

The Enigmatic Cambodian Insurgents: Reds Appear to Dominate Diverse Bloc

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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, March 12—What began in 1970 as a collection of disparate Cambodian dissidents is now a fairly unified, centrally directed insurgent organization whose dominant force appears to be the Cambodian Communist party.

Its order of leadership is not known to outsiders, however. Nor are relative positions and influence of the various factions, which range over nationalists, staunch supporters of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the exiled head of state, and Communists linked to Hanoi.

As the American-backed Government of President Lon Nol increasingly falters in its war with the insurgents, speculation centers on what the other side will do if it takes over in Phnom Penh and exactly who its top leaders are.

The Ford Administration says the insurgents are cruel fanatics who will massacre their opponents if they take power. The insurgents say there will be no bloodbath, promising that only seven "traitors," led by Marshal Lon Nol, will be executed and that everyone else who switches to the insurgent side will be pardoned.

In any case most non-Cam-

bodian observers—foreign diplomats and military experts—view the bloodbath debate as essentially irrelevant because they believe that an insurgent take-over is certain and that the wisest and most realistic approach would be to bend all efforts to make it as orderly and humane as possible.

In a way the debate typifies how little is known about the Khmer Rouge—literally, Cambodian Red—insurgents five years after they actively began building their military and political structure. Their origins go much further back than that

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—for into the regime of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who once denounced them vigorously.

When Prince Sihanouk was overthrown in March, 1970, by Marshal Lon Nol and his followers, the original Khmer Rouge was a band of no more than 3,000 dissident leftists who bore more resemblance to roadside bandits than to an insurgent army. Now, after five years of war and recruiting and indoctrination—and tutelage by the North Vietnamese—the insurgents have perhaps 60,000 men under arms.

The original Khmer Rouge, which fought against Prince Sihanouk and which was influenced by the French Communist party and had Soviet sympathies, was only one of many groups that participated in the fight against the Phnom Penh Government after the Prince was ousted.

They were joined by backers of Sihanouk who were seen as nationalists and possibly anti-Communists and who had refused to participate in the Lon Nol Government, and by French-educated intellectuals such as Khieu Samphan, now believed to be the insurgents' leader, who served Sihanouk and then went into the jungle to join the Communists in the nineteen-sixties to fight against feudal privileges and social inequities.

Also joining in was a group of possibly 6,000 Cambodians who left in 1954 with the Vietminh after the Geneva accords, were trained in Hanoi and returned here five years ago to assume leadership roles.

All have come together in a strange marriage, at least temporarily bound by the common goal of toppling the corrupt and ineffectual Lon Nol government. They are generally known as the Khmer Rouge, but officially they are the National United Front of Cambodia, whose acronym, from the name in French, is FUNK.

Some foreign analysts believe the insurgency has already evolved into a Communist rather than a nationalist movement with the Hanoi group and the Khmer Communist party increasingly dominant. Other observers say that the Hanoi-trained group is influenced in turn by the nationalists and that a struggle is in process that could produce a more flexible nationalist Socialism or Communism for Cambodia.

The insurgents' hierarchy has not yet come into clear focus. The most widely known figure, internationally, is Prince Sihanouk, who has lived in exile in Peking since 1970 as the nominal and ceremonial head of the insurgent government. His actual power is clearly limited; the government moved from Peking to the jungles of Cambodia late in 1973, and he sometimes acknowledges that his relations with the real insurgent leaders are poor.

Still, because of his celebrity and his still strong following among the peasantry, he cannot be ruled out as a possible peace negotiator or figurehead in a postwar government.

It is principally Norodom Sihanouk whom the White House has tried to contact for peace negotiations, according to a list of such efforts released last week by the Ford Administration. He might be viewed as a buffer against the Communists,

but some analysts here believe that the real insurgent leadership might seek to block any negotiating role for the Prince, fearing that he might use it to enhance his position in a future government. [In Peking on Monday, Prince Sihanouk said that Secretary of State Kissinger had made no attempt to reach him in Mr. Kissinger's seven visits there in the last four years.]

The shape of the insurgent leadership is still blurry; it has jokingly been called the world's most mysterious successful revolutionary movement. Western analysts have been able to identify only a half dozen or so of the top men, and they confess themselves confused as to the power each wields.

The most widely mentioned is Mr. Khieu Samphan, a Communist favored by Peking but also a nationalist with a reputation for integrity, incorruptibility and concern for the peasants who is highly respected among non-Communist Cambodians.



China Pictorial

Prince Norodom Sihanouk, second from right, during a trip to Cambodia in 1973. Insurgent leaders with him are, from left, Khieu Samphan, commander in chief of the rebel forces; Koy Thuon, a deputy minister; Hu Nim, minister of propaganda.

and have lost favor with the Cambodian Communists).

How much control Peking and Hanoi will exert on the insurgents is still another blurred aspect of the picture. Historically there has been friction and often deep hostility between Cambodians and Vietnamese, and any government in Phnom Penh that is too heavily Vietnamese in orientation would probably produce evoke an insurgency of its own.

There are those who believe that Mr. Khieu Samphan and others like him, once in power, might move somewhat to the right in an effort to remain independent of Hanoi. Students of Hanoi's policies say that relations between the North Vietnamese and Cambodian Communists have been deteriorating and that battles have erupted between them, particularly near the South Vietnamese border.

The Khmer Rouge controls three-quarters or more of Cambodian territory and at least a third of the seven million people. The Lon Nol Government controls only the major cities and towns, almost all of which are isolated and must be supplied by air.

According to refugees who have fled from insurgent territory, controls are rigid and Maoist, with private property forbidden and strict rules imposed on work and social life and even travel to the next village. Punishment for infractions is severe, the refugees say.

However, such reports come from areas that are either contested or close to Government lines—areas where discipline could be expected to be rigid. Generally, foreign analysts say,

A French-educated economist in his early forties and a former member of the Sihanouk Government, he broke with the Prince and was sentenced to death by him in 1966 but somehow escaped and disappeared into the jungle. Mr. Khieu Samphan, listed as Deputy Premier, appears to be the top man in the insurgent government, for the Premier, Penn Nouth, old, ailing and without power, stays in Peking with Sihanouk.

Mr. Khieu Samphan is also listed as defense minister, commander in chief of the armed forces and a member of the Politburo of the Khmer Communist party, yet there are doubts among Western analysts as to whether he is actually the top leader; it is generally believed that he shares significant powers with others.

One of those others is Ieng Sary, a Hanoi-inclined Communist also in his early forties who taught school in Phnom Penh until he went underground in 1962 with his wife, Khieu Thirith, now minister for people's education and youth. Both have spent time in Hanoi.

Mr. Ieng Sary, a Politburo member who is thought to have some influence with the North Vietnamese, joined Prince Sihanouk in Peking in 1971 and has since accompanied him on his travels. Mr. Ieng Sary is thought by some to be assigned to keep an eye on the talkative and volatile Prince.

Another key figure is Saloth Sar, Secretary General of the Communist party and army chief of staff, who is considered by some to be the main military strategist. Another major figure in the armed forces is Son Sen.

All three are thought to have helped found the Khmer Communist party in 1951 while students in Paris.

Two cabinet members, Hou Youn and Hu Nim, who escaped death sentences with Mr. Khieu Samphan, are considered more nationalist than Communist. It is thought that Mr. Khieu Samphan might also fit his description—that he may have become a Communist

mainly to gain more influence with Hanoi.

Most Cambodians on the non-Communist side seem to want to believe that a future insurgent government in Phnom Penh will be more nationalist than Communist, and they look to Mr. Khieu Samphan, Mr. Hou Youn and Mr. Hu Nim, as their principal hope.

For the moment the insurgents' government is said to be based somewhere in northeastern Cambodia, which they solidly hold. Its arms, almost exclusively Chinese-made, arrive via North Vietnam (the Russians, who used to supply some military aid, still keep a caretaker embassy in Phnom Penh

the farther one goes from Phnom Penh and the fighting, the better life is.

Since 1972 the North Vietnamese, who dominated the conflict for the first two and a half years, have almost completely ended any combat roles and are acting only as rear-echelon advisers. Cambodians on the Government side almost never talk about the Vietnamese enemy any more because the only enemy they hear about or see is Cambodian.

Much has been said about brutal behavior on the part of insurgent troops, particularly in the dry-season offensive now being waged. They are known to burn whole villages. Some prisoners—whose desire to live may make their statements less than totally reliable—have said that orders came from above to kill villagers who did not join the cause on the basis that if they were not with the insurgents they were with the Government.

Such behavior has apparently not been widespread, and some diplomats and other long-time observers suggest that if the country passes to insurgent control there would be no need for random acts of terror.

Moreover, unlike Administration officials in Washington and some American Embassy officials, most Cambodians do not talk about a possible massacre and do not expect one. By and large they have prepared themselves psychologically for their expected rulers; the idea is that since all are Cambodians an accommodation will be found.

The average peasant is plain-

ly so wearied by the fighting—having been forced to flee perhaps three or four times and almost certainly having lost a relative to a shell or bullet—that he only desires its end. He looks to possible Communist control neither with anticipation nor with fear, for he is usually a nonpolitical person whose only thought is to return to the easy, well-fed prewar days.

The reports of strict organization square with the well-coordinated, disciplined way the insurgents are running their military campaign. Though the Government forces are poorly clothed and paid, the insurgents face far more severe hardships, often being short of food and lacking even basic medicines. Many wounded insurgents die though they could easily be saved by simple treatment.

Despite such hardships they seem to fight with motivation—critics say it is fear instilled by ruthless Communist commanders—and they almost never surrender. Government commanders concede that the only time they get a prisoner is when an insurgent has fallen.

With time apparently running out for the Phnom Penh Government, an unanswered question is whether the insurgents will be willing to let that Government—or its American backers—negotiate a face-saving transfer of power or whether they will demand unconditional surrender. All their recent statements have indicated rejection of any meaningful negotiations and call for fighting on to final victory regardless of further American aid, which they say will prove useless.

The Military Situation in Cambodia

□ Government-Controlled Areas ▨ Disputed Areas ▩ Rebel-Controlled Areas



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