

Further Incidents on Cambodian-South Vietnamese Border.

The improvement in relations between the United States and Cambodia brought about by Mr. Bowles's visit was shortly afterwards followed by fresh tension because of the resentment felt at Mr. Bundy's statement and as a result of a U.S.-South Vietnamese incursion into Cambodia—the first major one for three months—on Jan. 18, 1968.

According to an official Cambodian statement, about 200 South Vietnamese and U.S. troops intruded about 200 yards into Prey Veng province during the night, fired at a Cambodian military outpost and in a sharp engagement killed three Cambodian soldiers. The State Department spokesman, Mr. McCloskey, said on Jan. 22 that the crossing had taken place “without hostile intent”, had “not been planned” and had occurred “during the heat of battle” when a U.S.-South Vietnamese patrol was conducting an operation against the *Viet Cong* in a village on the South Vietnamese side of the border, which because of a bend in the Caico River was “two-thirds surrounded by Cambodian territory”. When the patrol had come under heavy fire from the village and from Cambodian territory it had crossed the border for about 75 yards. Later, with the help of air strikes, the *Viet Cong* had been driven out of the village and had crossed into Cambodia, two Americans and four South Vietnamese having been killed in the fighting. The Cambodian Government, which demanded an investigation by the I.C.C., described the incursion as “a deliberate violation of the Phnom-Penh communiqué”.

As a result of a series of similar incidents, which caused some loss of life on both sides, U.S.-Cambodian relations remained strained throughout 1968-69.

After a U.S. Navy aircraft had been shot down by a Cambodian patrol boat in the Gulf of Siam on April 1, 1968, all its crew being lost, Mr. Mendel Rivers (chairman of the U.S House of Representatives armed forces committee) demanded that U.S. warships should enter Cambodian waters and sink the entire Cambodian fleet. A Cambodian Government statement of April 15 commented that “this arrogant attitude confirms the hypocrisy of the United States, which under pretence of defending freedom practises a colonialism of a brutality unprecedented in history”.

On June 29, 1968, two U.S. helicopters machine-gunned a Cambodian village in Prey Veng province, killing 14 people, and on July 10 a U.S. aircraft fired on peasants in the border province of Svay Rieng, killing one of them. Prince Sihanouk said on Aug. 8 that the U.S. forces were threatening to occupy part of this province, and that he would not hesitate to call upon the Chinese and Vietnamese Communists for help if this threat developed.

A U.S. patrol boat with 11 Americans and one South Vietnamese on board was seized by the Cambodians on the Mekong River on July 17. The State Department, declaring that the intrusion into Cambodian territory had happened inadvertently and that there had been no act of provocation on the part of the crew, asked for their release, and this was eventually granted by Prince Norodom Sihanouk as “a Christmas gesture” on Dec. 19.

The situation deteriorated further in November 1968. U.S. aircraft twice attacked the village of Preytoul in Svay Rieng on Nov. 6, killing a peasant and wounding 23 people; three provincial guards were killed on Nov. 15 in a U.S. incursion into the same province; and three armed motor boats fired into a village on the following day, killing nine women and three children. In a telegram to U Thant, the U.N. Secretary-General, which was published on Nov. 24, Prince Sihanouk gave Warning that Cambodia might declare war on the United States if such attacks continued. A lorry was attacked by U.S. troops on Cambodian soil on Nov. 27, the driver being wounded, and seven people were killed in a similar attack on Dec. 14.

A U.S. helicopter was shot down in Mondolkiri province on Jan. 8, 1969, the crew of three being killed. Prince Sihanouk said on Jan. 10 that it had become impossible to use the roads in this province, as U.S. helicopters-he alleged-attacked all traffic indiscriminately. U.S. aircraft were again shot down in subsequent incidents on Feb. 12 and April 28, four airmen being killed on the latter occasion.

Another cause of disagreement was the damage caused to rubber plantations and crops in the border areas by chemical defoliants dropped by U.S. aircraft. Prince Sihanouk stated on May 23, 1969, that he estimated the damage at 26,000,000 French francs (about £2,167,000), and that he would seek compensation through French diplomatic channels, as three-quarters of the areas affected belonged to French companies. An agreement was reached on June 2 through the mediation of the Australian Embassy in Phnom-Penh whereby American experts would visit Cambodia to assess the extent of the damage. A State Department spokesman said on June 4 that the aircraft used for this purpose were forbidden to fly within three miles of the Cambodian border, but admitted that "regrettable incidents" had occurred because the frontier was not clearly marked. The Cambodian Government put forward a claim on June 20, 1969, for compensation totalling \$8,684,810.

Fewer incidents were reported after the resumption of diplomatic relations between Cambodia and the United States on June 11, 1969, but on several occasions U.S. aircraft and artillery attacked alleged *Viet Cong* positions inside Cambodia during fighting in the border areas.

The U.S. command in Saigon stated on July 3, 1969, that during the siege of Ben Het [see page 23924] the allied forces had made air attacks on batteries firing on the post from Cambodian territory. During the fighting around Bu Prang, in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam [see page 23926], U.S. aircraft attacked the Cambodian border post of Dak Dam seven times between the middle of October and Nov. 2, and carried out further raids during Nov. 16-19. The Cambodian representative at the U.N., M. Huot Sambath, told journalists on Dec. 4 that the post had been destroyed during the second series of raids, as well as a school and other buildings, and 25 Cambodian killed; he denied that Bu Prang had been shelled from Cambodian territory, pointing out that the bombardment had continued after Dak Dam had been destroyed. U.S. aircraft again raided Cambodian territory on Dec. 3-4, after North Vietnamese forces had allegedly shelled the town of Tuyen Binh from across the border. The U.S. Government formally apologized for the attacks on Dak Dam in a Note of Feb. 20, 1970, and offered compensation totalling \$11,400 for the persons killed or wounded.

Although Prince Sihanouk openly indicated in a speech on Jan. 27, 1968, that the *Viet Cong* were using Cambodia as a sanctuary and a source of supplies and that this was a vital factor in their operations, other official statements issued during that year denied that they were present in Cambodia in any numbers. Prince Sihanouk invited the I.C.C. and foreign journalists on Aug. 8 to investigate the allegation that the *Viet Cong* used infiltration routes through Cambodia and had established supply depots there, in order to establish that it was untrue.

In reply to allegations made by the South Vietnamese delegation at the Paris peace talks, the Cambodian Ambassador to France, M. Sonn Voeunsai, said in a letter published in *Le Monde* on Jan. 9, 1969: "We have never tolerated the presence of foreign forces of any kind on our territory, nor *a fortiori* favoured one of the belligerents in South Vietnam to the detriment of the other. Any accusation or allegation about the so-called use of our territory by the Vietnamese resistance forces springs from pure imagination, and is solely intended to justify the violations of our frontiers, often followed by murderous aggression, committed by the forces of the United States and the so-called South Vietnamese Government."

From February 1969, however Prince Sihanouk openly expressed increasing concern at the use of Cambodian territory by the *Viet Cong* and North Vietnamese forces. He said on Feb. 5 that "although the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front have recognized Cambodia's present frontiers, armed Vietnamese elements continue to penetrate our country in Mondolkiri and some other provinces". On March 6 he stated that there were sizable *Viet Cong* units in Rattanakiri and Mondolkiri provinces, and that he was "deeply worried" about Vietnamese infiltration; the Americans, however, had not bombed the areas where the *Viet Cong* were, but "only the areas where there are Cambodians", and he maintained that they had done so in order to compel Cambodia to give up its neutrality. At a press conference on March 28 he said that although "the Vietnamese Communists are infiltrating into our country more and more", he was opposed to any intervention by the U.S. Air Force because Cambodian civilians would be killed and not the *Viet Cong*.

Despite these protests, the Cambodian Government continued to maintain friendly relations with North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front (N.L.F.). The N.L.F. mission established in Phnom-Penh in June 1967 was raised to embassy status on May 8, 1969, and the Provisional Revolutionary Government formed by the N.L.F. on June 10 was recognized by Cambodia three days later.

Prince Sihanouk stated on May 23 that six Cambodian soldiers and at least 12 of the *Viet Cong* had been killed in two clashes between them in Svay Rieng on May 17 and 21, and that he had ordered General Lon Nol to warn the North Vietnamese and N.L.F. Ambassadors to "go no farther". The Prince said on June 21 that the Provisional Government's Ambassador, M. Nguyen Van Hieu, had given a written promise that the *Viet Cong* forces would leave Cambodia as soon as peace was restored.

M. Huynh Tan Phat, the Prime Minister in the Provisional Revolutionary Government, arrived in Phnom-Penh on June 30, 1969, on an official visit, during which he discussed the question of *Viet Cong* activities in Cambodia with Prince Sihanouk.

A communiqué issued by the Provisional Revolutionary Government on July 14 called on “the administrative authorities at all levels, as well as the armed forces and population of South Vietnam, to apply its policy towards Cambodia more strictly and to pay close attention to its directives concerning relations on the frontiers”. About 30 *Viet Cong* prisoners were released by the Cambodian Government on July 4, and 53 others, who had been captured between November 1968 and June 1969, on July 29. Another clash between Cambodian and *Viet Cong* troops was reported to have taken place in Prey Veng province on Sept. 28, however.

A report drawn up by General Lon Nol in October 1969 estimated that in the second half of September there were 35,000 to 40,000 “foreign” [i.e. North Vietnamese and *Viet Cong*] troops in Cambodia, compared with 32,000 to 35,000 in the first half of the month. There had been a considerable increase in their number in Mondul Kiri and Kratie provinces and a slight increase in Svay Rieng, Prey Veng, Kandal and Takeo, the increases being attributed to floods in South Vietnam and recent offensives by the U.S. and South Vietnamese forces. The report added that “there is no indication that these foreign units will soon leave our territory”.

The Cambodian Government announced on Oct. 14, 1969, that it had asked the I.C.C. to leave Cambodia not later than Dec. 31. The communiqué stated that this decision had been taken for financial and not political reasons, as certain of the signatories of the Geneva Agreements had ceased to pay their contributions towards the Commission's expenses. According to press reports, these countries included China and North Vietnam.

The semi-official magazine *Sangkum* had previously reported on May 30 that the Government did not wish the I.C.C. to “concern itself with questions of *Viet Cong* infiltration and settlement, so as not to render them more complex,” and had accused the Canadian and Polish delegations to the Commission of serving the interests of the American and Communist camps respectively.

The “Red Khmer” rebellion in the north-western province of Battambang, which had been suppressed in June 1967 [see 22288 A], broke out again at the end of the year. In the first two months of 1968 it spread to several of the north-eastern, eastern, western and south-western provinces, and by December 1968 rebel forces were active in 11 of the 19 provinces.

The rebels, who were estimated in June 1969 to number about 1,500, were organized in bands of varying sizes, some of which were reported to be over 100 strong; these attacked isolated military posts and villages, ambushed Army patrols and sabotaged communications, but did not succeed in establishing their control over any large area. It was reported in November 1969 that whilst some of the rebels were still armed only with axes, sharpened bamboo stakes and crossbows, others were equipped with modern rifles, believed to be of Chinese origin.

Although the mass of the rebels were drawn from the peasantry, they also included a considerable number of intellectuals, among whom unemployment was widespread. One band of 50 to 100 men operating south-west of Phnom-Penh was believed to be commanded by M. Hu Nim, a former deputy who had gone underground in 1967. The National Assembly approved on Aug. 16, 1968, orders for the arrest of several public figures accused of Communist sympathies, including two former members of M. Son Sann's Government, M. Chau Seng (who was then in France) and M. So Nem, former officials and two school teachers.

Prince Sihanouk said on Jan. 27, 1968, that China and the Communist-sponsored “Thailand Patriotic Front” were probably involved in the revolt, and warned the Communists that if he were forced to resign the Army would take over and a pro-American Government would be set up. “Cambodia will become a fortified American base,” he added, “and there will be no more supplies or sanctuary for the Vietnamese Communists. With the Americans occupying Thailand and Cambodia, it will be the end of the *Viet Cong*.” General Lon Nol's report of October 1969 on *Viet Cong* activities in Cambodia described the revolt as “teleguided from abroad”, and alleged that the rebels in the eastern provinces were operating from South Vietnamese territory behind the *Viet Cong* lines.

In the north-eastern province of Rattanakiri the revolt was carried on by the *Khmers Loeu* or “Mountain Khmers”, a separate movement among the Montagnard tribes. At a press conference on May 3, 1969, Prince Sihanouk produced photographs, documents and weapons of Chinese origin which, he claimed, proved that the *Viet Cong* were taking part in the rebellion. He said on June 11 that there was evidence that “the Vietnamese Communists who are supporting the Khmer rebels are trying to communize and Vietnamize this territory by forcing the Montagnards to renounce Cambodia and to proclaim that Rattanakiri belongs to Tonkin”.

The right-wing rebels known as the “Free Khmers” continued to carry out raids on the western Cambodian provinces from their bases in Thailand during 1967-69, although the importance of this movement declined during this period. It was reported from Phnom-Penh on Jan. 17, 1969, that over 200 of the rebels had recently surrendered and handed over a large stock of arms. Two Army officers and two n.c.o.s were captured in a clash with the rebels in Battambang on May 16, and were sentenced to death by a military court on Jan. 12, 1970.

The British Government stated in a Note delivered on Jan. 12, 1968, that it “respects without reservation the sovereignty, independence, neutrality and territorial integrity of Cambodia within its present frontiers, and recognizes the inviolability of those frontiers”. Similar assurances were given by Japan on the same day; by India on Feb. 11; by Australia on Feb. 21; by Ceylon on July 21; and by Laos on March 23, 1969. The Australian Government had previously given such an assurance in 1967 without committing itself as to where the Cambodian frontiers might be, this qualification being rejected by the Cambodian Government.-(Times - Daily Telegraph - Guardian - Le Monde - Neue Zürcher Zeitung - New York Times - U.S. Information Service) (Prev. rep. 22283 A.)