Cambodia’s Foreign Policy

By ROGER M. SMITH
University of Washington

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agreement to the first demand but failed to win the con-
cession of the South Vietnamese to the second. The result 
was that South Vietnam retained a position from which 
she could control traffic to and from Cambodia and attempt 
to exert indirect political pressure on her. Cambodian ap-
prehensions in this regard proved justified in 1956, when 
South Vietnam suddenly imposed an economic blockade 
upon her in reprisal for Sihanouk’s visit to Peking. While 
the blockade has since been lifted, Saigon continues to 
prohibit entry to ships of Communist nations, with whom 
Cambodia has been conducting an increasing volume of 
trade. Fortunately for Cambodia the completion of the 
port of Sihanoukville in 1959, with the assistance of the 
French, has averted a potential crisis between the two 
countries arising from conflict over the port of Saigon.

For a certain amount of her trade Cambodia continues to 
rely on Saigon, but she is currently expanding facilities 
in Sihanoukville in the hope that her economy will soon 
become completely independent of South Vietnam.

As Cambodia has striven to make herself less and less 
reliant upon Saigon, tension between the two governments 
has arisen on a new front. In 1956, while construction of 
the port of Sihanoukville was proceeding, South Vietnam 
attempted to occupy Cambodian islands strategically situ-
ated in the vicinity of the new port, affirmed ownership of 
them, and harassed Cambodian fishermen fishing in the 
area.46 The largest of these islands, Kôh Tral (Phu Quoc), 
was administered as part of Cochinchina by the French and 
is at present in South Vietnam’s possession. In March and 
April, 1960, South Vietnam demanded that Cambodia re-
nounce claims to other islands in the group over which 
Cambodia has always exercised control. These acts of the 
South Vietnamese government confirmed the suspicions 
of Cambodian leaders that the Vietnamese were still intent 
upon keeping Cambodia in a subordinate position and 
that they hoped to accomplish this by keeping her eco-
nomically dependent upon Saigon. In the spring of 1960, 
Sihanouk publicly expressed his fears in his assertion that 
“the loss of the islands and the territorial waters surround-
ing them would lead to the stifling of the port of [Si-
hanoukville] . . . and very soon to the end of our inde-
pendence.”47

Relations between South Vietnam and Cambodia have 
also been marked by Cambodian complaints of numerous 
border violations by the Vietnamese. In June, 1958, for 
example, the Cambodian government reported that South 
Vietnamese troops had crossed the border, occupied a 
Cambodian village and moved boundary markers.50 An

funds, however, has never been implemented, and the money re-
 mains tied up in Paris banks. Cambodia has tried several times to 
open discussion of this problem, but the major difficulty in resolv-
ing the issue appears to be Vietnam’s refusal to include the other 
two members of the former Federation (Laos and France) in the 
negotiations and her insistence on making the issue an exclusively 
Cambodia-South Vietnam affair. For a report of Sihanouk’s efforts 
to negotiate the matter with the Diem regime in 1959, see Cambodia 
News (Washington, D.C., Royal Embassy of Cambodia), no. 13, 

See Great Britain, Fifth Interim Report of the International 
Commission for Supervision and Control in Cambodia for the Pe-
riod October 1, 1955 to December 31, 1956. Cambodia No. 1 (1957), 

See “Le Cambodge face à l’impérialisme sud-vietnamien,” Cam-
bodge d’Aujourd’hui, Special number (Mar.-Apr., 1960), nos. 3-4, 
pp. 3-4; 35-44.

See the letters from the Royal government to the International 
Commission in Great Britain, Seventh Interim Report of the Inter-
national Commission for Supervision and Control in Cambodia for