

Let's make Weekly
26/8/1970

Cambodia's National Front: what it is and what it is not

AN INTERVIEW WITH NORODOM SIHANOUK

United States Vice President Spiro Agnew began a nine-day Asian tour this week with the pledge, promptly seconded by the White House, that the administration would do everything in its power to prevent "a Communist takeover" in Cambodia.

Although a White House spokesman emphatically denied that this might mean further intervention by US troops, the possibility of direct American action at some point in the future cannot really be ruled out. Moreover, the limitation clearly did not extend to South Vietnamese or other foreign forces, or to US logistic and air support for General Lon Nol's troops, whose efforts to eradicate the partisans of deposed Head of State Prince Norodom Sihanouk in large areas of Cambodia have so far been anything but a success.

In an exclusive interview from exile in Peking, Prince Sihanouk draws up a balance-sheet of the "revolution of the Khmer people" since the rightist putsch of March 18.

Following is the text of an interview granted to *Le Monde's* special correspondent Alain Bouc by Prince Sihanouk, President of the National United Front of Kampuchea (Cambodia), earlier this month in Peking:

Q. More than four months have elapsed since the coup d'état that deprived you of power. How do you appraise the situation in your country and the attitude of the Khmer people towards the cause you defend?

A. The situation of the Khmer people's revolution in this month of August 1970 is the following:

1) The provinces of Stung Treng, Rattanakiri, Mondulakiri and Kratie (east of the Mekong) are completely liberated.

2) West of the Mekong, the province of Preah Vihear (except the temple of Preah Vihear near the Cambodia-Thailand border, which has now been reoccupied, with Lon Nol's permission, by Thailand), the province of Kompong Thom (except the provincial capital where "heated" battles took place), the province of Siem

Reap-Angkor (except the provincial capital and the international airport) have also been liberated.

3) In the other provinces, the people's army and administration are settling down in the countryside and even in several towns and district capitals.

The Lon Nol administration and the armies of Phnom Penh and Saigon occupy and control very superficially the important cities, which are harassed, shelled with mortar and rockets almost daily, by the people's forces (for example, the cities of Svay Rieng, Takeo, Kampot...) and often attacked (Kompong Speu, Kirirom, Prey Veng, Kompong Cham, for example).

In the large and rich province of Battambang, western "observers" believe they note a rather impressive "calm," which, as they see it, means that the Lon Nol regime has this province "well under control."

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Now these appearances are quite misleading. Our guerrillas are keeping Battambang City "quiet" in order not to give the Bangkok government the pretext of a so-called Communist "threat" to intervene militarily in this ardently coveted province.

But, with the exception of a few cities, the province of Battambang, like all the other provinces, is wide open to the National United Front, which is all the more at ease there because numerous "Sihanoukist" Battambang residents quite naturally may be added to the equally numerous Red Khmer "cells" in existence since the first Indochina War (1947-1954.)

The liberation of provinces such as Battambang, Pursat, Koh Kong may be "silent" but it is nonetheless as far along as that of Svay Rieng, Kompong Cham, Prey Veng, Kandal, Takeo, Kam-pot, Kompong Speu and Kompong Chhnang, where bloody fighting goes on rather "regularly" every week and is reported to the outside world by the international press.

To sum up, I can say without being accused of exaggeration, that two-thirds of Cambodia is already in the hands of the Front.

B-52 "raids" and "strafings" by Phantom jets and others, as deadly as they may be, will not be able to change the situation in Lon Nol's favour. Quite to the contrary.

Cementing an alliance

I say "quite to the contrary" because, as it was put by another journalist, Richard Dudman (captured and later released by our guerrillas two months ago) "the common fear of bombings, the outbreak of the war following the American and South Vietnamese intervention, have cemented the tacit alliance of the people of the paddies and the guerrillas."

The Phnom Penh regime, aided in this by the Washington government, is desperately defending the thesis according to which this war is not a civil war.

Now the National Front in Cambodia exists as a people and an army guided by the ideals of independence, social justice and anti-imperialism.

Yes, from now on, Lon Nol and his feudal reactionary partisans, big capitalists, traffickers, attached to the bandwagon of the USA, will find themselves facing Red Khmers and "Sihanoukists" united as one man, who will struggle without compromise to strike down the fascist Phnom Penh regime and to establish in its place not "the power of Sihanouk," as the American press claims I intend, but a revolutionary popular power which, moreover, will not exclude respect for Buddhism and the royal family.

In respect to the so-called existence of a Khmer guerrilla

war, I should like to quote at this point the statements of Saigon military leaders as they are reported by AFP (the French news agency, Agence France-Presse) in a dispatch dated August 3:

"One month after the withdrawal of American forces from Cambodia, North Vietnamese, Vietcong and 'Sihanoukist' Khmer enemy elements have again appeared in the Parrot's Beak and in the Chup and Mimot plantations, General Do Cao Tri declared today... For his part, Colonel Leu Tho Cuong... said that on Sunday his forces destroyed a 'Sihanoukist' Khmer training camp fifty kilometres north of Svay Rieng. Last week, another 'Red Khmer' centre was destroyed not far from Prasaut. About fifty Red 'Khmers' were killed during that operation, he added."

Nixon's payroll

In the mouths of these Vietnamese, charged by President Nixon with protecting the Lon Nol regime against the assaults of the Khmer people, obviously only the "victories" of their troops over the "Sihanoukist" Khmers and Red Khmers are reported, but what must not be lost sight of is the *undeniable existence* of an organized Khmer guerrilla force. This is what the Saigon military leaders and protectors of Lon Nol on Nixon's payroll have just pointed out.

Q. Could you summarize the results of your efforts to rally political support at the international level?

A. The National Front enjoys the support of all the world's progressive, socialist and anti-imperialist nations, and of all the national and international organizations within these countries. The Front also has the support of all the peoples of the world, including the people of the United States.

Broad recognition

The Royal Government of National Union under the aegis of the National Front is recognized by twenty-one sovereign states: Albania, Algeria, China, Congo-Brazzaville, North Korea, Cuba, Guinea, Iraq, Libya, Mauritania, the United Arab Republic, the Central African Republic, Rumania, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, North Vietnam, the PRG and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, North Yemen and South Yemen, Yugoslavia, and by the Pathet Lao and the Al Fateh Palestinian Liberation Organization.

The Soviet Union and its East European allies, East Germany, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia have not yet legally recognized our government, but they have officially recognized that "Prince Norodom Sihanouk is the legal head of state of Cambodia."

Q. What is the importance of the support of the socialist na-

tions of Asia in your present struggle and for the future of Cambodia?

A. The support of the Asian socialist states is in our view of the greatest importance in the struggle we fight now and for the future of Cambodia.

Theirs is in fact the only concrete and effective support we are receiving. Without it we would not be able to triumph, whatever the faith and bravery of our soldiers in the field.

We are a small people who must face a colossal and extremely rich enemy, American imperialism, served by a host of satellites and mercenaries equipped with inexhaustible and ultra-modern means of aggression and extermination.

Our struggle would be inconceivable, our resistance would be impossible against such enemies without our integration in a united front of Indochinese peoples, that is to say, a fighting alliance with the Vietnamese people and the Lao Patriotic Front, and without the material aid of China and the Korean Democratic People's Republic.

Independence underwritten

As for our future, we have the absolute conviction that Vietnam and socialist China (not to mention Korea, which is geographically very far from Cambodia) will respect our national independence and our territorial integrity in every way.

The leaders of Peking and Hanoi have given me formal assurances in this connection; they have given me to understand that, on the national as well as on the international level, their two countries would have absolutely no interest in "satellizing," and even less in "swallowing," Cambodia.

They even told me in so many words that they would like Cambodia to maintain, after its liberation, its policy of non-alignment and avoid proclaiming itself "socialist" or "communist." For a Cambodia that would appear as a tiny partner of the Asian socialist camp could no longer be useful to this camp on the international, political and diplomatic level. On the contrary, if it were clear to the whole world that our country is really independent, "national" and neutral, our voice would be listened to and our support for the just cause of a socialist China and Vietnam would carry weight.

Lastly, the Chinese People's Republic and the Korean Democratic People's Republic have promised us very substantial aid for the social and economic reconstruction of Cambodia, after the liberation.

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