

A Cambodian Diem?

Administration hopes for a stable peace in Indochina, already jarred by the reported Communist military build-up in South Vietnam, are further threatened by the deteriorating political situation in neighboring Cambodia.

Lon Nol's harsh crackdown on dissident elements, including members of the royal family, intellectuals, politicians and newspaper editors, suggests fear of an opposition far more sweeping and serious than that posed by the lone pilot who attempted to bomb the Presidential palace last Saturday. That lunatic attack by a son-in-law of the deposed Prince Sihanouk was unfortunately symptomatic of a deeper discontent that has found expression recently in a parliamentary impasse over the budget and in the national strike of teachers and students who were once among the regime's most enthusiastic supporters.

Military failure, official corruption and runaway inflation have all contributed to the growing disaffection with the ailing Lon Nol. He is reported to be increasingly isolated from the public and under the domination of an ambitious younger brother in a way painfully reminiscent of South Vietnam's late President Diem. As with Diem, the United States Government continues to lavish on the Lon Nol regime economic and military support, including daily B-52 bombings of Communist forces, while pressing ineffectually for reforms needed to broaden popular support.

Unless drastic reforms are quickly forthcoming, which is most unlikely, the results of current American policies in Cambodia could prove as disastrous as those Washington followed in Vietnam in the early nineteen-sixties. Even now, three years after the ouster of Prince Sihanouk and the American-South Vietnamese invasion of Cambodian "sanctuaries," Communist forces control two-thirds of Cambodia, including the long porous border with South Vietnam. The implications for the future security of any non-Communist regime in Saigon are self-evident.