

Cambodia Without Prince Sihanouk

By ROBERT KLEIMAN

The caution Moscow and Washington are manifesting toward the Cambodia coup is well justified by the fluid situation that continues in Pnompenh almost two weeks after the ouster of Prince Sihanouk.

Efforts of Premier Lon Nol to consolidate power are hampered by the existence of significant pro-Sihanouk sentiments and pressure by the Vietnamese Communists, including troop movements in frontier regions that Pnompenh now asserts are probing deeper into Cambodia.

The new Government displayed its nervousness when a few provincial demonstrations for Sihanouk Friday led it to impose a curfew, close airports and seal the Mekong bridges into Pnompenh as a security precaution. A further embarrassment is posed by the decision of Hanoi and the Vietcong to withdraw their embassy staffs and break off talks with the Cambodian Government on its demand for evacuation of their troops.

The Cambodians lack the military strength needed to drive the Vietnamese Communist units out. They forced negotiations by loosing Govern-

ment-instigated mobs to sack the two embassies. And the talks then became the chief evidence the new rulers had to justify the claim, which helped them achieve power, that they could press more effectively than Sihanouk for removal of the North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces. That evidence now is gone.

Other problems lie ahead for the Pnompenh Government. The new regime, despite claims of unanimous support in the National Assembly, evidently has had to deal with some opposition there, as in the army, in the civil service and in the police and security forces. A number of regional commanders and military staff officers have had to be removed. So have the governor and police chief of Pnompenh and other important political figures. The royal family, which is not a negligible political factor, is also under attack.

In the narrowly based internal politics of Cambodia, this suggests that the new rulers face some resistance within most of the country's power elites. Current pressures moves by the Vietnamese Communists are believed to be aimed primarily at re-enforcing this resistance and impending growth of confidence in the

new regime as well as deterring Pnompenh from encouraging increased South Vietnamese or American military action across the border into their Cambodian sanctuary. Hanoi is also expected to step up support to the small "Red Khmer" insurgency that has troubled the Cambodian Army for several years.

If the new Government's position gradually deteriorates in the coming weeks, there would be temptation for other military men or political groups, including pro-Sihanouk forces, to bid for power.

The upheaval in Cambodia ironically came at a time when Prince Sihanouk, whose squire maneuvering at home and abroad had held back Communist penetration of his country for fifteen years, was himself improving relations with Washington and actively seeking withdrawal of North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops. While he emphasized diplomacy and good relations with Hanoi and Moscow, he did not neglect pressure. He reportedly slowed rice shipments flowing to Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops and tacitly welcomed harassing cross-border attacks against them by allied units.

The somewhat increased co-

operation of the Cambodian Army now with South Vietnamese and American forces gains little for the allies. Some allied military men undoubtedly are tempted to mount a major effort here. But Pnompenh has no interest in having a much bigger war on its territory, and South Vietnamese forces, on Washington's urging, reportedly are being ordered to curtail their recently increased cross-border operations. A military effort to close off the Communist sanctuary in Cambodia could prove as futile as the long efforts to destroy more accessible—and completely surrounded—Communist base areas in South Vietnam itself.

The new Pnompenh regime, as a result, brings more risks than benefits to the United States. There is little Washington can do to enable it to consolidate power. Yet unless the regime does so, its failure could set off dangerous instability. That in turn could lead to an increased possibility of outside intervention and the widening into Cambodia, of the Vietnam war at a time when President Nixon is trying to turn it down and withdraw.

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