



## Pullout May Collapse New Cambodian Regime

WASHINGTON — As the deadline approaches for the U.S. withdrawal from Cambodia, an ominous question mark hangs heavily over that unhappy land. American strategists are asking whether the Lon Nol government can survive without U.S. ground forces to hold off the fierce North Vietnamese. The American lunge across the border has driven the North Vietnamese inland where they now hold a dagger at Lon Nol's throat. If President Nixon considered it essential to destroy the Communist sanctuaries along the border, the strategists ask, could he sit by while the Communists took over all of Cambodia?

The strategists don't believe that the South Vietnamese, for all their new bravado, could prevent a Communist conquest of Cambodia. The inside reason the U.S. didn't let the South Vietnamese clean out the sanctuaries alone, in the first place, is that the South Vietnamese Army couldn't spare enough battleworthy troops to do the job.

There is secret intelligence that the North Vietnamese had intended to install a Communist regime in Phnom Penh before the American intervention. The deposed Prince Sihanouk had been reduced to puppet status, and his "liberation" movement was firmly in Communist hands. He was merely being used as a front for the takeover.

Even his statements were written for him by his Communist backers. In place of his own colorful style, the statements were laced with dull, dry Marxist jargon.

Militiamen carrying Sihanouk's banner began to emerge from the rain forests. But they needed Cambodian interpreters to communicate with the curious Cambodians who came to greet them. For the soldiers were Viet Cong in Sihanouk's uniforms.

### Timetable Wrecked

The U.S. intervention, apparently, interrupted the timetable for the takeover. But

the Americans also pushed the Communists deeper into Cambodia, where they will be in a better position to resume their mischief after the U.S. departure. The destruction of their sanctuaries, of course, may deprive them temporarily of the weapons they need for a major offensive.

My associate Les Whitten, writing from Phnom Penh, reports that the delightful, quixotic Cambodian people are determined to defend their country. But they are pathetically unprepared for war.

Whitten gives this description of the preparations in Phnom Penh:

"At the foot of the 15th-century shrine is a green wall with a pagoda-like soft drink stand and benches. There the mothers bring their babies. In hot weather the children, up to about four years old, play naked on the mall.

"In the past they frolicked aimlessly. Now the three-year-olds, their brown bodies glistening with sweat, imitate war. They drop to their bellies, lisping 'zzt,' the Khmer equivalent of 'bang bang.'

"The steep incline of the shrine hill itself is used by the young city boys to train for the army. They look up sheepishly when a stranger pauses to watch them fall and crawl among the stylized lions and statues of warriors with grotesque leers and broad swords.

"On the other side of the shrine is a continuation of the mall. Men and girls, no more than a day in uniforms, are learning to drill there. The girls laugh with shrill good humor when they make a mistake.

"Away from the mall, the graceful old trees planted by the French when they made Cambodia a protectorate 106 years ago bear posters in French and the squiggly Cambodian. One says:

"Americans! Drive the Viet Cong from our borders. Thank you! . . ."