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3 SIHANOUK AIDES SAID TO BE MYTHS

Pnompenh Believes Prince Executed Them in '67

Increasing doubts are being raised whether the three Cambodian Communist leaders, who Prince Norodom Sihanouk says are directing his forces in Cambodia are alive, or whether they were executed by Prince Sihanouk in 1967.

The dispute has assumed great importance for Cambodians because Prince Sihanouk has repeatedly asserted that these three men, and not Vietnamese Communists are directing the fight against the Government of Premier Lon Nob, who ousted Prince Sihanouk as Head of State last March.

According to diplomatic and intelligence sources the three men, Hou Youn, Hu Mim and Khieu Samphan, have not been seen since they were arrested by Prince Sihanouk's police in 1967 for participating in an uprising by the Khmer Rouge, the Cambodian Communist organization.

The Lon Nol Government appears so certain that the three are dead that earlier this week it did not bother to try them in absentia for treason, as it did the other members of Prince Sihanouk's recently established government in exile.

3 Named as Ministers

On May 3 when he established his government in Peking, Prince Sihanouk listed Hou Youn as interior minister, Hu Nim as information minister, and Khieu Samphan as defense minister. The next week he announced that the three men were in Cambodia, directing his "patriotic forces."

But the Pnompenh Government, believing that the three men are dead, feels that Prince Sihanouk and the North Vietnamese are simply using their names to cover up North Vietnamese aggression.

The recent doubts about the three men have come from a variety of sources.

The Cambodian delegate at the United Nations, Kim Tith, a former Premier and Defense Minister, says that he read a

confidential report late in 1967 detailing the execution of the three men.

Mr. Tith said in a recent interview that the report — prepared by Oum Mannorine, Prince Sihanouk's brother-in-law and then chief of the security police—stated that Khieu Samphan was burned to death with acid, while Hou Youn and Hu Nim were crushed by a bulldozer.

Peking Charge Reported

The U.N. delegate also said that he heard a broadcast by Peking radio at the time accusing Prince Sihanouk of executing the three men.

In Mr. Tith's view, the North Vietnamese have pressed Prince Sihanouk into using the names of the three men because there are no other well-known Cambodian Communists who can serve as a front.

American intelligence analysts have long had serious reservations about the existence of the three ministers. They say that they had reports of the executions of the three in 1967 and that no one is known to have seen them since.

"Unless we get some independent confirmation that they are still alive, it is pretty hard to believe that they are still around," an American specialist in Cambodian affairs said.

A French leftist, Charles Mayer, who was once a close adviser to Prince Sihanouk and friend of the three men, thinks that Hou Youn and Khieu Samphan are probably dead, though he is less sure about Hu Nim.

Some Doubt Reports

In a recent interview in Paris after his return from Pnompenh, he said that he had been told of Khieu Samphan's arrest in 1967 by the man's brother. Mr. Mayer thought it unlikely that the men would be allowed to live once arrested.

Some sources familiar with Cambodia, however, are skeptical of the reports of that the three were executed. They note that the Cambodian Government has not produced any official record of the executions.

Before their disappearance in 1967 the three were known as leftist deputies in the National Assembly who favored strong policies of economic nationalization and friendship with North Vietnam and Communist China. Hou Youn was born in 1930, Hu Nim in 1932, and Khieu Samphan in 1931.

4th Figure Doubted

Doubts have also been raised about the existence of Son Ngoc Minh, a shadowy figure whose picture is reported to be replacing Prince Sihanouk's in the Communist-controlled areas of northeast Cambodia.

Mr. Tith said that he had never heard of Son Ngoc Minh nor known of anyone who had met him. He said that Son Ngoc Minh was a Vietnamese and not a Cambodian name.

In 1953-54, when the Vietminh under Ho Chi Minh invaded eastern Cambodia during the war against the French and set up a so-called liberation government, they also referred to a Son Ngoc Minh.

At that time the Vietminh said that he was a brother of Son Ngoc Thant, a Cambodian nationalist hero in the World War II and an opponent of Prince Sihanouk. But Son Ngoc Thant denied the report.