

# Cambodian Hopes For Peace Subside

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PHNOM PENH—The widespread hopes of instant peace fostered among Cambodians by Henry Kissinger's magical aura and their own government's pronouncements have now largely subsided.

They have been replaced, at least among educated people, by the glum realization that Cambodia is further away from even a limited settlement than any of

## News Analysis

the other countries of Indo-China. For even if a cease-fire were to extend to Cambodia it is difficult to see what kind of political follow-up there could possibly be.

The mood of pessimism deepened with recent Communist military successes. For a time the Communists had closed four of the country's six main railroads and were threatening the other two. They crowned their temporary dominance with the destruction of a heavily escorted convoy and consequent butchery of the government troops and a number of women and children, the soldiers' dependents.

President Lon Nol has given his new prime minister, Hang Thun Hak, a brief to arrange talks with the other side at the local level. Officially all that is on offer is service in the government, army or re-settlement on the land. According to rumor, there may also have been some vague suggestions of a "place in political life."

The official government line has always been that if the North Vietnamese withdrew, Khmers would soon settle their differences amicably. Since it is unlikely that all Vietnamese will withdraw and since it is reluctantly conceded that there is such a thing as a dedicated Khmer Communist, the actual government strategy is to try to make little local settlements with the less committed Khmer dissidents.

It is recognized that a "hard core" will be left. Western diplomats who share the Cambodian government view suggest that "over time" the Cambodian army will be able to get the better of these units.

The government's plan is thus essentially to bring about the capitulation of some hostile units and to destroy the others, a plan for continuing the war rather than ending it. It is based on the hope that the majority of North Vietnamese units, advisers and support personnel will indeed depart, or at least, even if they stay on Cambodian territory, will cease to intervene in a major way in the Cambodian war.

It ignores the signs over recent months that the Khmer dissidents are increasing in number, now to an estimated 30,000-35,000, and in combat effectiveness while the Cambodian army doesn't seem to be getting significantly better. It ignores, too, the possibility that there may soon be a major reduction in American supplies of arms and equipment, even if the United States provides straight cash for arms purchases to circumvent any restriction in a cease-fire agreement on direct supply.

One Khmer opposition party member commented: "Lon Nol isn't interested in any settlement. He tells Hang Thun Hak to get some talks going but he won't let him offer anything that the other side would accept."

Other critics of Lon Nol who take the same view would like to see him replaced, somehow, by a more

honest and less lackadaisical government.

What would the other side accept? The answer seems to be that, like the Phnom Penh government, it too is opposed to a settlement. Exiled Prince Norodom Sihanouk has, of course, already announced his opposition loudly and vociferously in Peking. But he speaks only for the Sihanoukists among the dissidents, if he speaks for them.

However, in this case he may well be voicing the common attitude. The Khmer dissidents make up an uneasy and complicated alliance and its complications are further compounded by the policy differences among Peking, Hanoi, and Moscow.

"If they tried to get together a national leadership that could negotiate with Phnom Penh," one informed student of their affairs here said, "they would bring into the open so many problems and differences within their own ranks, it just wouldn't be worth it for them at this stage."

Others would argue that there is no need to go into the internal problems of the Khmer Rouge, one of three major rebel groups, to consider a settlement. Communists and non-Communists alike, the Khmer Rouge leaders went off into the jungle with the aim of ultimately seizing power in Cambodia.