

# Cambodians See Peril in a Cease-Fire Now

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PNOMPENH, Cambodia, Oct. 15—Cambodia has passed her second anniversary as a republic and there is a general feeling here that even if the Vietnam war were to end quickly, Cambodia would be broken apart and dominated by forces beyond her control. But there is also a feeling of resignation and a sense that resistance to inevitable historical forces is futile.

If there were a cease-fire here today, the Communists would claim to control more than half the country's territory, if not the populations of the large towns and of Pnompenh.

Some Cambodian officers believe that the Communists may be preparing to do that, perhaps to use Cambodia as a vast regrouping zone and base of operations in case of a cease-fire in Vietnam. Official Government commentaries on recent speculation on peace have been that that speculation is part of a Communist propaganda plot.

The entire 600-mile border

between Cambodia and South Vietnam is now one continuous hostile territory that the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong are using to infiltrate men and supplies into South Vietnam, more freely even than in the days of Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

The war that the North and South Vietnamese and the Americans brought to Cambo-

dia in 1970 has brought the Vietnamese Communists nearly undisputed control of most of eastern Cambodia. The Cambodian Army is no match for them, even after two years of American military aid.

At the moment, the Administration is planning for more such aid and has requested \$209-million for the current fiscal year.

In 1972, the resistance to the Communists in Cambodia has been left largely to the Cambodian Army. American troops left at the end of 1970, two months after they entered to prevent the entire Cambodian-South Vietnamese border from becoming "one continuous hostile territory from which to

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launch assaults upon American and allied forces," as President Nixon put it.

Northeastern Cambodia, from the Laotian border all the way down to the big Chup rubber plantation, is solidly Communist-controlled and that control is not being contested this year.

But the Communists are also pressing the Cambodian people in this capital. When, on Oct. 6, two companies of North Vietnamese commandos blow up a Japanese-built bridge just outside Pnompenh. They also commandeered a dozen armored personnel carriers from sleeping Cambodian soldiers. In the resulting fight, scores of homes were destroyed and the French Embassy was left pocked with bullet holes.

Route 5, the rice road from Pnompenh northwest to battambang, has been cut since August. Determined Communist attacks have kept it impassable, with heavy losses to defending Cambodian troops, and the capital's supply of native rice from the provinces has been cut off.

The national patrimony of the Khmer, or Cambodian people, is the ancient temples of Angkor. They are under the control of the Vietnamese Communists as solidly now as they were in 1970.

South Vietnamese troops, who had conducted spoiling operations in 1970 and 1971, have been tied down this year in defense of their own country.

All of Route 1 between the Mekong River and the Vietnamese border is in Communist hands now. According to intelligence officers here, the Communists are using their control of that territory to move into the northern Mekong delta region of South Vietnam.

Heavy fighting is also going on to the south, in Takeo Province, bordering the lower Mekong delta area, and Cambodian troops have been retreating steadily north.

"Many of my friends left for the jungle after the coup in March, 1970," a member of Pnompenh's educated elite said the other day. "The ones who left—they were all highly intelligent, energetic people."

The Government likes to say that its only enemies are the four North Vietnamese divisions

in the country. But all Western diplomatic sources in Pnompenh — and many Cambodians — agree that the Vietnam Communists in the jungles are building an indigenous Cambodian Communist movement at an alarming rate.

In May, 1970, American estimates of Cambodian Communist strength ran to about 3,000 men. The best estimates of Cambodian Communist strength now are 30,000 to 40,000 men, only 10,000 to 20,000 of which are in armed fighting units.

The strongest base of the movement is the Cambodian peasantry, which always liked Prince Sihanouk, who, from Peking, claims to lead the Cambodian Communists. The peasantry is now subject to Communist influence most of the time because the Government does not maintain a strong presence in the countryside.

As a result of the attack on the bridge earlier this month, according to some Western sources, some of the population of Pnompenh has left the city for enemy-held areas.

## The Trouble Areas

Those areas under control of the Cambodian Communists are along Route 2, south of Pnompenh, to the northwest of Pnompenh in the mountains and along the coast, near Angkor, and along Route 5 between the capital and the rice-growing regions.

"The Khmer feel they're confronting an organization created by an occupying power in an occupied area," a diplomat said. "But they're going to have to stand up and face the problem some day."

President Lon Nol has confined his actions against the Cambodian Communist threat to veiled verbal appeals, most recently on Oct. 9, when he said, in circumlocution: "I would like to appeal to a certain number of our compatriots who have been forced by the enemy to live under their yoke to rise up together with us. Those of our compatriots who have been misled by enemy propaganda, please remember that the enemy is trampling underfoot our independence, our freedoms and our folklore, and stop collaborating with them. Co-operate instead with us."

Ot Sam, a 61 year old man

who was burned out of his home during the attack on the bridge, was rebuilding a house for his family of eight. He had lived in Baray, a small town 30 miles north of Pnompenh, when it was under Communist occupation from 1970 until mid-1971, when the Government briefly "liberated" it.

"The Vietnamese were all the time making us go to meetings," he said. "They had Khmer interpreters and they made us organize a rice cooperative."

"I stayed when the Government came back and lived with the soldiers for awhile," he continued. "When they fled Baray, I came back to Pnompenh with them at the end of last year." He looked about him, laughed and went back to sawing wood.

The Cambodian Government, headed by Marshal Lon Nol, who proclaimed himself President in March and then legitimized his appointment with elections in June, seems at a loss to deal with the steadily more difficult problems it faces. Increasingly, President Lon Nol is governing, insofar as he governs at all, through a smaller and smaller circle of intimates.

On Oct. 9, 1970, In Tam, then president of the National Assembly, was the man who proclaimed that Cambodia was from that day forward a republic.

Today he lives in a modest, shabby house on the road to the Pnompenh airport, without much to do. The American Embassy would like to persuade Marshal Lon Nol to broaden his Government and invite In Tam to take an important post, but that did not happen when the cabinet was reshuffled on Oct. 15.

At his house, over the loud, whistling screeches of a pet black-and-white monkey called Ouk-Ouk, In Tam said: "I would accept a role if it was something like Minister of the Interior or Defense. But I know they will never give me those."

One of the founders of the republic—along with Marshal Lon Nol and In Tam—was Gen. Sisowath Sirik Matak, who was Premier until he was forced out last March and replaced by Son Ngoc Thanh. He has been violently critical of Lon Nol's methods of governing in recent months, but the

President has asked him several times to be his vice president.

According to people close to General Sirik Matak, he has refused. "Lon Nol must have consulted an astrologer before he asked," a Sirik Matak supporter said. "He does that before he makes any decisions."