

imperialist aggressors. Cambodia joined the Organization of the Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAAL) that resulted from the conference, and after the March 18 coup in 1970 OSPAAAL was among the first to issue a strong statement in support of Sihanouk against Lon Nol and Sirik Matak.

Sihanouk grew alarmed by continuing American allegations that Cambodia harbored "Vietcong" bases and permitted a Congressional investigating team—led by Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield—to look for itself. The subsequent report categorically stated that it had found no evidence of Vietnamese Communist bases in Cambodia. In answer to another common American charge—that the port of Sihanoukville was being used to bring in supplies for the Vietnamese Communists—Sihanouk invited the International Control Commission to supervise the work on the port. Early in February, he established that the representative of the Asia Foundation in Phnom Penh worked for the CIA and he closed it down on March 1.

Sihanouk took two initiatives in March in an effort to break American resistance to international recognition of Cambodia's neutrality. First the president of the National Assembly sent an invitation to three American senators to come to Cambodia to establish the actual situation for themselves. Vice-President Hubert Humphrey declined. When Dean Rusk publicly accused Cambodia of giving asylum to "Vietcong" later in the month, Sihanouk proposed that the International Control Commission be given permanent and general powers to supervise the territory of Cambodia. Although this proposal appeared to meet the American point, it was unconditionally opposed; for the White House and the Pentagon, repeated allegations against Cambodia were an essential part of the buildup toward more and more blatant measures of aggression, culminating in outright invasion.

In an important and lengthy editorial in *Le Sangkum* in April, Sihanouk launched a bitter attack on "Les Khmers Serei et Les Khmers Vietminh," tracing their historical hostility to the Cambodian throne from both the right and the left. The Khmer Serei had brazenly "declared war" on Cambodia and openly claimed responsibility for incursions across the border. Sihanouk exposed the CIA and Saigon-Bangkok links of the Khmer Serei leaders Son Ngoc

Thanh, Sam Sary, Songsakd Kichpanich, and Son Thai Nguyen (Son Ngoc Thanh's brother), and bitterly rebutted their charges against himself and his administration. Those he called the "Khmer Vietminh" he alleged had abandoned the tactic of overt and constitutional political activities used from 1956 to 1965 in favor of subversion and insurrection. He discussed the case in which the leader of their Pracheachoun Party, Non Suon, and accomplices had been accused of spying:

We imagine . . . that the information they were charged with collecting would interest . . . our friends of the NLF, who could thus avoid our military posts in their movements on our frontiers, not wanting to compromise our genuine neutrality nor to incur regrettable squabbles with us. But "the law is the law": our spies and Non Suon were condemned to death for espionage and treason. But their sentence was commuted by me. . . . It is to be noted that at the time of the rupture of diplomatic relations with America, I received from Non Suon a letter of warm congratulation sent from his prison!

Sihanouk nevertheless retained a realistic appraisal of what was required to preserve Cambodia's equilibrium, and in the same month as his article appeared, he gave permission to the DRV to install a diplomatic mission in Phnom Penh. Despite his equation of the Khmer Serei with the Khmer Vietminh, he knew that the first represented reactionary forces that one day must succumb while the second reflected progressive forces with a future. It is also significant that he conceded that the Vietnamese Communists went out of their way to avoid embarrassing Cambodia in its neutralist stand and to avoid clashes with the Cambodian army. On the other hand, U.S. and ARVN violations of Cambodian territory continued unabated: in May the American government admitted that it had permitted its troops to "fire into" Cambodia when they thought Vietcong were to be found, and China once again solemnly declared that if Cambodia were attacked China would come to its assistance.

Sihanouk had not abandoned all hope that America might perceive the need for a neutral Cambodia with inviolable frontiers. He thus in late June gave serious consideration to Averell Harriman's request for talks. He replied favorably in mid-July, and Washington

revealed that Harriman would be the personal representative of President Johnson.

Then on July 31 U.S. planes attacked the village of Thlok Trach in Kompong Cham province, inflicting severe casualties upon the Cambodian inhabitants. An American study team was in Cambodia at this time, seeking to determine the truth in White House charges that Vietcong bases existed on Cambodian soil.* By chance they witnessed the American helicopter attack on Thlok Trach. While their report was at first characteristically denied, the government subsequently had to withdraw this rebuttal since a CBS television team had also been eyewitnesses to the attack.

Worse was to come: on August 2, an ICC team traveled to Thlok Trach to see the damage, accompanied by several foreign journalists and the military attachés of a number of embassies in Phnom Penh. They not only saw an American attack in progress on a Cambodian village, but came under fire themselves. Two F-105 jets came thundering in and blasted Thlok Trach while they were there, killing a pregnant woman and two children. The F-105s fired air-to-ground rockets, directed by an L-19 spotter plane. Clifford Webster, the Canadian representative on the ICC, and his colleagues from India and Poland, had to dive for cover to escape injury.

It was obviously impossible for Washington to deny this attack. But in a desperate attempt to exonerate their behavior, the American administration published a map showing Thlok Trach and other Cambodian villages that had recently been under U.S. attack inside the borders of South Vietnam. Sihanouk canceled the invitation to Averell Harriman. Reconciliation with America was clearly impossible in the circumstances. On their return to the States the American investigation team published a report called *Is Cambodia Next?* which vindicated Cambodia of the charge of harboring Vietcong and accused the United States of aggression and duplicity.

Despite accumulating evidence of their hostile designs, the

* Neither this group, nor an ABC television crew, found a shred of evidence for the American charges, despite the fact that they were permitted to travel freely throughout Cambodia and probe locations specifically designated by Washington as "guerrilla bases."

Americans did not abandon plans to reestablish contacts inside Cambodia via a diplomatic presence. In September "some German friends" of the United States dropped hints to Sihanouk that the American embassy in Phnom Penh should be reopened; Sihanouk rebuffed the approach.

Late in August Baron Herbert de Ribbing of Sweden arrived in Cambodia as a representative of U.N. Secretary-General U Thant. The visit arose out of Thailand's refusal to abide by the decision of the International Court of Justice regarding the ownership of the Cambodian temple of Preah Vihear. On April 3, 1966, Thai forces had attacked and occupied the temple, killing five Cambodians whom they succeeded in taking prisoner. Three days later Cambodian troops retook the temple and adjacent territory seized by Thailand. Both parties appealed to the United Nations to send a representative to establish the rights of the matter. U Thant had at first appointed a Guatemalan, José Rolz Bennett, but Cambodia rejected his nomination on the grounds that Guatemala was subject to American pressure. Sihanouk confirmed to Baron de Ribbing that Cambodia's precondition for reopening diplomatic relations with Thailand was signature of a joint declaration of mutual respect for the actual common frontiers. In September Thai leaders rejected this condition, and their border violations continued as before.

General de Gaulle visited Cambodia from August 30 to September 2, and went out of his way to praise Cambodia for its neutral policies, contrasting the stability and prosperity of Cambodia with the tragic embroilment of South Vietnam in a war involving foreign powers. The joint communiqué at the end of the visit made two important points: first, that France reaffirmed its respect for the territorial integrity of Cambodia within the limits of its actual frontiers—along the lines of the guarantee sought by Cambodia from all the powers; and second, that it was "foreign intervention" that had created the tragic situation in Vietnam, a situation that ought to be met by international agreement to guarantee and supervise the neutrality of Vietnam. (We should recall the NLF had advocated guaranteed neutrality for South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos from as early as 1962.)

The elections took place on September 11, after an unprece-

Cambodia in the Southeast Asian War

*by Malcolm Caldwell
and Lek Tan*

Preface by Noam Chomsky



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