

# Cambodia Incursion by U.S. Appears to Unite Foe

JUN 29 1970

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Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, June 27—As American soldiers near the end of their two-month incursion into suspected North Vietnamese and Vietcong sanctuaries in Cambodia and return to South Vietnam, the course of the war in Southeast Asia appears vastly more complicated and uncertain than before the incursions began.

Underscoring the complexity and uncertainty is the belief, shared by many intelligence sources here, that events in Cambodia have brought Communist elements in Indochina not only closer together than ever before, but also closer to China.

This survey of the situation throughout Indochina is

based on reports from correspondents of The New York Times throughout the area. It is also based on extensive travels by correspondents within the battle areas, particularly since April 30, when President Nixon announced the decision to send United States troops into Cambodia, and to remove them by June 30.

With that deadline at hand, this is now the general military situation in Indochina:

¶The Communists appear to be on the offensive in Cambodia and in southern Laos to extend the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the traditional supply line from North Vietnam through Laos to South Vietnam. This extension would aid Communist forces

that previously depended on shipments of supplies from the Cambodian port of Kompong Som or Sihanoukville. These offensives were under way before the United States incursions.

¶The South Vietnamese for once have carried war into someone else's territory, and South Vietnamese leaders pledge to maintain a military presence in Cambodia.

¶In Laos, the monsoon rains have dampened the seesaw battle north of Vientiane.

¶In North Vietnam, no preparations for major military moves are apparent to allied analysts in Saigon, although some of these analysts see clear signs that Hanoi will mount a major ef-

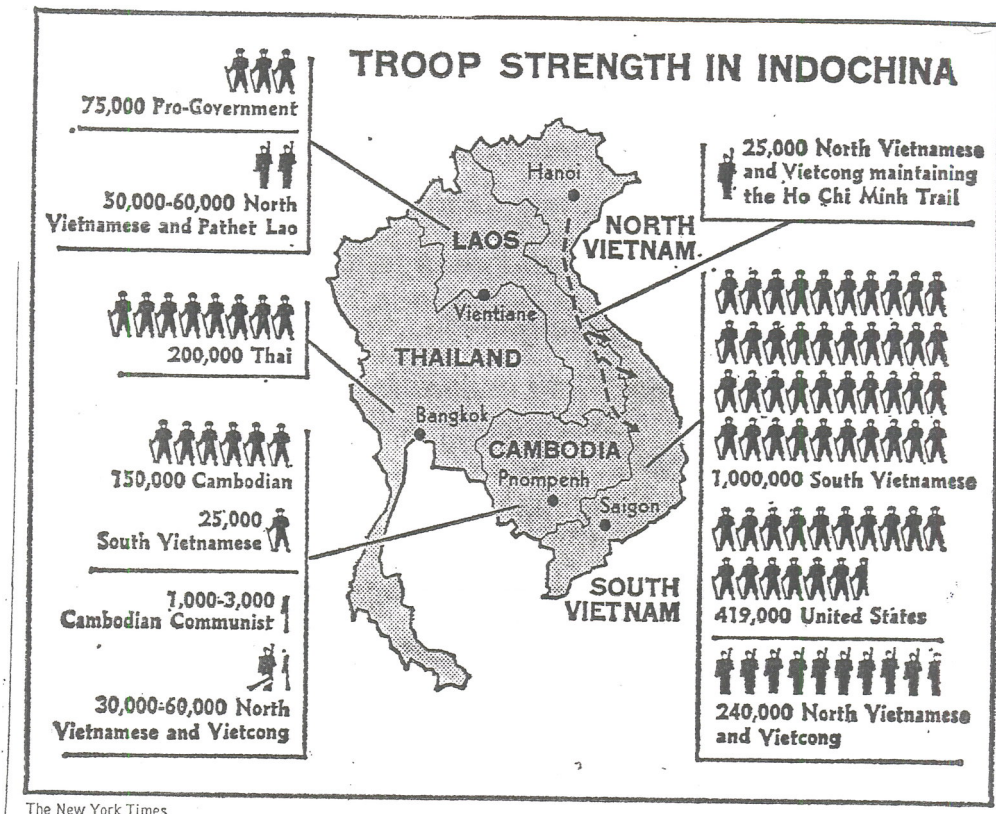
fort to move supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail during the wet season, which lasts until late October.

¶In northern South Vietnam, the military line-up on both sides and the level of conflict appears to be no different from previous years. In the southern half of South Vietnam the level of violence is said to be lower than three months ago, but only because substantial numbers of contesting forces have moved west into Cambodia.

In a newspaper interview in 1961, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, then the Chief of State of Cambodia, said:

"Between Laos and South Vietnam, Cambodia is like a stack of hay placed between

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two other stacks already set on fire. We want to survive in a merciless world."

Nine years and six months later, Cambodia was clearly burning.

For at least a decade, Vietnamese Communists have made use of Cambodia. In the last five years they are said to have established sanctuaries and supply routes there for Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops fighting in the southern half of South Vietnam. It was less than a month after Prince Sihanouk fell from power on March 18, that South Vietnamese troops began raiding the suspected Communist sanctuaries, and that the North Vietnamese and Vietcong in those sanctuaries began their expansion west into the Cambodian interior.

The war in Cambodia was well under way in the last days in April when thousands of South Vietnamese troops crossed the border in what was described as a search-and-clear operation. They were followed three days later by thousands of American troops.

#### Enemy Numbers Unknown

Thus began the military alteration of Cambodia. It was still going on this week. Early in the week, more than 25,000 South Vietnamese soldiers were operating in Cambodia, but that number was expected to dwindle as the United States deadline approached. How many South Vietnamese would remain in Cambodia was not clear.

Also fighting against the Communist-led troops is a marginal Cambodian army that recently has grown from about 30,000 to about 150,000 troops, under an intensive drive for volunteers.

Facing the South Vietnamese and Cambodian soldiers are a force of 1,000 to 3,000 Khmer Rouge, or Cambodian Communists, and a force of North Vietnamese and Vietcong, whose strength is put at any level from 30,000 to 60,000.

By this week the Cambodian Army occupied less than one-third of the country's 69,000 square miles, mostly cities and towns. A Government military spokesman announced in Phnompenh today that Government forces had withdrawn from the northeastern province of Ratanakiri. Previously Cambodia had withdrawn her forces from the three other eastern provinces — Stung Treng, Monduliri and Kratie. The withdraw-

als appear to be part of the Government's strategy of concentrating its trained troops in the Phnompenh area.

North Vietnamese troops firmly controlled one-third of the country this week and could roam at will through most of the remaining third.

#### Aid Seen as Vital

By late this week, the military situation in Cambodia was deteriorating rapidly for the Government, headed by Lieut. Gen. Lon Nol, which overthrew Prince Sihanouk. Whether this deterioration can be reversed appears to depend entirely on how much aid is sent to Phnompenh, and how fast and well the Cambodian Army can be properly trained. According to reports from Phnompenh, the survival of the Lon Nol Government depends almost entirely on how much military help it gets from the United States, South Vietnam and, perhaps, Thailand. Leaders in Thailand have pledged aid, but little has been forthcoming.

Few knowledgeable military and civilian officials in Phnompenh said they believed the Communists were strong enough to take over all of Cambodia in the near future. But most of these officials said they believed that the Communists were off to a very good start toward that goal, regardless of whether they wanted to attain it.

American and South Vietnamese military men have proclaimed the success of their operations in Cambodia, but the success was being judged in terms of the short-ranged tactical advantage that the allies had gained in South Vietnam and not in terms of the long-range outlook for Cambodia. It also appears from the most recent remarks of President Nguyen Van Thieu and his military leaders that continued South Vietnamese operations in Cambodia will be designed with the primary objective of defending South Vietnam, not Cambodia.

#### Advantages Are Cited

The allies say that they have captured about 30 or 40 per cent of the enemy's supplies stored in border sanctuaries. They say also that the Cambodian operations have gained time for the allies in the southern half of South Vietnam; how much depends on how long it takes the North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops to restore administrative and supply networks apparently disrupted when the allies crossed the border.

Estimates of this time range from three months to a year, during which the allies expect to continue the withdrawal of Americans from South Vietnam, to proceed with "Vietnamization" programs, and to carry out an offensive against enemy forces in South Vietnam who are believed to be isolated and directionless.

The extent to which they can do all these things depends not only on the success of the operations in Cambodia, but also on the dimensions of the support the allies will be required to give or decide to give the Cambodians.

The Cambodia incursions have given the South Viet-

namese troops needed boosts in morale and confidence, as well as experience in conducting large-scale maneuvers of armor, such as those conducted in World War II, while facing fairly limited opposition. They are rarely if ever called to this kind of action in their own country.

How well they will sustain morale and confidence when they return to their defensive role in South Vietnam remains to be seen.

#### Saigon Has Upper Hand

In any event, for the moment the military advantage in South Vietnam appears to be on the side of Saigon and its million-man armed force. It is fighting against an enemy apparatus that allied analysts continue to estimate at 240,000 men, although the reliability of that figure is open to question.

In terms of area, the situation is brightest in the Mekong delta, south of Saigon, and in the provinces around Saigon that make up the III Corps tactical zone. In these areas, where nearly two-thirds of South Vietnam's 18 million people live, the Government's presence continues to spread, and the Vietcong influence is said to be rapidly fading. The operations in Cambodia have helped that process.

In the northern half of South Vietnam, the picture is different. Largely unaffected by events in Cambodia, enemy forces remain strong and well supplied and the control of the population continues to be a seesaw struggle; both sides claim great gains.

### Shift in Strategy Seen

Allied analysts cite a large body of evidence, including speeches by Hanoi leaders and instructions in captured documents, which they say show an evolution in North Vietnam's strategy. They say the shift has been from an emphasis on large-unit operations to gain a "decisive victory" toward an emphasis on small-unit guerrilla operations, terrorism and political subversion in a "protracted conflict" to gain "ultimate victory" sometime in the future.

Some analysts say they expect pitched battles between main units to become less frequent and to play only a minor and diversionary role.

For the time being, however, the war in South Vietnam is a combination of struggles in which Saigon appears, for the moment, to have the advantage.

But this advantage is being undermined by an economy that is collapsing as its foundation of American dollars withers with the withdrawal of American troops.

As of this week, there were 419,000 American soldiers in South Vietnam, including those on their way back from Cambodia. President Nixon has said that by the spring of next year, 260,000 American soldiers will remain in South Vietnam, operating in what allied officials say will be an "increasingly supportive and defensive role."

### Implications for Laos

The clearest immediate implications of the Cambodian situation for Laos involve the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which is Hanoi's only link now with its forces in South Vietnam and Cambodia. Until now, the trail has been used to supply Communist forces in the northern and central portions of South Vietnam with men and munitions and to supply forces in the southern half of South Vietnam with replacements.

The North Vietnamese in Laos moved quickly after the fall of Prince Sihanouk to extend this overland supply route farther south. On April 30, they captured Attopeu, the southernmost Government stronghold in Laos. It had been surrounded by North Vietnamese troops for months and could have been taken by the Communists, according to military men, any time they wanted it.

The fall of Attopeu opened an access route to forces farther south by way of the Se Kong, a tributary of the Mekong River. They converge in Cambodia to form an all-weather

route to the south. On June 9, the Communists overran Saravane, farther to the north in Laos, leaving the only semblance of Government resistance in the southern panhandle of Laos at Pakse, along the Mekong River to the west, and roughly between Saravane and Attopeu.

The extent of any new drive

the enemy might make along the trail is not now clear. According to analysts in Saigon, nothing much out of the ordinary for this time of year is apparent.

The movement of men down the trail, starting late last October, continued at a rate estimated at 10,000 a month until January, when it was said to have dwindled considerably. It has been termed light since then. The fall of Prince Sihanouk and the allied operations in Cambodia do not appear to have affected Hanoi's strategy in this area.

Hanoi made what allied officials call a record effort to move supplies down the trail during the dry season, citing the appearance of 1,000 trucks a day.

This movement slackened before the fall of Prince Sihanouk and remains at an average of about 100 trucks a day, according to these officials.

### Administrators Remain

Usually the North Vietnamese make a concerted effort during the dry season to move enough supplies down the trail to last their forces in the northern half of South Vietnam through the wet season; June to October, when roads are washed out by daily rains. After this effort, substantial numbers of administrative workers turn to other jobs or move back into North Vietnam for the duration of wet season. So far this year, American sources have said, the administrative apparatus, estimated to number 25,000 men, has remained in place.

This information, taken together with captured documents and prisoner interrogations, leads allied officials to believe that a major resupply effort is planned during the wet season. By this week, however, it had not materialized.

### Foe Controlled Half Laos

Elsewhere in Laos, a force estimated at 35,000 to 45,000 North Vietnamese soldiers is helping 15,000 soldiers of the Pathet Lao battle about 60,000 Royal Government troops and about 15,000 Meo hill tribesmen organize and financed by the United States Central Intelligence Agency.

The Communist-led soldiers controlled more than half the country before they began their expansion in the south. Most of the sparsely populated mountainous area from the Plaine des Jarres north and west is controlled by the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese. In the far northwest, about 10,000 Chinese are at work on a road-building project. They had completed about 100 miles of it from southeastern Yunnan Province in China almost to the Mekong River, when the expansion began.

Of a population of three million, the Government in Vientiane controlled more than half,

most of whom inhabited the thickly populated Mckong valley lowlands.

Prince Souphanouvong, the leader of the Pathet Lao faction, has demanded that his half brother Prince Souvanna Phouma, the Laotian Premier, ask the Americans to stop bombing of Ho Chi Minh Trail as part of a settlement to end the fighting. So far, Prince Souvanna Phouma has refused to ask, and the United States has reportedly told him the bombing would not stop even if he did ask.

Lately, Souvanna Phouma has been under some pressure from the rightists in his Government as a result of the recent gains by the Communists in the south. The Americans, aware of the rightist opposition, have told the Laotians, as one diplomat put it recently, "no Souvanna, no money."

"No matter what happens," said one well-placed American source in Vientiane, "the United States could not conceivably send in American troops."

The Laotians appear to be convinced of this, and are hoping for more American money. Among other things they would do with it would be to double the pay of their soldiers from \$6 to \$12 a month.

There have been rumors in both Saigon and Vientiane that South Vietnamese forces might be planning forays into Laos. Knowledgeable Americans and Laotians feel this might provoke strong counter-measures by the North Vietnamese.

The Laotian Government has given the new Cambodian Government a gift of 500 old French rifles — without ammunition.

The Pathet Lao are reported to have presented a gift also, this to the pro-Sihanouk forces in Cambodia. It was a contingent of men believed to be performing logistics and supply tasks and possibly combat in the western portions of the country.

### A Role Is Expected

Thailand is expected to play a role in the Indochina fighting sooner or later, simply because of her geography. Elements of her 200,000-man army stationed along the 400-mile border with Cambodia had been placed on full alert by this week, according to the Premier, Thanom Kittikachorn.

The Premier told the Thai Parliament that Thailand would send her troops to Cambodia if necessary, but that for the moment such a move was not necessary.

Besides the army, Thailand has a 25,000-man air force and a 15,000-man navy, but the leaders have expressed constant worry over what they say is increasing Communist infiltration. Thai officials assert since the war spread to Cambodia, the Communists have infiltrated all of their border provinces with Cambodia.