

Communist-Led Rebel Force Combines Diverse

By JOSEPH B. TREASTER

The insurgent force that is taking control of Cambodia was forged from several disparate groups, with opposition to American intervention as one of their central rallying points.

The force, which is generally known as the Khmer Rouge and officially known as the National United Front of Cambodia, is believed to be dominated by the Cambodian Communist party.

Although the insurgent force has been fighting against the American-backed Government in Phnom Penh for five years, so little was known of its leadership and the relative power of the various factions that in the final months of the war United States officials said they were not even certain with whom a settlement might have been negotiated.

The titular head of the insurgents and unquestionably the best known is Prince Noro-

dom Sihanouk, who has been living in exile in Peking since his overthrow as head of state and Premier of Cambodia in a coup on March 18, 1970.

As the insurgency gained strength Prince Sihanouk's influence seemed to diminish and three or four others who had been at odds with him at various times are believed to have moved into more commanding positions.

Some diplomats suggest that the most important insurgent figure may be a French-educated economist named Khieu Samphan, who is listed as defense minister, commander in chief of the armed forces and a member of the Politburo of the Khmer Communist party.

Almost in the same breath they also speak of Ieng Sary, a minister without portfolio who is thought to have some influence with the North Vietnamese; Saloth Sar, the secretary general of the Communist

party, and Son Sen, the chief of staff of the army.

"These four are already in important positions," said a Washington official who specializes in Cambodian affairs, "but the thing we don't know is whether one is stronger than the others or if all are acting as a real collegium."

He said that the State Department had no information on some members of the insurgents' cabinet and added, "There are big gaps in what we do have."

Killing Spree Foreseen

The Ford Administration has described the insurgents as cruel fanatics who were likely to go on a killing spree, massacring their opponents in Phnom Penh if they took power.

Prince Sihanouk and the other insurgents promised there would be no bloodbath in the capital "unless the anti-Communists there resist with weapons," but said that seven Government officials had been marked for execution, including President Lon Nol, who left the country on April 1. Later Prince Sihanouk said a further 21 Government leaders would be killed, but not all of these were named.

The origins of the insurgents lie far back in the regime of Prince Sihanouk, who had portrayed himself as a neutralist and had vigorously denounced them.

When the Prince was deposed in the coup in 1970, which he insists was engineered by the Americans, despite their denials, the Khmer Rouge was a ragtag band of no more than 3,000 men. It was a force that had been influenced by the French Communist party and had Soviet sympathies.

With the Prince's ouster, the Khmer Rouge was joined by his followers, who had refused to participate in the new Government formed by Lon Nol, a marshal. The Sihanouk troops were seen as nationalists and possibly anti-Communists.

At about the same time, the Khmer Rouge also gained the support of other French-educated intellectuals such as Khieu Samphan, who had served Prince Sihanouk before fleeing to the jungles to join the Communists in the nineteen-sixties to fight against feudal privileges and social inequities.

Also joining in was a group of perhaps 6,000 Cambodians who went to Hanoi in 1954 after the signing of the Geneva agreements, received training and returned to Cambodia in about 1970 to assume leadership roles.

At that point, there had been little fighting in Cambodia and most of the North Vietnamese and Vietcong in the country were operating in bases along the eastern frontier, from which they conducted attacks and funneled supplies into South Vietnam.

Six weeks after the coup that put Lon Nol in power, President Nixon ordered an invasion of Cambodia by United States troops to destroy the so-called sanctuaries of the Vietnamese Communists and to smash the Communists' military headquarters known as COSVN, for Central Office, South Vietnam.

The North Vietnamese and Vietcong withdrew deeper into Cambodia rather than fight the Americans. Unbothered by the feeble Cambodian Army, the Vietnamese Communists then began working with the Khmer Rouge to recruit and train soldiers for an insurgent army, which now stands at more than 60,000 men.

Supply Support Kept

Prince Sihanouk, seething at what he regarded as mistreatment by the Americans, joined with the insurgents in mounting an anti-American campaign. They seized on the heavy involvement of Americans in the affairs of their country in their propaganda to the peasants, in their recruiting efforts and in their exhortations to their combat troops. The propagandists also attacked the cor-



China Pictorial

Son Sen, at left, is the chief of staff of the insurgent army. In this 1973 photo, he is seen with Khieu Samphan.

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Groups

ruption and the ineffectiveness of the Lon Nol Government and pointedly referred to the President as a creation of the Americans.

It was the same approach that had been used by the Communists in South Vietnam, and independent analysts said there was convincing evidence that it had been a factor in bolstering the war effort in both countries, which in their histories had shared decades of foreign domination.

In late 1972 or early 1973 the North Vietnamese and Vietcong apparently decided to turn the major responsibilities for the war over to Cambodians, and only 2,000 or 3,000 remained as advisers and crews, mainly in heavy weapons and communications.

They continued, however, to maintain their supply and logistics support, since most of the Khmer Rouge war matériel was being shipped through North Vietnam from China.

By early 1973, the insurgents had gained control of 70 per cent of Cambodia's 71,000 square miles and perhaps a quarter of its eight million people, and they began to implement the strategy of strangling the capital city, cutting the roads and the Mekong River and shelling the airport, which finally brought them victory.

The insurgent army proved to be leaner, tougher and more disciplined than the Government troops—the envy, in fact, of military attachés of countries politically allied with President Lon Nol.

Though the Government army had 220,000 soldiers, compared with 60,000 insurgent troops, almost all of the insurgents were combat soldiers, while no more than 70,000 of the Government's forces were in fighting units.

In contrast to the dispirited Government troops, the insurgents seemed more disciplined and able to withstand shortages of food and basic medicines. Insurgents rarely surrendered, and only when they were wounded so badly they

could not move. Critics said part of the secret of the seeming motivation of the insurgents was that they were commanded by ruthless Communists who instilled fear.

American diplomats said that they were impressed by the insurgent leaders' ability to keep secret most of the facts of their lives and their relationships with one another but were unable to fathom why they had chosen to do so.

By the war's end, the State Department's background file

on the members of the National United Front cabinet consisted of 10 typewritten pages, some of them only half-full.

According to this file all four of the leaders thought to be most influential—Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary, Saloth Sar and Son Sen—studied in France. All are in their forties, with Khieu Samphan the youngest at 43. Son Sen and Ieng Sary spent some time as teachers and Khieu Samphan and Saloth Sar have worked as journalists.

There are two other important leaders, the information minister, Hu Nim, and the minister of interior, Hou Youn, both of whom, with Khieu Samphan, had served in Prince Sihanouk's Cabinet and were elected to the National Assembly.

In May, 1970, two months after Prince Sihanouk's ouster, the three announced from somewhere in the countryside their support of the Prince's "national front," which opposed the Lon Nol Government.



China Pictorial

Prince Sihanouk met with Khmer Rouge leaders in 1973 in a guerrilla stronghold in Cambodia. From left: Hou Yuon, deputy minister; Prince Sihanouk; Khieu Samphan, rebel commander in chief; Hu Nim, information minister; Ieng Sary, special adviser.