Yangtze in late September.

In any event, arrangements for the sale of rice to the Viet Cong were made through the Chinese Communist Embassy in Phnom Penh in December. Shipments of Cambodian rice began in February 1966. Within three months, rice deliveries came to 14,000 tons.* The name of the group Sihanouk appointed to oversee the shipments was the "Central Committee to Fight Against Fraud." It was chaired by Lon Nol, then Cambodia's Minister of Defense, now its premier.

Formal arrangements concerning the delivery of munitions to the Viet Cong via Cambodia began in 1966. Although the exact timing of the arms deal is far from clear, both Sihanouk and Lon Nol were deeply involved. The first shipments took place in December 1966. One batch of arms went through the Cambodian northeast via Stung Treng. Another came aboard the Chinese Communist ship He Ping, which docked in Sihanoukville on 23 December 1966. Two days later, COSVN's border defense command issued a set of regulations to cover "the influx of goods

By early 1969, they were to exceed 60,000 tons.

on a long range basis." By the eve of the Tet offensive some 10,000 tons of munitions had arrived in Cambodia for delivery to the Viet Cong. By April 1969, the deliveries came to more than 20,000 tons.

Hanoi's Double Game

Even as the Communists haggled for arms with the Prince, Hanoi was sending cadres from the old Khmer Viet Minh down the trail towards southern Cambodia. According to a well-placed defector,* the first such infiltrators, few in number, arrived in the COSVN area in 1962. The trickle widened into a small but steady stream in 1965. If the defector's estimates are taken at face value, the total number of Cambodian regroupees to have arrived at COSVN by late 1967 was in the neighborhood of 3000. Other evidence suggests that the number of Khmer infiltrators was much lower.

The defector is Do Van Tru, who served in various capacities along the Communist infiltration pipeline from early 1962 until September 1970, when he rallied. Tru bases his reports on personal observation, on conversations he had with Cambodian infiltrators, and on infiltration log books, to which he had frequent access. At the time of his defection, he was deputy chief of Commo-Liaison Group 45, subordinate to COSVN's postal transport service, which supervised the COSVN end of the pipeline. Tru is considered an unusually knowledgeable and accurate reporter. For example, he was the first intelligence source to identify the Communist Regions C10, C20, and C30.

The regroupees who came down the trail between 1962 and late 1967 -- characterized as "Phase One" infiltrators by the defector -- were mostly civilian cadres. But some were soldiers. For example, a Viet Cong officer who defected in July 1971 stated that 45 members of the staff of the Prey Veng Province Unit had regrouped from North Vietnam in 1966 and 1967. With few exceptions the early infiltrators were members of the Cambodian Communist Party or its Youth Group. Many hold high positions in the Khmer Communist structure today.

How the pre-1968 infiltrators were deployed is not yet known in detail. Some went to organize in Cambodian villages and hamlets, others went underground. A recent defector described an ethnic Khmer Party cadre who worked "under cover" as a teacher in a local Cambodian high school after his training in Hanoi. The cadre left the school for the jungle in 1968 to join the rebellion which broke out in earnest that year. He is now a KC battalion commander.

PART V: HANOI OPENS THE CAMBODIAN FRONT (1968-1970)

The Decision

The Viet Cong were well on their way in early 1967 to recovering from the initial shock of the American intervention. By mid-year, they were planning the Tet offensive of January 1968. The plans called for a change in Communist policy towards Cambodia. The change manifested itself gradually, and was so shrouded in secrecy that its nature and ramifications are only now coming to light.

In essence, Hanoi decided to begin actively supporting a rebellion in Cambodia, using the native Cambodian Communist Party. The decision provided for a large-scale increase in the number of Khmer infiltrators from North Vietnam, and the start of guerrilla warfare in the Cambodian countryside. Above all, the policy was designed to be carried out covertly, and in such a way that Hanoi could plausibly disavow it. The obvious reason for secrecy was that an overt Communist insurrection in Cambodia was at odds with the Viet Cong need to keep their Cambodian bases open and the arms flowing from Sihanoukville. Three reasons have been advanced to explain their involvement.

First, the Communists -- who realized that they needed the support of the Cambodian government for safe haven and supplies -- may have felt the need to take out insurance in case the Cambodians decided to renege. To begin with, they were far from confident that Sihanouk, whom they viewed as the best of a bad lot, was secure on his perch. A variety of documents show that they feared the rise of Cambodia's "right-wing clique," which included

such officials as Lon Nol and Sirik Matak.* In this regard, the Viet Cong had already got a taste of the uncertain nature of Cambodia's cooperation. A senior Cambodian official intimately involved with the arms shipments has said that Lon Nol delayed the first deliveries of munitions several months to test the Viet Cong's good behavior. Cambodia's hesitations and delay must have seemed to the Viet Cong not only galling but extremely dangerous.

Second, the Communists may have decided to take advantage of long-standing grievances on the part of certain segments of Cambodia's population to exert leverage on the Cambodian government -- including an increasingly uneasy Sihanouk. In some areas, such as Battambang, much of the peasantry was already restive (partly because of the government's manipulation of rice prices), and in others there were disgruntled minorities. In Northern Stung Treng, for example, many Laotian inhabitants had little in common with Cambodians except mutual dislike. The northeastern tribesmen were similarly unhappy over Cambodian attempts to bring them into the Khmer nation. Many tribesmen even bridled at the name the Cambodians gave them, "Khmer Loeu" ("Upper Khmers"), as disrespectful of their tribal heritage.** Furthermore, Communist intelligence was aware of the restiveness, and of the sorry state of the Cambodian army and police. They also knew of the corruption pervading the Royal government, since a good slice of their budget in Cambodia went for

**See Discussion on Pages 59-62.*

**The French arbitrarily assigned the area now comprising Stung Treng and Ratanakiri Provinces to Cambodia in 1911. The hastily-drawn border between Cambodia and what is now South Vietnam passed through Jarai tribal lands. Many Jarai are still unaware that such a boundary exists, and regard both the Vietnamese and Cambodians as foreign interlopers.*

greasing official palms. Those on the take included high officials in Phnom Penh as well as a myriad of province and district functionaries on the frontier.

Third, Hanoi -- sanguine over the prospects for success of the Tet offensive in Vietnam -- may have decided the time was ripe for a major step towards its long range goal of putting a Communist government in Phnom Penh. Thus the decision may have represented a shift of revolutionary phases in Cambodia in the direction of armed rebellion. A recent Khmer Communist document supports the supposition. It indicated that 1968 marked the end of the "years of resistance" and the start of the "politico-military struggle," which continued until Sihanouk fell.

The exact timing of the Communists' decision on Cambodia is far from clear. A notebook kept by a high-level Lao Dong Party member in Laos suggests, however, that the "Cambodian front" opened prior to April 1968. The testimony of the defector most knowledgeable about the flow of Cambodians south supports the notebook. The rallier indicated that starting in January 1968 the annual rate of Khmer infiltration to the COSVN area increased sharply, and that thereafter the large majority of infiltrators were soldiers rather than civilians.* Finally, there is the evidence of the rebellions themselves. Serious fighting broke out in the southwest in February 1968; in the northeast in March.

He characterized the acceleration as a shift from "Phase One" to "Phase Two" infiltration. Another defector has indicated that at about the same time the number of north-bound Cambodians greatly increased. The defector saw a group of about 500 Khmers marching north from the COSVN area in June 1968. He stated the group "was composed of cadres, soldiers, and a small number of female nurses."

How the Communists ran the rebellion has not yet become clear. However, a Cambodian Communist Central Committee clearly existed as early as 1966, and region commands were in being in 1968. Unfortunately, neither the location nor the methods of operation of a central headquarters have been ascertained. Perhaps the Cambodian headquarters was near COSVN in Cambodia's southeast, in line with Lon Nol's assertion that the Khmer Communist Party "President" was there in late 1969.* Or it may conceivably have been in Hanoi. The central headquarters ruled its subordinates loosely. The insurgents lacked radios, and messages had to be carried by hand.

In any case, rebels in different parts of Cambodia appeared to have been in contact. Documents captured by the Cambodian government in May 1968, for example, suggested that insurgents in the country's southwest corner were in touch with rebel operatives in Phnom Penh. Likewise, the rebels in the capital were almost certainly in contact with those in the southeast. A defector who served on the main commo-liaison corridor between COSVN and Phnom Penh saw over a hundred ethnic Cambodians travelling to and fro over the route between March and September 1969.

Another question still unanswered was the precise nature of the relationship between the Cambodian and Vietnamese Communists. Since Hanoi controlled the infiltration pipeline and had trained most of the Khmer Communists, it clearly made the major decisions. Yet there are many

A captured COSVN roster indicated that as of September 1969 the number of "delegates" from Cambodia to COSVN was 15, with the expectation that it would rise to 50 by 1970. That the 15 were the leaders of the Cambodian Communist Party seems improbable. More likely, they were charged with liaison.

signs that the Cambodian Communist Party was far from being Hanoi's puppet.* Perhaps the most persuasive evidence of this -- apart from mounds of recent reports describing the Viet Cong and their Khmer colleagues at each others throats -- is a statement attributed to Muoi Cuc in August 1970.** Quoting the secret portion of a COSVN directive, Cuc reportedly stated that the reason the Vietnamese Communists "were forced into action in Cambodia" was that "the revolutionary movement there had grown too rapidly and was out of control."

A review of events leading to Sihanouk's fall suggests that Cuc was right. The arrival of Hanoi-trained cadres in the Cambodian interior led to unrest which local authorities found increasingly hard to contain. By late 1969 the rebellion had reached a point where it seemed an eventual threat to Phnom Penh. Fear of its unchecked growth was a major contributing factor to Sihanouk's overthrow. Although not unexpected, Sihanouk's overthrow was for Hanoi premature, and forced it to change its plans regarding Saigon.

In early 1970, the Communists had rebellions underway in three main regions of Cambodia: The northeast, the west, and the southeast. (See Map on page 42.)

Part VII discusses the matter at greater length.

***Cuc was by then chief advisor to the Khmer Communists.*

AREA OF RED KHMER ACTIVITY: EARLY 1970

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The Northeast Region

As already noted, the Communists' first serious attempt to organize in the northeast probably began no later than late 1960.* The attempt apparently stemmed from Hanoi's decision earlier in the year to prepare an alternate infiltration corridor through Cambodia towards southern Vietnam. By mid-1962, Sihanouk was complaining of "special agents" sent by Hanoi and the Pathet Lao to stir unrest among the "Lao and Cambodian Montagnards" of Stung Treng, Ratanakiri, and Mondulkiri. This, said Sihanouk, was a Communist plot to divide and eventually conquer the royal Kingdom.

Whatever its cause, the first Cambodian tries to scotch the unrest were clumsy and inept. They called their policy "Khmerization." It included efforts to build roads and put garrisons in the wilderness, and to resettle the tribesmen to where they could be got at. The government cared little whether it mashed tribal toes. According to US Embassy officers who toured the northeast in late 1962, Cambodian officials looked on the natives with "ignorance, scorn, and amusement." The American visitors discovered there had been armed brawls between Cambodians soldiers and angry tribesmen as early as May 1961.

Accounts of the Communists' early attempts to organize are rare. One describes the approach of a tribesman from Ratanakiri by Pathet Lao and "Red Khmer" representatives in August 1962.** The meeting apparently went well, because the person approached was himself recruiting tribesmen a year later. The cadres continued to proselytize until the start of the so-called "Khmer Loeu"

But the governor of Stung Treng Province had reported the infiltration of "former Viet Minh" functionaries as early as 1957.

**The account appears in an interrogation conducted by the Laotian government of refugees who fled northeast Cambodia in early 1968.*

rebellion in early 1968. Their propaganda dwelt on local complaints -- particularly the misbehavior of the Cambodian government -- and shunned mention of Lenin and Marx.

The first big exception to the Communists' non-doctrinaire approach occurred in November 1967. This took the form of public demonstrations against the visit to Phnom Penh of Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy. The anti-Jackie riots, some in areas peopled by Jarai, accused Sihanouk of "selling out to US imperialism." Most Jarai had only a dim understanding of the term "Cambodia." Since they could scarcely have learned about "US imperialism" without being told, their chants and placards were almost certainly fashioned by Communist propagandists, perhaps including fellow tribesmen who had attended one of Hanoi's "Ethnic Minority" training camps.

Small-scale fighting flared in the northeast in February 1968. In late March, a large group of tribesmen, apparently Jarai, attacked a Cambodian government outpost, but were beaten back with heavy losses. Shortly thereafter, the signs and artifacts of a Communist "people's war" began to appear en masse. Interrogations of village cadres revealed the existence in June of "guerrillas," "fortified villages," recruit training centers, and a political organization which collected taxes, gathered intelligence, drafted young men, and dispensed propaganda.* By September, Cambodian Army patrols were overrunning rebel camps with scores of buildings and large caches of rice. The nature of evidence suggested that the rebellion was both widespread and fairly well-organized.

More concrete evidence concerning organization began to appear in early 1969. Agent reports told of a Central headquarters near the Vietnamese frontier in

The interrogations were carried out by the Laotian government.

eastern Ratanakiri province. The headquarters was said to control province, district, village, and hamlet echelons. One training center was reported as having 500 students.

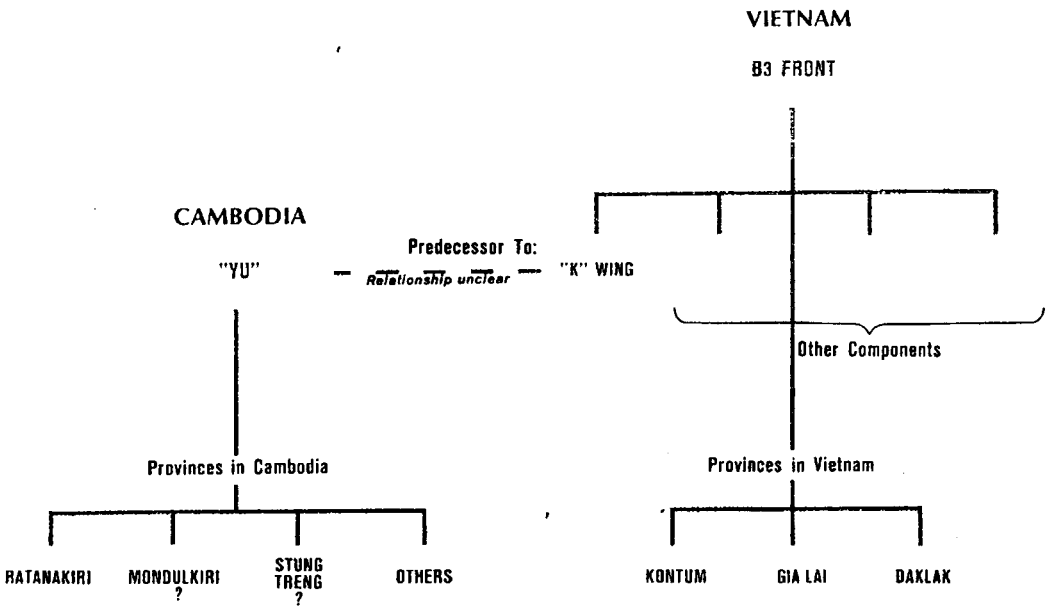
Captured documents taken during the Allied incursions of 1970 into Cambodia have since confirmed much of the material in the agent reports. The documents, written in Cambodian, give a general picture of the rebel structure, and of its control by the Cambodian Communist Party. Although most were dated 1969, one was a notebook with entries starting in January 1968. Its owner was a well-educated Cambodian who was a member of the Communist Party. His unit was small but well armed.

The documents suggested that the overall boss, perhaps for the whole northeast, was a headquarters identified by the cover letters "Y U". The headquarters gave orders to lower echelons on such matters as catching spies, moving people, fortifying villages, and making weapons. It was particularly concerned with the activities of the Communist Party and its Youth Group. "Y U" ran a modest army, with staff and service troops as well as combatants. The army had local forces units for provinces and districts, and guerrilla/militia for villages and hamlets. The documents did not state which provinces came under "Y U's" jurisdiction. Ratanakiri was definitely included: perhaps Mondulkiri, Stung Treng and others as well.

The documents also suggested that "Y U" was in touch with the Viet Cong B3 Front.* Its reports were

**The B3 Front is a Viet Cong military command which includes the VC border provinces of Gia Lai, Kontum, and Daklak. The Front headquarters were usually located in Cambodia's Ratakaniri Province. So were many of the Front's service and training installations.*

CAMBODIAN COMMUNIST STRUCTURE IN NORTHEAST: 1969
A CONJECTURE*



*As suggested by captured documents and POW reports obtained after Sihanouk's fall.

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captured among those of the Front, and lower-level Cambodian documents mentioned some of the Front's subordinate units -- for example, a hospital belonging to its Rear Service Command. Other reports told of Vietnamese advisors serving at rebel headquarters. Such evidence suggests that the Viet Cong B3 Front had a component responsible for liaison with the Cambodian Communists. If so, the component would have been the predecessor to the B3 Front's "K Wing," which emerged in April 1970 to support the Khmer Communists' rapidly expanding post-coup structure. (See Chart on page 46.)

The most convincing evidence of Vietnamese involvement in the rebellion continued to be the movement and training of people. According to a recent defector report,* additional Cambodian tribesmen -- including Jarai, Rhade, and Bahnar -- marched off to North Vietnam for training in June 1968. A year later, "Khmer Rouge" battalions were reported on the way to training centers in Attopeu Province in southern Laos. A recent Vietnamese rallier said he saw a group of Cambodians entering the northeast in August 1969. Armed with pistols and automatic rifles, they said they had just finished "studying in North Vietnam."

Nonetheless, the Vietnamese Communists went to great lengths to keep their involvement secret. Captured documents show, for example, that the Viet Cong Border Defense Command was under strict orders to treat the "Khmer Rouge" at arm's length. Perhaps as a result, VC units meeting Cambodian Army patrols always claimed

**The defector, a Montagnard from the Vietnamese side of the border, was questioned in early 1971. He said the training center the tribesmen went to was southwest of Hanoi. The course of instruction lasted 18 months, half devoted to learning Vietnamese.*

ignorance concerning the rebels. The rebels did not always cooperate. They often boasted to villagers of Hanoi's support -- probably even more than they had.

The Viet Cong policy of denying the rebels included rationing their weapons. Captured documents show that the ordnance depots of the B3 Front brimmed with munitions. Apparently fearing that a well-armed rebellion would tip their hand, however, the Viet Cong gave their Khmer brothers only a few guns at a time. Khmer Communist documents therefore stated that modern weapons could "only be obtained in small numbers with much difficulty," and extolled the virtues of "cross-bows and lances," which could be made locally. Other reports suggested that many weapons were actually available, but that the "time was not yet ripe to use them."

The small number of guns gave rise to resentment. Many rebels, aware of the arms glut on the other side of the border (in part because supplies bound for the Viet Cong passed through rebel-held territory) were angry that they didn't get their share. On at least one occasion, a local rebel leader was reported to have attacked a Viet Cong supply convoy, giving the reason that the "Vietnamese had not acknowledged or supported the Khmer Rouge as promised." The rebel leader was subsequently relieved, and sent north to a "thought reform" camp.

Despite the difficulties, the northeast rebellion spread. By mid-1969, it had engulfed much of Ratanakiri and Stung Treng Provinces, and had lapped over into Mondulkiri and Preah Vihear. At the same time, captives described the formation of small "mixed units," composed of tribesmen and Viet Cong regulars. By the fall of the year, the Cambodian government presence in many areas was limited to a few towns and hmalets, and the right-of-way along the main roads during the daytime. In a speech in October, Sihanouk complained that the Khmer Rouge "had opened the door" to the Communists in the northeast. Later in the year, unconfirmed agent reports began to come in describing "Khmer Rouge" battalions.

The Western Regions

The rebellions which erupted in western Cambodia in early 1968 had many predecessors, some modest, some minute. The exit of most -- but not all -- Khmer Viet Minh from the west in 1954 had helped quiet things down. Their departure had little effect, however, on the problem of the non-Communist Issaraks, many of whom refused to rally to the Sihanouk government after independence. Certain Issaraks turned to banditry, others to sniping at government posts. Their motives varied. Some sought booty, others smarted at local corruption, still others -- especially those with Thai blood -- nursed ancient grudges against the Khmers.

In the years after Geneva, Cambodia never fully tamed its west. Rebels and brigands roamed the countryside, holding up buses, then retreating to mountain fastnesses. Rumors floated about that some of the more ferocious bands followed the old Khmer Viet Minh. But it is hard to say whether the stories were based on fact or manufactured by Cambodian bureaucrats to draw attention from their own incompetence and sloth.

The fiercest rebellion before 1968 occurred a year earlier in Battambang Province, the source of much of Phnom Penh's rice. It broke out in about the same areas where the Communists had been strongest in the early fifties. Although the 1967 outbreak was often ascribed to peasant discontent -- many farmers were unhappy because the government refused to pay their asking price for paddy -- Cambodian Army units coursing the province often reported "Khmer Viet Minh," and automatic weapons. A report dated April 1967 asserted that Cambodian intelligence thought that although the insurgents were natives, "some had received training in North Vietnam." We have information that hundreds of Cambodian infiltrators arrived in the COSVN area in the years prior to 1967, but nothing to show them on the way to Battambang.

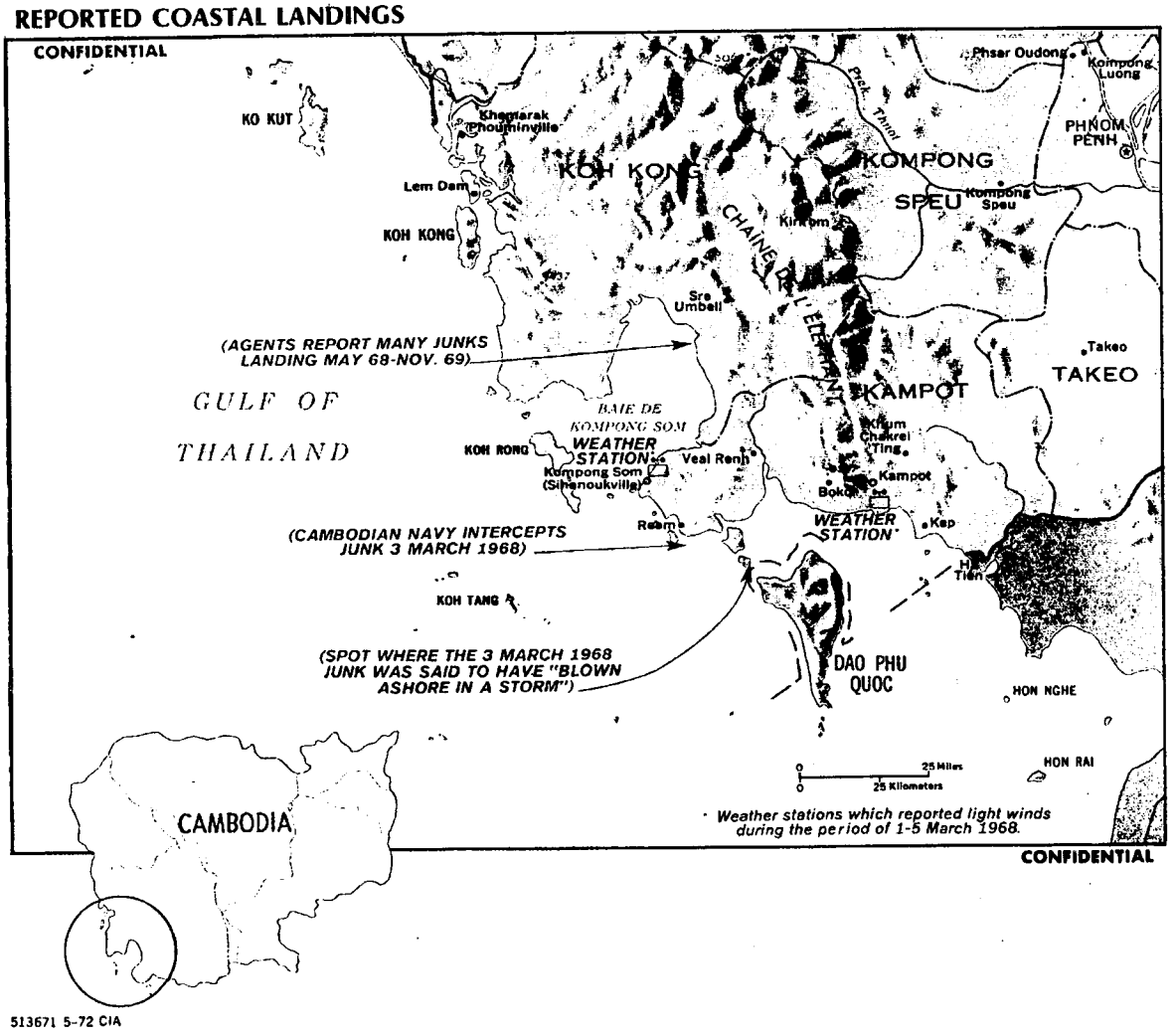
Whether or not the Communists started or merely took advantage of the Battambang rebellion of 1967 is unclear. The evidence is much more persuasive that they were behind the larger outbreak in the southwest in early 1968.

The best clue to their deep invovlement in the 1968 rebellion is an event which took place on 25 February. The "Red Khmers" then launched simultaneous suprise attacks on government posts in three provinces in Cambodia's southwest,* making off with large numbers of rifles as well as some machine-guns. The posts were as far as 110 miles apart. The tight coordination of the assaults and distance between them suggested central control, which non-Communist rebels in the west had historically lacked. In a speech in Battambang right after the attacks, Sihanouk complained of "agitators" sent from Hanoi, and said that although he had anticipated a resurgence of the Khmer Viet Minh, he had not expected it "until after the defeat of the Americans in Vietnam."

A week after the assaults a second incident occurred pointing to Communist involvement. On 3 March 1968, the Cambodian navy overhauled an arms-laden junk just off the coast of Kampot Province, at a point some fifteen miles west of the South Vietnamese Island of Phu Quoc. Initial interrogation of the crew -- three Vietnamese, two Cambodians -- showed that the arms were bound for "Red Khmer" rebels in the Cambodian interior. Subsequently the story was changed to indicate that the arms were headed not for the Red Khmers in Cambodia, but for the Viet Cong on the South Vietnamese mainland. But the

**The provinces were Koh Kong, Kompong Speu, and Kampot, all subordinate to the Communists' Southwest Region.*

REPORTED COASTAL LANDINGS



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new story and the circumstances surrounding it were highly suspect.*

In the following months, a variety of sources reported landings on Cambodia's west coast. On 13 March, Sihanouk announced that a "Red Khmer" chieftain captured in Battambang had said that the vessel captured off Kampot was only one of "six boatloads" of arms and ammunition smuggled to the rebels. In May, the first of a series of agent reports appeared which told of junks landing in southern Koh Kong. The reports stated the junks unloaded arms and men, including Cambodians and Vietnamese, who marched inland towards the Elephant Chain Mountains after scrambling ashore. By November 1969, over a thousand men and several tons of ammuniton had landed, the agents said.**

**According to a report from Phnom Penh, two Viet Cong representatives showed up at the office of the Cambodian Army G-2 on 8 March "to negotiate for the release of the crew." After assuring the G-2 that the arms vessel was headed for Viet Cong territory, they reportedly left a two-inch-thick package of 500 riel notes "as an earnest" even though the crew had already been shot. After the riels -- worth some $3000 -- changed hands, Cambodian intelligence began giving a different account of what happened. Whereas the original story indicated the junk was intercepted 15 miles west of Phu Quoc -- that is, far from the Viet Cong but close to Cambodian rebels -- the new story indicated the vessel had gone aground on a Cambodian island only 2 1/2 miles from Viet-Cong infested Phu Quoc, having been "blown ashore...during a storm." One trouble with the new story was that there had been no storm. A review of local weather reports of 1 through 5 March 1968 show that the weather around Phu Quoc was balmy and that the winds were light. The weather reports included those from Sihanoukville and Kampot.* *(See Map p. 51.)*

***The reports came from an agent network run by the US Navy. Never confirmed, they have a ring of truth. The information they convey is concise, plausible, and of a type which local informants can provide.*

As time passed, the western rebellion grew. Although a coordinated attack as large as the one which took place on 25 February 1968 never recurred, government troops found themselves embroiled in more and more places. By mid-1969, several reports told of insurgent hideouts in the Elephant Chain, and of rebel bands with "Vietnamese advisors." At the same time, Cambodian police at Sihanoukville warned foreigners not to drive towards Phnom Penh at night because Red Khmers made the roads unsafe.

In late summer 1969 the Royal Army G-2 had intelligence which suggested the classical Asian Communist army, with various units in different structural layers. Dated September 1969, the reports mentioned province, village and hamlet formations. Shortly thereafter, other reports appeared that the western rebels had organized battalions. A Khmer Communist officer who defected last year said his battalion formed in early 1970, before Sihanouk's overthrow in March. The defector stated that the cadre who mustered the unit was a Cambodian fresh from training in North Vietnam.

The Southeast Region

The dissidence in Cambodia's southeast differed from the western and northeastern insurrections in two respects. In the first place, it started later. Local unrest bubbled throughout 1968, but major trouble did not erupt until late summer. Second and more important, the southeast rebellion took place in a region which indisputedly mattered.

The southeast's importance to the Royal Government stemmed from its nearness to Phnom Penh, and its many people, mostly Khmers. The South Vietnamese thought it key because of the threat that its Viet Cong bases, including COSVN, posed to Saigon. It mattered to the Viet Cong for the same reason.

All parties concerned had policy dilemmas over Cambodia's southeast, but none was sharper than the Communists'. On the one hand, they obviously needed the area -- which included Svay Rieng, Prey Veng, and Kompong Cham -- as a refuge and a source of supply. On the other hand, they used it as the main staging ground for Cambodian infiltrators. As elsewhere, the Viet Cong attempted to keep their involvement in the Khmer dissidence a secret. They were none too successful.

Although Hanoi-trained Cambodian soldiers were reportedly moving into the southeast as early as 1966, and companies and battalions had formed by early 1968, the first serious incident there did not occur until August 1968, when a small unit of Red Khmers attacked a government outpost. In October, Cambodian newspapers reported an organization called "The Revolutionary Front for the Khmer People." The Front was said to operate in the Prey Veng and Svay Rieng Provinces, not far from the Viet Cong redoubts. Simultaneously, the Cambodian Army G-2 gave Sihanouk a map which showed a Red Khmer rebellion starting up in Kompong Cham.

Despite Viet Cong disclaimers, they were blamed at once for the troubles. Cambodian Army intelligence reported Viet Cong training schools with Red Khmer students and stated there were Cambodian revolutionaries plying to and fro over the border. The press took up the cry, and the Viet Cong issued more disclaimers. In January 1969, for the first time during the war, Cambodian functionaries on the frontier began regular meetings with the Allies to discuss their mutual problems.

The situation worsened in April. In mid-month a company of Red Khmers assaulted a Cambodian post near the border of Route 1 (the main thoroughfare between Saigon and Phnom Penh) then handed out pamphlets scolding Sihanouk and Lon Nol. Widespread rumors had it that the Viet Cong abetted the attack. The incident may have been one of the causes of the Cambodian decision later in April to forbid Chinese ships with arms for the Communists from

docking at Sihanoukville. In May, Lon Nol called in the North Vietnamese ambassador to Phnom Penh, and rebuked him for Hanoi's support of the Red Khmers, noting that many had trained in North Vietnam after the 1954 Geneva agreement.

The COSVN Border Defense Command warily observed the unfolding events. A letter of 4 May from one border defense official to another warned that Cambodian spies were seeking proof that the Viet Cong had helped the Red Khmers "to conduct attacks on posts and towers." The Command watched the Royal Government's sweeps against the rebels and assured Cambodian officers on the frontier that it was doing its best to keep rice and other supplies from "falling into the hands" of the insurgents.

As in the northeast, the Viet Cong went to extraordinary lengths to cover their tracks. A directive issued in early 1969, for example, advised subordinates not even to discuss the Cambodian Communist Party. A second document put forth the ground rule that "no person should deliberately attempt to contact the 'Red K'." Some documents -- particularly those which received broad distribution -- claimed that stories of Viet Cong connections with the Red Khmers were Allied provocations. A widely broadcast COSVN edict stated that the Allies were alleging Communist support for the Red Khmers in order "to undermine the friendship between the Viet Cong and the Cambodian government.* Another internal report stated that Cambodian

**COSVN Directive CTNT 90 of late May 1969, followed by Directive CTNT 120 of late September.*

officials were spreading "false rumors" that the Viet Cong "provided" the Red Khmers' leadership.*

The Border Defense Command sat with anguish on the horns of the dilemma. A "Top Secret" document of October 1969 showed the essence of its discomfiture. "Border defense units," it said, "have encountered difficulties" because Red Khmer troops often fled into the Viet Cong's wooded lairs. When they did so, the Royal Cambodians followed, to fell the trees in an effort to expose the rebels. The receding forests opened both the Cambodian and Vietnamese Communists to attack from Allied air. The Command's solution was twofold -- first, teach the Red Khmers better to hide their bivouacs; second, bribe the Royal Cambodians to stop clearing the woods.

The Royal protests only grew louder. Finally, in the November 1969 edition of the government-sponsored magazine "Sangkum," Lon Nol, then the Cambodian Army Chief of Staff, published an article called the "Khmer Rouge Organization in Military Region (MR) I."** Based

**In one sense, the document, dated December 1969, was correct, in that the Viet Cong had "trained" rather than "provided" the Red Khmers' southeastern leadership. As it was being written, a Viet Cong interpreter who later defected saw one of the top Red Khmer cadres consorting with the Viet Cong in the COSVN area. The cadre, who had been trained in Hanoi, later became the KC Province Chief of Svay Rieng, and is now said to be deputy commander of one of the KC regions. Captured documents indicate that a Khmer Communist Party Committee existed in Svay Rieng in December.*

***MR 1 consists of Prey Veng, Svay Rieng and Kompong Cham.*

on Cambodian intelligence sources, it contained a detailed description of what the Cambodians knew (or were willing to admit they knew) about the Khmer Rouge structure and strength in the southeast.

The article suggested that the southeast was a regional command under the aegis of the "President of the Clandestine Khmer Communist Party." The region had a special mobile unit with leaders, the article stated, "said to have returned some time ago after training in North Vietnam." Beneath the region served a number of local commands, each charged with a distinct geographical area. Almost all the leaders, the article went on, had been "members of the Clandestine Communist Party since 1954." Khmer Communist documents dated November 1969 suggest the southeastern command was designated "Region 203." Region 203 still exists.

As 1969 approached its close, the tempo of the Vietnamese Communist involvement quickened. The defector who watched the Khmer pipeline said that from September on there were so many cadres -- both Cambodian and Vienamese -- passing through the infiltration corridor that "he was unable to make an accurate estimate" of their number. By early 1970, the Khmer Communists in the southeast had formed at least two well-armed battalions.

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PART VI: SIHANOUK'S FALL

Background to the Fall

The pressures which caused Sihanouk's dismissal were long abuilding. Most peasants still thought well of the Prince, but his prestige among the politicians and intellectuals in Phnom Penh had greatly diminished. Of the various reasons behind the decline, one far transcended the others. This was the problem of what to do about the Communists, particularly Vietnamese, but also local, who were operating in larger and larger tracts of Cambodian territory.

In late 1969, Phnom Penh's vexation over the Cambodian Communists was increasing. The Cambodian Army G-2 had long since concluded the "Khmer Rouge" and "Khmer Loeu" rebellions were Communist-directed, and by September considered them a threat to the "future internal stability of the country." Although the Cambodian government repeatedly downplayed the Khmer Rouge threat in public, there is evidence of its growing concern in private. In a special meeting on 20 September of provincial governors with the Cambodian cabinet, virtually every one of the 19 governors present complained either of the Viet Cong or the Red Khmers. The catalog of woes of the governor of Kompong Cham was especially long. He complained of Communist subversives in the schools and temples, of saboteurs and of Viet Cong-supplied Chinese weapons. The meeting's chairman was First Deputy Premier Sirik Matak, later thought a driving force behind the Prince's fall.

Sihanouk himself had repeatedly complained of the Communists. As early as December 1967, he indicated he would not be opposed to the Allies' bombing Viet Cong

bases on Cambodian soil.* But he seemed unwilling to go all out. Earlier speeches shed light on his quandry. In 1962, Sihanouk had spoken of the inevitability of a Communist takeover in Cambodia.** In a much later pronouncement, he said, "I must deal (with the Communists) tactfully to ensure national survival... I know that once they win the war, they will suppress me and destroy our country, national regime, nationalism, and Buddhism. But because we are a small country, it is useless to act like the Americans." Other Khmers may have shared his view of the future but apparently preferred to go down swinging.

The Communists were aware of the split in the Cambodian government. Their documents identified two main factions. First there were the "rightists" and "ultra-rightists",*** including Lon Nol and Sirik Matak, who were "pro-American." Then there were the "neutralists" led by Sihanouk, who if bellicose at times at least saw the handwriting on the wall. The Communists liked the neutralists better.

In explaining his decision, Sihanouk said that he doubted the Viet Cong would hand him a note saying "We have the honor to complain to you that the Americans have bombed us while we are occupying your territory."

***"I am absolutely certain that the hour of Communism ...must one day strike here as in all Southeast Asia."*

****Sometimes the "rightists" and "ultra-rightists" were listed as separate factions.*

To their dismay throughout 1969, however, the Viet Cong saw the "right" gain strength. A review by the COSVN Border Defense Command of the first six months of the year stated the "Cambodian rightists now have the conditions and opportunity to act;" they intended to destroy "the revolutionary movement" in Cambodia, and -- "bribed by the US" -- to attack the Viet Cong on the frontier. A notebook written by a border cadre in September stated that the rightists were striving to force Sihanouk "to sever diplomatic relations" with Hanoi. The notebook then posed the key question: "Will Cambodia attempt to side with the US...?" The answer was that "such a course was not probable, but it was possible."

On 6 January 1970, Sihanouk left Cambodia for France, partly for health, but mostly to remove himself from the political pressures gathering in Phnom Penh. Three days later COSVN headquarters told its subordinate commands that the "rightists" had caused his departure, predicted they would "create difficulties for us" on the frontier, then declared "we must be on our guard."

Anti-Communist and anti-Vietnamese demonstrations broke out in Svay Rieng Province on 8 March. Early on the eleventh, similar disorders broke out in Phnom Penh. Later in the day COSVN laid blame at the "evil gang's" feet, and told its subordinates to try to hold down the lid along the frontier. COSVN's Military Staff issued contingency plans the next day in case the "rightists" decided to launch a full scale attack. On the 15th, COSVN counseled its underlings "to keep calm, maintain vigilance, and avoid provocation," but warned that the situation might get worse beofre it got better. On 17 March, the day before Sihanouk's fall, the COSVN Border Defense Command was still telling its units "to maintain good relations with the local Cambodian authorities."

Meanwhile, COSVN was taking steps to prepare the Cambodian Communists in case the lid blew off. On the

eve of Sihanouk's overthrow, Khmer Rouge battalions from Svay Rieng marched with full combat gear to Vietnamese Communist camps in South Vietnam. Viet Cong guides led the way.

The Fall and Events Which Followed

The Phnom Penh airport closed to outside traffic in the small hours of 18 March. Shortly thereafter, tele-communications wires went dead, and the Cambodian National Assembly met in special session. It deposed Sihanouk as Cambodian chief of state, and replaced him with a comparative nonentity. Among those behind the Assembly's move were Lon Nol and Sirik Matak, the "rightists" of the Viet Cong documents.

COSVN, which was monitoring the situation closely, advised its subordinates to hide their gear, keep a stiff upper lip, and prepare to fight. Viet Cong units near the border, already on high alert, began to plant mines and bury documents in expectation of enemy attack. If confronted by Cambodian troops, they were told, "it is strictly forbidden to mention Sihanouk."

Sihanouk, meanwhile, had arrived in Peking. He called his removal a "coup", and demanded the new government's ouster. Shortly thereafter, he proclaimed the creation of FUNK (United Front of Kampuchea), with himself its head, to effect the transaction.

On the Frontier

The confusion on the frontier was spectacular. Cambodian border guards were unsure of their seniors, Vietnamese Army units jockeyed for position, and Viet Cong service troops scurried about like ants, carrying boxes and digging holes.

The Viet Cong quarantine on Sihanouk's name vanished almost at once. "Local officials previously loyal to Sihanouk are now confused," a Border Defense report asserted on 20 March; "we must persuade them" to follow his lead. Sihanouk obliged the next day with a call from Peking to all Cambodians to head for the jungle. Thereupon COSVN issued a directive on how to handle wavering Cambodian officers; tell them to mount a local coup, "proclaim themselves dissidents, and prepare for combat," advised the directive. It also ordered Viet Cong cadres to inquire discreetly what the officers felt "towards the Red K."

The Red Khmers were also confused, but not as much as the government. Although their twenty-year foe was now their titular leader, Communist discipline triumphed. On 26 March, the Party swallowed its pride, embraced Sihanouk, and called for solidarity. Additional Khmer Communist (KC) units reported to Viet Cong headquarters on the frontier. Some deployed alongside Viet Cong units to protect the bases, others attacked government posts.* On 1 April the COSVN border Defense Command reported that all Cambodian posts in its area had either fled -- leaving their weapons -- or surrendered to Khmer Communist units.

COSVN's Assessment

Several miles beyond the tumult of the border, COSVN assessed what had transpired. The reading was mixed, but not without promise. Although Hanoi had gained another enemy, the Government of Cambodia, its new adversary

**Apparently, Hanoi used KC units to attack the posts because it was still trying to keep its nose clean in Phnom Penh. Its negotiators were closeted with Lon Nol, buying time.*

was so weak that it might quickly be neutralized. Viet Cong bases on the frontier were in danger, of course, but there seemed no reason why they couldn't be moved. A COSVN directive of 27 March saw an opportunity to turn "temporary difficulties into fundamental advantages."

COSVN's assessment of the Cambodian weakness arose from a decade of dealings. Cambodian officers, it had found, could be cheaply bought. Rank-and-file soldiers were poorly trained with indifferent morale. The army was small, had limited arms, and not much ammunition. More important, the countryside was extremely vulnerable to guerrilla-type warfare. The peasants lacked guns, and Cambodian police seldom departed the cities. The bulk of the army was formed in battalions, good for marching up roads and sitting in bunkers, but ill-suited for the day-to-day task of defending the hamlets.

The Government's political base was also shaky. Although the Phnom Penh politicians were happy enough at Sihanouk's fall, the Prince's picture still adorned many a hut. To COSVN's disgust, the new government seemed willing to offset its weakness by fanning the "petty racial sentiments" which had dogged the Vietnamese Communists' efforts in Cambodia since the late forties. As they watched Vietnamese cadavers splash into the Mekong in the racial orgy surrounding the coup, the Communists were fully aware that Khmer pride of race was their most formidable adversary.

But their local assets were not inconsiderable. Large numbers of Vietnamese, who compromised some 7% of Cambodia's population, already belonged to some kind of Party-run organization. Likewise, the overseas Chinese making up 5% of the population, were heavily pro-Communist. Furthermore, recent reports suggest that the pact drawn up by the Vietnamese Communists and China in the early fifties -- that in time of war Cambodia's Chinese take orders from the Lao Dong -- was still in effect. The smaller minorities, if not pro-Communist, could at least be counted against the government.

Finally, there was the Cambodian Communist Party.* By Vietnamese standards, it was weak and poorly organized. Although it became a source of concern to Phnom Penh, the local Party controlled relatively few Khmers. On the other hand, several thousand cadres by that time had been trained by Haoi and had entered Cambodia. Others were still in North Vietnam. Still others could be drawn from South Vietnam.**

Communist Plans

Sihanouk's fall was only hours old when COSVN made its essential decision. It appeared in a clandestine report obtained six days after the coup. The report stated that if negotiations with the Lon Nol government fell through, COSVN would "back the Cambodian Revolutionary Armed Forces in the same manner that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam has been backing the Pathet Lao." The report did not lay out the details, but its implications were clear enough:

-- that Vietnamese regulars would invade Cambodia,

-- that the Khmer Communist Party, Army and political apparatus would be expanded as rapidly as possible.

*See Discussion on pages 87-90.

**About half a million Khmers live in South Vietnam's Delta. The Communists have been at them since 1951.

-- that the Viet Cong would supply the Cambodian Communists with advisors for as long as they were needed.

-- that a countrywide command structure would be perfected from national through hamlet levels.

In the days that followed, the Communist high command flooded its subordinates with implementing decrees. On 20 March, COSVN instructed Viet Cong border provinces to prepare to administer adjacent areas in Cambodia. Two days later, the Communist Cadre Affairs Committee in Phnom Penh ordered its Cambodian-speaking Vietnamese cadres to join the Khmer Communist Army. On the 27th COSVN sent a general directive to its lower commands informing them of its plan to "help the friends" build a "people's government" in Cambodia.* The directive instructed Viet Cong organizations along the frontier to set up liaison with, and send advisory groups to, their Khmer counterparts on the other side of the border. In places where "relations with the friends" were lacking, the Viet Cong were to "infiltrate the people and the local government to guide them in the struggle against the reactionary gang." This was a call for the formation of armed propaganda teams -- widely used in Vietnam in the early sixties when the Vietnamese countryside was relatively defenseless.

Detailed orders to specific commands went out on the same day. Viet Cong Region II and Subregion II, for example, were told to select 25 cadres each for service as advisors to the KC Province Committee in Svay Rieng, and to have them there within three days. Viet Cong Binh

**COSVN Directive CT 6, later amplified by Directive CT 12 of 17 April.*

Long Province began to choose cadres to serve in the villages just over the frontier. Likewise, the Communist B3 Front started to flesh out its "K Wing" for employment in Cambodia's northeast.

Simultaneously, Viet Cong Main Force units subordinate to COSVN were put on alert for duty in the Cambodian interior. COSVN ordered one Communist unit, for example, to prepare for an offensive against Route 1 through Svay Rieng in the direction of Phnom Penh. The COSVN troops were to deploy piecemeal -- sometimes in battalions, sometimes as armed propaganda teams. The invaders were to operate "in close cooperation" with the Cambodian Communists, and to hold whatever land they took until it could be transferred to "friendly troops."

Directives on the composition and duties of armed propaganda teams went to a myriad of lower commands. The teams were to range in size from 10 to 20 men, including propagandists, guards, and one or two Khmer interpreters. After entering a Cambodian hamlet, they were to set up Front Committees made up of persons "who followed Sihanouk," to govern the hamlet. Thereupon the Committees were to form guerrilla and militia units to see to their own defense. The impression was to be "avoided" that the Front Committees were Viet Cong tools. "We must make them realize they are their own masters," one directive stated rather hopefully. It added that the "working class" was to be informed that the Revolution was led by the Khmer Communist Party.

The Vietnamese Communist takeover in Northeastern Cambodia began in earnest in early April. Units from the B3 Front crossed the border in the northeast to join the polyglot of Red Khmer and Vietnamese Communist formations already there. At the same time, large numbers of Viet Cong units, mostly small, crossed the frontier in the southeast. The campaign gained momentum throughout the month, and took over large areas with little resistance. By 20 April a COSVN document claimed that the Viet

Cong had "liberated" a million people. A second document claimed that within two months, the Communists had captured 10,000 weapons, and 600 tons of ammunition.*

The US incursion into Cambodia started on 1 May. It lasted only two months, was confined to the border, and therefore was in no position to check the Communists' progress in the interior. Shortly after the US offensive was over, a Viet Cong document claimed that the number of Cambodians in "liberated" territory had climbed to two and a half million, and that the Khmer Communist structure was growing with "tremendous speed."** The document noted wryly the KC structure was an anomaly: "a Communist Front with the participation of a King."

Even if the claim was true, the captured munitions were not nearly enough to offset the more than 20,000 weapons and 1800 tons of ammunition taken by the Allies in May-June 1970.

**The document was a notebook maintained by a Region-level Viet Cong Party Committee cadre. The number probably reflected the Communist view of reality.*

PART VII: THE COMMUNIST STRUCTURE IN CAMBODIA

Muoi Cuc Takes Over

Muoi Cuc is 58 years old, quiet, scholarly and heavy-browed. His office is said to be lined with books, both Marxist tomes and recent novels. When he reads, which is often, he uses glasses. He has led an eventful life. In August 1945 he piloted the getaway boat after a prison break from the penal colony at Con Son Island. Within the vessel's thwarts were many of today's Communist leaders. One was Le Duan, now the Lao Dong Party's First Secretary in Hanoi. Then fellow fugitives, Duan and Cuc are now fast friends.

Muoi Cuc became the top Vietnamese advisor to the Khmer Communist Party in the spring of 1970.* His qualifications for the job are impressive. In the war against the French when he was Party chief in Saigon, his organization was the source of some of the Viet Minh's best intelligence on Phnom Penh. As head or deputy head of Nam Bo and COSVN since 1954, he is thoroughly familiar with what the Communists have been up to in Cambodia for the past 17 years. He spent well over half the period on Cambodian soil -- often in forests, but sometimes among the Khmers (for example, between 1957 and 1959 in Phnom Penh).**

**Cuc (alias Muoi Ut, Ut, Anh Muoi, Nguyen Van Cuc, Chi Linh, and Nguyen Van Linh) continues as deputy head of COSVN. Pham Hung took over as chief of COSVN in late 1967.*

***Whether Cuc speaks Khmer is unknown. He is good at languages -- he reads French and Chinese -- so he may well have mastered the Cambodian tongue.*

It is likely that Muoi Cuc was with COSVN when Sihanouk fell, and that he moved with the headquarters as it travelled 50 miles into the Cambodian interior to escape the US invasion in May. A usually reliable source stated that he was at the headquarters in August 1970 attending a conference called to discuss Communist policy towards Cambodia. As at earlier COSVN sessions, Cuc was a principal speaker. His remarks illuminate what the COSVN leadership was telling Viet Cong advisors to the Khmer Communists.

Cuc claimed the Lao Dong hierarchy considered the speed with which the Khmer Communist organization had developed down to the village level was "phenomenal." It was "the most rapidly developed revolutionary movement in history," he said, and had arrived at the same stage the Viet Cong had taken twenty years to reach. Despite their rapid advances, Cuc emphasized, the Khmer Communists were not then strong enough to run Cambodia. It was this situation and not the opposition of the Khmer Republic, he asserted, which had delayed the Communists' conquest of Phnom Penh.

Whether or not they believed Cuc, the Viet Cong advisors dwelt in private on the Khmers' shortcomings. These included the shortage of specialized cadres, the inexperience of village-level officials, and the "political unawareness" of the Cambodian people. The advisors agreed that the best antidotes were time, training, and guidance. Unable to hurry time, the Communists focussed on training and guidance, which are the two main facets of the Viet Cong advisory system.

Viet Cong advisors began to report for duty across the border in late March 1970. By mid-April, there were reports of Vietnamese Communists serving in Red Cambodian infantry units. As the Communist invasion of Cambodia took over more territory and the Khmer structure grew in size and complexity, Viet Cong calls for cadres to serve in Cambodia became increasingly frequent. At first, the orders specified a preference for Khmer speakers, and

Cambodian Proselyting Sections throughout the Delta in southern Vietnam were rapidly drawn down. But as weeks passed, standards relaxed, and calls for manpower widened to include most of South Vietnam. In May, for example, the northern Viet Cong province of Quang Da was ordered to muster several hundred cadres for service in Cambodia. By late 1970, so many cadres had left for Cambodia from the southern half of South Vietnam that Viet Cong operations there suffered severely.

Hanoi supplemented the southern transfers with Vietnamese cadres from North Vietnam. In the dry season which stretched from the fall of 1970 to the spring of 1971, large numbers of Vietnamese political cadres infiltrated into Cambodia over the Ho Chi Minh trail. The large majority reported in to COSVN, presumably to serve with the Cambodians. The new cadres took on a myriad of tasks. Some were specialists such as cryptographers. Others served as advisors to Khmer Communist military and political organizations. Still others helped man the Communist training establishment.

The Viet Cong training program in Cambodia had started its rapid growth directly after the coup. The first efforts were jerry-built, and emphasized speed over quality. The COSVN Border Defense Command, for example, had whipped up an infantry training course which by 7 April 1970 had 400 students. As might be expected, the early products were poor soldiers, ill-disciplined, and prone to go over the hill. Some of the hastily-put-together KC units disintegrated when the US invaded in May.

As the months passed and larger numbers of people came under Communist control, the training program began to shake down. By late 1970, many reports indicated it had reached formidable proportions. Then, as now, there were two types of schools: military and political.

Military schools have been reported throughout Cambodia. Most are boot camps which turn out cannon fodder for the Khmer Communist Army. The length of training varies with the students' assignment. Graduates bound for the Main Force regiments and battalions often receive two or three months of instruction. Students headed for province and district level units get six weeks or so. Guerrillas and militiamen in the villages and hamlets are lucky to receive a fortnight of training. At first Viet Cong teachers gave most of the courses, but Khmer Communists -- including quite a few trained in Hanoi -- now do most of the work. Despite a high desertion rate, the number of Khmers to have received some sort of military training probably now reaches into the tens of thousands.

There are also military schools for cadres and specialists. As early as May 1970, for example, a hundred KC officer candidates were training near the headquarters of the Phuoc Long Front, one of the Communists' five main military regions in Cambodia. By September, another military region had 400 officer candidates under training.* Other Khmer students attend sapper schools of which several have been reported. (A recent attack on the Phnom Penh petroleum storage tanks was said to have been carried out by a mixed KC/VC demolition team.) Still others train in such fields as intelligence. COSVN's Military Intelligence Office, for example, has a school for KC intelligence officers.

Also ubiquitous, the political schools are smaller. Their subjects range from civil health and police work, to propaganda and administration. An early example was a training course held in Kandal Province in 1970 for sixty Viet Cong-appointed Cambodian officials. The

**This was the H-12 School, subordinate to Military Region C-30.*

course emphasized the need for informer and courier networks. Courses have also been reported which instruct mid-wives and journalists. All such instruction is heavily laden with Communist ideology, and almost always includes strictures on the need for solidarity between Vietnamese and Cambodians.

Not all training occurs in Cambodia. Some Khmers cross over into South Vietnam, others are said to go to schools in Laos. The stream of Cambodians headed for training in North Vietnam continues. They will probably return in the not-too-distant future to serve alongside their comrades in the Khmer Communist political apparatus and the Cambodian Liberation Army.

The Cambodian Liberation Army

The Cambodian Liberation Army (CLA)* of today follows the model set in 1953. The main difference between then and now is that today's army is much larger. Overall direction of the CLA is vested in Hanoi's Ministry of Defense, which also runs the Communist armies in Vietnam and Laos. Day-to-day control comes from the military headquarters of COSVN. Thus Hanoi enjoys in Cambodia as elsewhere the advantage of central direction.

Structural vagaries still abound, but the Cambodian Liberation Army clearly fits the classical pattern for Asian Communist armies. There are Main Forces, subordinate to region level and above: Local Forces, for the subregion** and district echelons: and the Guerrilla-Militia, who serve in the villages and hamlets.

**The CLA's formal title is the "Cambodian National People's Liberation Armed Forces."*

***Subregions, sometimes translated as "zones," are organizationally equivalent to provinces.*

VIETCONG-RUN MILITARY REGIONS IN CAMBODIA

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Most Viet Cong Main Force units -- principally the Fifth, Seventh, and Ninth Divisions* -- remain under COSVN's direct control. Others technically belong to the Cambodian Liberation Army to serve under the five Vietnamese Communist-run military regions which formed after the coup. The new regions are designated C10, C20, C30, C40, and the "Phuoc Long Front." (See Map) There is also a second set of regions, with somewhat different boundaries, which the Khmer Communists run. The KC regions existed prior to Sihanouk's fall.

The Viet Cong regions (C10, etc.) pack most of the Communists' Main Force punch in Cambodia. Conceived by COSVN in mid-1970, their leading cadres are Vietnamese. Captured documents and POW reports show that Viet Cong soldiers also man the more important staff components, including operations, intelligence, and communications. Other headquarters elements, such as hospitals, prison camps, and transport outfits have sizeable contingents of Khmers who perform the menial tasks. In addition, there are thousands of Cambodians undergoing instruction, both formally in region schools and informally as understudies to Viet Cong cadres.

The new regions' main combat units are a perhaps dozen or so well-armed regiments created last year from Vietnamese Communist formations. Some of the new regiments are Khmer in name only, since all but a few of their members are Vietnamese.** Others contain many Cambodians, both rank-and-file soldiers and cadres as high as company commander.*** In addition the regions control a myriad of smaller combat units, including sapper, artillery, and

Some of these have Cambodian fillers.

**E.g., the 207th Regiment.*

***E.g., the 203rd Regiment.*

reconnaissance outfits. Despite the presence in these units of a fair number of Cambodian officers and non-coms, most cadres in the new regions are Vietnamese -- a fact which gives rise to considerable resentment on the part of the race-proud Khmers.

The KC-run regions -- at least five in number -- are designated Northeast, Southeast, Northwest, Southwest, and a Special Zone, almost certainly Phnom Penh. The region we know most about is the Southeastern, also called "Region 203." Known to exist as early as 1969, Region 203 includes major portions of Kompong Cham, Svay Rieng, Prey Veng, and Kandal Provinces. Captured documents show it has a military headquarters with staffs charged with such matters as political ideology and military training. Although the headquarters runs a number of region-level combat units (including all-Cambodian battalions), its main military task seems to be supervising the Local Forces of the lower KC echelons.

KC Local Forces under the subregions and districts have existed since 1968. Few in number prior to 1970, their quantity and size mushroomed after Sihanouk's fall. Now probably all the twenty-odd KC subregions and the vast majority of the more than 100 districts run Local Force formations, which have the mission of keeping the Cambodian Army locally at bay, although they have uneven success. In the case of the subregions, the Local Forces usually have a battalion or more of infantry as well as service and specialized combat troops. Most districts have at least a company of foot soldiers. The Local Forces are fairly well equipped with small arms. Heavy weapons, even mortars, are still scare.

In some areas, the Local Forces still have Vietnamese advisors. Although in early 1970 the subregions and districts had been swamped with Vietnamese, including cadres and combat units, the Viet Cong presence has become smaller and less obtrusive with the passing of time. A rash of recent reports suggests that the Viet Cong are

doing what they can to turn over full military responsibility to the local KC. The transfer stems partly from Hanoi's desire to get the KC to take a bigger share of the load, partly from its wish to ease racial tensions.

The Khmer Communists began recruiting guerrillas in the villages and hamlets of Cambodia in 1968, if not before. Like the Main and Local Forces in the Cambodaian Liberation Army, the Guerrilla-Militia began to grow rapidly after Sihanouk's fall. Instruction manuals carried by Viet Cong armed propaganda teams into the Cambodian interior in the spring of 1970 called for the creation of guerrilla platoons in the villages and of guerrilla squads and militia platoons in the hamlets. The village and hamlet guerrillas were to employ "rifles, grenades, and mines," the hamlet militiamen were to carry "machetes, axes...and various types of rudimentary weapons."

The manuals must have been followed, because Guerrilla-Militia now serve in most Communist-controlled areas. Their tasks in Cambodia are the same as those the irregulars perform in Vietnam: standing guard, collecting taxes, spreading propaganda, gathering intelligence, toting boxes, and serving as a man-power pool for the higher level units. So far the Guerrilla-Militia have fought little. Part of their inaction may stem from distaste; but part arises from a lack of opportunity. The guerrillas' main function so far is keeping the people in line.

Although sometimes vague and often contradictory, evidence about Khmer Communist irregulars lends itself to four generalizations. First, Guerrilla-Militia units consist of local people, mostly ethnic Khmers. Second, the Khmer Irregulars' weaponry is not nearly as good as that of the Guerrilla-Militia in South Vietnam, but it is getting better -- guerrilla units in some places are very well-armed. Third, the guerrilla-militia is still largely unenthusiastic except perhaps in areas where South Vietnamese soldiers are present. And fourth

-- paradoxically -- they are easy to recruit. A guerrilla squad leader who rallied in late 1970 gave the reason why. He said that people who join guerrilla units don't have to serve away from home.

The overall quality of the CLA, poor at first, is gradually improving. There are now quite a few KC battalion commanders, for example, a fair quantity of captains, and large numbers of lieutenants. Some are graduates of first-rate North Vietnamese military adademies. Other cadres are products of Communist officer candidate schools set up in Cambodia after the coup. Still others had commissions in the Royal Army in the days of Sihanouk. Despite the improvement, accounts of KC ineptitude still abound. CLA units, when confronted, often retreat, and a large percentage of its rank-and-file periodically goes over the hill. Reports of friction between the Cambodain Communists and their Vietnamese mentors would fill several manila folders.

The Vietnamese Communists know what they are working with in Cambodia, and have adjusted accordingly. Vietnamese soldiers still do most of the serious fighting -- as they do in Laos -- and the Khmer Liberation Army, like the Pathet Lao, plays a secondary role. This situation seems to be changing however, as the CLA gains in experience. Recent evidence shows that KC troops are fighting more often.

Meanwhile, the CLA's main assets are two in number. The first is its pyramidal organization, which puts the bulk of the army in the countryside. The second is its opposition, the lackluster FANK, which has most of its units in the towns or along the roads. Until the Cambodian government gets back into the hamlets, the Communists' basic advantages are likely to persist.

The Khmer Political Apparatus

The Khmer Communist (KC) political apparatus was unready for Sihanouk's fall. Prior to March 1970, it directed most of its energies towards subversion and guerrilla warfare in the countryside. Geared to usually small and furtive endeavors, it lacked the cadres and experience to govern large numbers of people. The only area over which it exercised firm control was the lightly-populated northeast. If the Khmer Party had a timetable, it probably covered several years.

The KC's pre-March organization reflected its view of the future. Connected by courier rather than radio, the structure's headquarters were relatively unsophisticated and limited in size. Cadres in the field operated in small groups, often cells. Many were underground. Just as the rebel army was still in its formative stage -- its few battalions were newly-mustered -- so the KC political bureaucracies were largely embryonic. The need to superintend a large population must have seemed a long way off.

Sihanouk's overthrow and the Viet Cong invasion of the Cambodian interior in the spring of 1970 transformed the Khmer Party's problems and prospects overnight. As Vietnamese armed propaganda teams swept into hundreds of undefended Cambodian hamlets, the Communists found themselves, willy-nilly, in the business of big government. The newly-created "Liberation Committees" led by "pro-Sihanouk" Cambodians, were often no more than a collection of bewildered peasants and monks, entirely lacking the sinews of Party control.

Muoi Cuc had his hands full. Not only was he faced with the problem of getting Khmer cadres into the villages and hamlets, but he simultaneously had to flesh out the national, region, subregion and district political headquarters

to which the villages reported.* Although national and region level organizations almost certainly existed at the time of Sihanouk's overthrow, it is likely that in many if not most areas subregion and district staffs had to be assembled from scratch. As already noted, Cuc's solution was a deluge of Vietnamese advisors, many of whom couldn't speak Khmer. Well acquainted with the historical enmities between Vietnam and Cambodia, Cuc must have realized that this could be only a temporary palliative, bound to worsen racial tensions in the future. Therefore he did his best to hurry along a more independent Khmer Communist structure.

The Khmer Communists' top governing body is the Central Committee for Cambodia (CCC). It is currently located in southwestern Kratie Province, less than an hour's drive from COSVN and Muoi Cuc. There are hints that the CCC is moderately large, and has a fairly complex bureaucracy. Doubtless it has Vietnamese advisors, as well as Viet Cong cryptographers and radiomen.

Like Cambodian Central, the KC political regions are adjacent to major Viet Cong military commands. The front office of the Southwest Region, for example, is near the headquarters of the Viet Cong-run Phuoc Long Front. (See Map opposite p. 75.) Although we have yet to nail down the exact boundaries of the KC regions, their organization and functions are becoming increasingly clear from captured documents and POW reports.

**The Khmer Communists have divided Cambodia into at least 5 regions, a score or more subregions (also called "zones"), and 105 districts. There are also 1,000-odd villages and some 7,000 hamlets in Cambodia. How many of these are Communist-controlled is unknown.*

The evidence points to the regions' growing sophistication. The Southeast Region, for example, has its own bi-monthly magazine ("The Eastern Light"), a newspaper which complains about the "American imperialist aggressors and their lackeys in Phnom Penh," and a staff which turns out Cambodian-language training manuals.* Captured regional directives have concerned such matters as the problem of counterfeit banknotes and the necessity of preventing people from government areas from "buying groceries" in KC territory. Captured documents show there is a clear chain of command between the regions and their subregion subordinates.

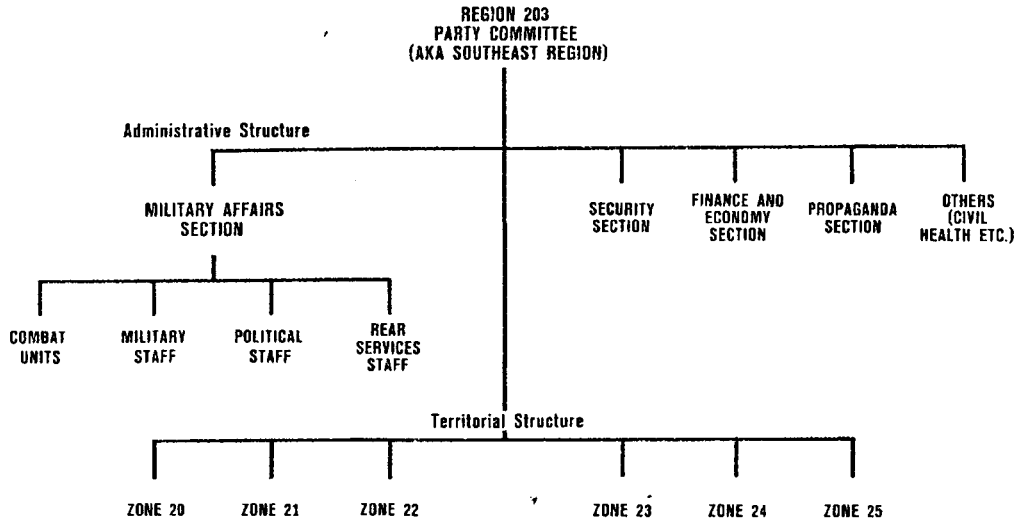
We know more about the lower-level structure in some areas than we do in others. As usual, our best evidence comes from the Southeast. In mid-1971, the Southeastern Region was divided into six subregions or "zones," (numbered 20-25), each controlling some half a dozen districts. As in Vietnam, the districts are split up into villages, the villages into hamlets. (See Chart, p82.)

Liberation Committees, usually governing in "FUNK's" name, serve each level of command.** In some areas the committees eschew the "FUNK" label, and simple call themselves "Khmer Liberation Committees." The Committees' make up varies by echelon and locale. At district level and above, they are largely on paper, and the real power resides with the Cambodian Communist Party. However, in the villages and hamlets -- where Party

For example, manuals entitled "Party Political Principles in People's Warfare," "Guerrilla Warfare Tactics," "Technique of Shooting at Aircraft with a Rifle," and "Construction and Camouflage of Underground Bunkers."

***Sihanouk, FUNK's leader, has joined the so-called Indo-China Front, which consists of North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.*

ORGANIZATION OF KHMER COMMUNIST REGION 203



Notes: 1. Region 203 reports to the Central Committee for Cambodia
2. The Zones control Districts, Villages, and Hamlets

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members are still rare, Muoi Cuc's efforts notwithstanding -- the Liberation Committees carry out much of the day-to-day work of government.

As in days of the war against the French, the organization is strongest in places peopled by Vietnamese. The Party structure in the vicinity of the Chup Plantation, for example, is as formidable as ever.

The Communist structure in Cambodia, like that in Vietnam, is broken down administratively as well as geographically. There are separate bureaucracies for such matters as propaganda, finance and economy, and security. In some places, the KC organization is rudimentary. In others, captured documents show that it is highly complex. As in Vietnam, each level of the Party structure controls a military headquarters. (Again, see Chart)

The Communist propaganda apparatus, for example, is becoming increasingly mature. Copy for the KC regional newspaper "Eastern Light" is supplied by an organization called the "Agence Khmer Information" (AKI). Like the Viet Cong's Liberation News, the AKI is a wire service. Since March 1971 its produce has been transmitted via radio teletype, and is often used by the "Voice of FUNK," a Cambodian-language clandestine radio which broadcasts from North Vietnam.*

**On the air 35 hours a week, the "Voice" gets some of its best material by tape from Sihanouk, still an extraordinarily able propagandist. In a recent "Voice" broadcast, the Prince contrasted stories from the Western press about havoc caused by Allied bombs in Cambodia with a news dispatch about Sirik Matak's visit last summer to the United States. Surrounded by US officials, Matak was in Disneyland, shaking hands with Mickey Mouse.*

The KC Finance and Economy apparatus, which the "Liberation Committees" administer locally, is interwoven with the Communist military supply structure. The committees levy taxes in the KC-controlled villages and hamlets -- sometimes in cash, more often in goods, particularly rice -- keep part of the proceeds, then forward the balance to higher authorities. The precise means by which funds and goods are disposed of thereafter are unknown, but the Communist army in Cambodia has enough food to eat and gasoline to run a modest fleet of trucks and motorized sampans.

In fact, the flow of Cambodian foodstuffs and petroleum goes not south but north, towards Laos and the Ho Chi Minh trail. There the supplies are used by the Vietnamese Communist logistics structure, which pumps munitions and infiltrators in the other direction. The Communists obviously get some of the northern-bound material (including all the gasoline) in government territory. Their ability to do so points to the existence of a clandestine procurement apparatus in the cities. Various reports have described Communist agents buying such things as flashlight batteries, cloth and medicines in the Phnom Penh marketplace. Other reports indicate the Khmer Communists buy guns and ammunition from South Vietnamese Army units in Cambodia. The practice is elsewhere common. The going price for a US-made M-16 rifle in South Vietnamese black market is about $20, less than a sixth of its cost to the American government.

Because they are unloved, the Communists' most important bureaucracy in Cambodia is the Security Section, which runs the KC secret police and political informant system. We know little of the Section's formal structure, but enough evidence has now accumulated to show that its organization and duties are similar to those of its sister in South Vietnam. The security apparatus maintains the interrogation facilities and "thought reform" camps traditionally found in Communist territories. More important,

it supervises the pervasive system of travel passes and weapons permits which in Cambodia are the clearest evidence of KC measures at population control. KC-manned checkpoints dot the main thoroughfares and secondary roads throughout the country.

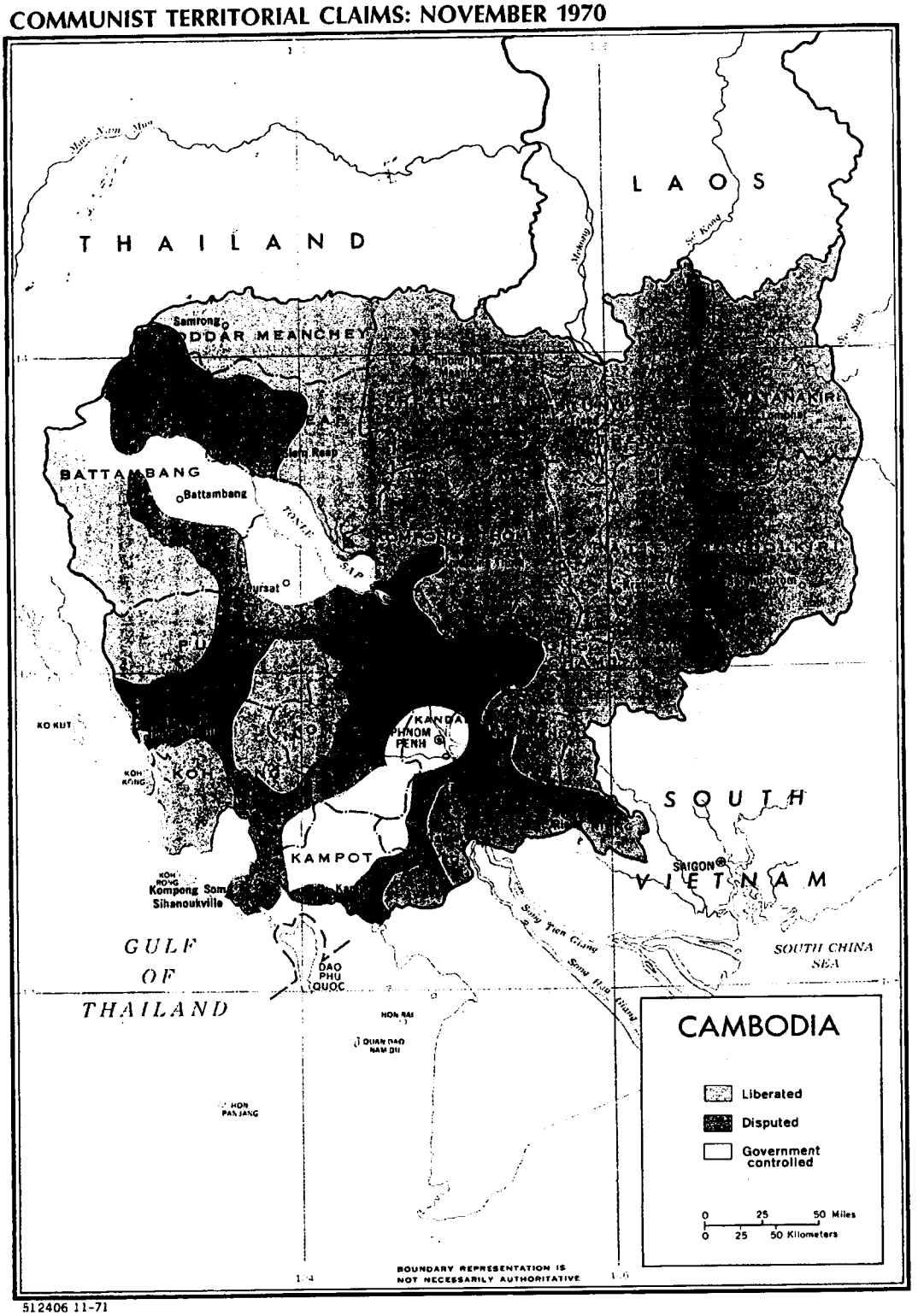
If the Communist organizational guidebooks have been followed -- and there is little reason to believe the opposite -- security representatives now serve in most KC hamlets. Even if their hearts are not in their work, they and the KC guerrilla-militia have discouraged open revolt in all but a few places. Recent Allied appraisals have dwelt on the number of Khmers who turn out to cheer when FANK battalions come into view on KC turf. The appraisals fail to address what happens when the battalions leave.

How many of Cambodia's seven million people the Communists presently control can only be guessed at. Claims contained in their internal documents, which have shown a consistent trend upward since Sihanouk's overthrow, leveled off in early 1971 at around four million.* Whether this number reflects the Communists' view of the truth or is internal propaganda designed to encourage the cadres may never be known. However, a population control map displaying "liberated," "disputed," and "government" areas -- handed out by Sihanouk in Peking in November 1970 -- seems to be consistent with the documents' claims. (See Map on next page.)

The map may well be a fair representation of Cambodian realities. If one plots on it the whereabouts of enemy units as reported by FANK, the overwhelming majority are located in "disputed" areas, almost none in areas shown under Communist control. A reason for the latter

**A recent propaganda claim raised the number to five million. This is probably too high.*

COMMUNIST TERRITORIAL CLAIMS: NOVEMBER 1970



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phenomenon could be that the government has so few assets, intelligence or otherwise, in enemy territory. Another recent report lends credence to the map. The US Army Attache, who recently visited Prey Veng -- largely Communist, according to the map -- reported that only 100,000 of the province's 600,000 persons lived in "government-controlled" areas. The Attache also reported that most of FANK's units in Prey Veng were stationed in the province capital or were strung out in strategic positions along the province's main road. FANK reports on the location of its own forces suggests that such deployments are the countrywide norm.

Altogether, the KC political apparatus shares the virtues and vices of the Cambodian Liberation Army (CLA). Like the CLA, the KC political structure has a presence -- sometimes tenuous -- in the countryside, and its villages and hamlets are tied to reporting channels which extend upwards to higher commands. Again, the pyramidal structure is in sharp contrast to that of the Cambodian government, which seldom has officials serving below district level. In this regard, the two sides resemble the adversaries in Vietnam in the early sixties.

The Cambodian Communist Party

Affixed to the letterhead of the first Khmer Communist stationary was the title "Cambodian People's Revolutionary Party." It originally appeared at the top of the draft Party statutes of 1951, well before the Party even existed. A captured document showed that in 1956 the Cambodian Central Committee, in a minor display of independence, changed the name to the "Communist Party of Cambodia."

Beyond that, our knowledge is cloudy. Information on the Khmer Party consists of fragments of documents, a smattering of prisoner and defector reports, and stories

from agents who are non-Party members. We do not know for sure when it formally came into being, or who runs it, or how big it is.

Even so, the reports are fairly numerous and permit three generalities. The first is that the Party aims eventually to rule in Phnom Penh. A Party training document captured in December 1970, for example, states its long range goal is to "achieve socialism for Cambodia by using the revolutionary forces." The struggle may be long and hard, the document goes on, "but, victory is certain."

A second generalization is that the Cambodian Party is still dependent on the Vietnamese Lao Dong. However, it is not Hanoi's puppet; "client" might be a better word. Although in many respects the Cambodian Communists are like the Pathet Lao in that both have Vietnamese advisors peeping over their shoulders, the parallel is inexact. Unlike their Lao comrades, the Khmer Communists have a fierce sense of nation. Indeed, captured documents show the Viet Cong think they must handle the KC with kid gloves.

The third generality is that the Cambodian Party fits the standard mold. It has committees, chapters, and cells with admission procedures like those in Vietnam and the Soviet Union. One report even claims the Party flag displays a hammer and sickle.

The date of its creation is particularly hard to pin down. Although Cambodian Communists existed as early as 1947, their Party cards read "Indo-China." What happened to the cards when the Indo-China Communist Party formally dissolved in 1951 is unknown. However, a usually reliable defector indicated that a legal Cambodian Party was still nonexistent as late as September 1960. A second defector has since said that it formed in 1961. An item in an East German newspaper in 1968 lends weight to the defectors' assertions. It stated the Cambodian Party had been "born since 1960."

If information on the Party's founding is murky, the evidence on its leadership is even worse. Cover names abound in agent reports, and available information is contradictory. As for Son Ngoc Minh, he apparently went into eclipse after the Lao Dong's Third Party Congress of late 1960. A recent defector stated that the Cambodian Communist authorities refused to let Minh return to Cambodia after Sihanouk's fall. Who replaced him is not known. A number of names have been bandied about, but none is yet confirmed. Perhaps the Party Secretary is a person still unknown to western intelligence. When the head of the Laotian Party came to light, he had scarcely been heard of.

Similarly, the size of the Party is only conjecture. Almost all of the thousands of Khmers trained in Hanoi became Party or Youth Group members. Reports suggest that many others have signed up in Cambodia since Sihanouk's fall. A Vietnamese document written in 1970 suggested that the "friends'" Party was growing fast. Altogether, the evidence would suggest a current Party strength of more than ten thousand. In comparison, the South Vietnamese People's Revolutionary Party (the southern extension of the Lao Dong) approached 100,000 members in 1966; the Laotian Party had some 14,000 in 1968.

Concerning Party quality, reports are mixed. Some of the earlier ones about the Khmers' behavior in North Vietnamese training camps state that many inmates were unruly and ill-disciplined. But without exception, those making the evaluation were Vietnamese Lao Dong Party members, whose standards are unusually high. Current reports suggest that most Cambodian regroupees are competent and dedicated, but that recent recruits who joined the Party in Cambodia are less enthusiastic. There are three clues which suggest that the Party is already something to reckon with, even considering its youth. First, there

have been very few Party defectors.* Second, Allied intelligence -- so far as is known -- has yet to insert a spy in its midst. And third, it ran a rebellion which, within two years, had the Phnom Penh government seriously concerned. Although the rebellion was a long way from being an immediate threat, it was no mean accomplishment.

Finally, there is the question of the Party's position in the Communist world. Here the evidence strongly suggests that the Cambodian Party, although formed in North Vietnam, has a mind of its own. There are already clear indications that its leaders have flirted with China to offset Hanoi.** For example, a Vietnamese defector who had high-level contacts in the north before he came south said that Hanoi and Peking were "vying for favor" with the Cambodian Communists. Although the Khmers' short-term interests are clearly with Hanoi, the Party leaders probably regard their dependence as temporary.

In fact, what evidence there is points to friction in the future. POWs and ralliers from the KC frequently report troubles they have had with the Viet Cong. And a COSVN assessment of October 1971 suggested that in some areas relations between the Cambodian and Vietnamese Communists have grown "steadily worse."

Whatever the problems may become eventually, they seem unlikely to get out of hand in the immediate future. The two Parties have more pressing near-term goals -- to gain Saigon and Phnom Penh, respectively. But it would not be surprising if at some more distant time, the ancient hatreds between the Khmers and the Vietnamese publicly re-emerge in the trappings of Communist dialectic.

Of the two thousand or so Khmer Viet Minh who went north in the mid-fifties, only three are known to have rallied to the government.

**The phenomenon curiously resembles the Cambodian state policy during Sihanouk's reign.*