



Cambodia Coming Apart at Seams

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Phnom Penh

AM RONG is the name of the Cambodian major who gives the military briefing every morning here in Phnom Penh. And Dickens on his best day couldn't have invented a more symbolic name.

For no one speaking in the name of the Cambodian regime can possibly be right. Cambodia now presents the spectacle of a country coming slowly apart.

The most visible mark of the disintegration is the movement of Vietnamese Communist forces at will all over the country. Recently they moved about 50 miles in a single night to hit Siem Reap, the site of the great Angkor Wat ruins. The day before they occupied the town of Set Bo, only ten miles south of this capital. They hold a firm base in the northeast corner of the country, and they have struck in more than half of the 19 provinces.

There is talk that they will bring back the deposed ruler, Norodom Sihanouk, and establish an insurgent regime on Cambodian soil.

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GENERAL LON NOL, the prime minister in the government which ousted Prince Sihanouk, is calm in the face of adversity. At a reception here the other night he said that the general situation was "not too bad."

But Lon Nol looks terribly tired. He seems to be suffering from some kind of liver ailment. Already Phnom Penh is alive with rumors that he may be re-

placed by a figure more to the taste of the swinging go-go-go generals in Saigon.

The Cambodian forces are not in much better shape than their ranking general. At one point nine battalions of Cambodian troops were holed up in the town of Kampong Cham, unwilling to sally forth to do battle against Communist troops just across the Mekong River. Descriptions of the fighting at Set Bo suggest that the Communist troops just walked through Cambodian units. Even Lon Nol acknowledged at the reception that if the Communists kept up the pressure his country would need "foreign assistance."

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THE PROSPECTS for quick help from the outside are not good. Some South Vietnamese generals are prepared to go all the way with the Cambodians. Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky talks confidently of a joint military alliance linking this country with South Vietnam and Thailand in a Phnom Penh-Saigon-Bangkok axis.

But President Nguyen Van Thieu is determined now, as in the past, to pull the United States with him into Cambodian ventures. He understands that Washington, for the time being, needs to make good on President Nixon's promise to get all American forces out of this country by July 1.

So Saigon's instinct is to hold back on help to Cambodia until much later when the deteriorating situation will require still another massive invasion again with American help.