

CAMBODIAN CHIEF STILL NOT CHOSEN

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Council Unable to Agree on
a Premier and Cabinet

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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, May 7—The four-man ruling council formed two weeks ago has still not been able to agree on a premier and a cabinet.

"Strife is still the word to describe their deliberations," an informed Western diplomat said.

Knowledgeable informants agree that the council will eventually pick a cabinet, perhaps soon and perhaps as a result of the same American pressure that forced the formation of the coalition council in the first place. They also agree that the prospects for a stable, effective government are slim.

The consensus among Cambodian politicians, foreign diplomats and other analysts is that the ruling council is primarily a cosmetic device and that the Government will continue to count on American air power to hold off the Communist military threat to Phnom Penh and a few other population centers until something is worked out at the negotiating table by Hanoi, Washington, Moscow and Peking.

A few officials at the United States Embassy say they believe the new council has a chance of putting things right again, but this sentiment is almost never heard outside the embassy.

Deterioration of Morale

Cambodian morale has been sliding steadily for a long time, especially since the disastrous rout of a Government military offensive late in 1971. Prices have been rising unchecked, and public dissatisfaction has risen with them.

Military leaders have lost whatever little offensive spirit they had, and the army—lacking leadership—has become riddled with corruption and indiscipline.

The same political leaders who joined Marshal Lon Nol in 1970 in helping depose Prince Norodom Sihanouk, then Chief of State, are now his political opposition, and it is they who have come back into the Government he heads as President as the other members of the ruling council.

It was under strong American pressure that President Lon Nol finally agreed to the four-man executive, in which he would ostensibly share power equally with the principal leaders of the legal opposition—Sisowath Sirik Matak, a former Premier under him; In Tam, a former Interior Minister, and Cheng Heng, a former Chief of State.

The idea behind the coalition was to bring together the various anti-Communist political factions to present a united front to the growing military threat and to pursue the war with greater vigor.

Brother Left the Country

Another part of the deal was the demand, by the Americans and the political opposition, that Marshal Lon Nol send his younger brother, Brig. Gen. Lon Non, who had come to exercise great authority as the power behind the throne and who was widely distrusted, into temporary exile. This was accomplished a week ago when General Lon Non left with his family for what he said would be a three-month trip to France and the United States.

The council has been meeting often, sometimes in consultation with representatives of the major political parties. There is little information about the differences that have delayed agreement.

It is known that the men whom General Sirik Matak has been suggesting are independents. Each has reportedly made it clear that he would not agree to be simply fronts for the council but would insist on picking a cabinet and doing his governing. This idea has apparently met with resistance.

Meanwhile, the work of the Government, never very dynamic, has slowed noticeably. The outgoing Cabinet, which resigned formally five days ago, was a lame duck for several weeks, and officials in several Government departments report that important decisions are being postponed and that the decline in morale among the poorly paid corps of civil servants has intensified.