

U.S. Did Not Instigate Cambodian Chief's Fall



WASHINGTON — U.S. credibility has sunk so low that millions of Americans no longer trust the official statements about events in Southeast Asia. This column has been deluged with inquiries, for example, pleading for the truth about Cambodia. Many Americans apparently suspect that the United States secretly engineered the overthrow of left-leaning Prince Norodom Sihanouk and precipitated the Cambodian crisis. This column has carefully investigated the backstage activities and can state categorically that the U.S. played no part in Sihanouk's ouster.

President Nixon not only hoped to keep Cambodia neutral but was pleased to deal with Sihanouk. At the time of his downfall, ironically he was appealing to Moscow and Peking to bring pressure on Hanoi to pull North Vietnamese troops out of Cambodia.

Queen Mother's Role

His mother, Queen Sisowath Kossomak, at first hailed the anti-Communist demonstrations in Cambodia. Not until her son reached her from Peking to warn that the demonstrations had gone too far did she reverse herself.

Then she played a backstage role in precipitating the showdown in the national assembly. In secret meetings with Cambodian leaders, the Queen Mother expressed her displeasure over the demonstrations, accused those who opposed her son of treason, and called for a vote of confidence in Sihanouk.

The assembly, instead, voted Sihanouk out of power. The new leaders strived at first to maintain Cambodian neutrality and even delivered two protests to the U.S. embassy over American shelling and helicopter incursions across the border.

At this time, there were only 11 people on the embassy staff. No other U.S. officials, CIA agents or special forces were present in Cambodia. The embassy staff has now been expanded to 16. Four of the newcomers were sent on temporary duty to improve the vital communications between Pnompenh and Washington.

Ever since diplomatic relations with Cambodia were restored last July, the embassy has been instructed to keep a low profile and not to meddle in Cambodian affairs.