

The Spokesman
1974



Prince Norodom Sihanouk

Cambodia: Then and Now

Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia was interviewed in Peking in early July by the directors of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, Ken Coates and Chris Farley. The following is the text of the interview:

Question: What is the present relationship of forces inside your country?

Sihanouk: Firstly, I should like to make it known that the number of combatants on the Cambodian battlefields are as follows:

- Armed Forces of the Cambodian National Liberation people's army: 50,000 men.
- Enemy Forces: 200,000 men of the Lon Nol army (Phnom-Penh) and 23,000 men of the Saigon army, to which must be added the air forces of the USA based in South Vietnam and Thailand.

The propaganda machine of the Washington Government, plus that of Saigon and Phnom-Penh, is attempting to make the world believe that "Sihanouk's armed partisans" are not Khmers but "Vietcong" and "North Vietnamese" exclusively. This is a lie. Look at these photographs which have recently reached me from the liberated zone of Cambodia, that is the zone controlled by the NUFC — National United Front of Cambodia. These show that the resistance of the Cambodian people is no myth, and that our Cambodian Front has its own people's army with combatants who are of the Khmer race.

Naturally enough, since we are not a numerous people, the Cambodians, in their struggle against not only the army of Phnom-Penh, but also the

forces of "the greatest military power in the world and of all time," the USA, co-operate closely with the two other Indochinese peoples in their struggle against the same colossal enemy.

And in any case, are we to be blamed for not "going it alone" in our confrontation with the coalition of the air forces of the USA and the land armies of Phnom-Penh and Saigon, when even Britain had to ally itself with the USA, and even with the USSR, during the Second World War, to overcome Hitlerite Germany?

Having made this clear, our NUFC controls and administers, at this moment, two-thirds of Cambodia. In the remaining third of our country, the armed forces of Phnom-Penh and Saigon occupy the towns and our guerillas have the run of the countryside, the forests and the mountains.

Our combatant strength is certainly much less than that of our enemies — we prefer quality to quantity — but our fighters can rely on the support of the people, from whom they spring. They are "of the people" as are "fish in water".

Question: How do you think the war will develop, and do you think your forces can gain a military victory?

Sihanouk: In accordance with the Joint Resolution of the Summit Conference of the Indochinese Peoples (25 April 1970) our three armed forces, Cambodian, Vietnamese and Laotian peoples' armies, have united, are uniting and will continue to unite their efforts to overcome, together, their common enemy. Peace will come to all Indochina, or it will not come at all. But I am sure that, despite the bellicosity and obstinate aggressiveness of President Richard Nixon of the USA, peace will finally come to our three countries — Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos — with the defeat of our common enemy, who is the enemy of our three peoples as well as of the national independence of each of our three countries.

Question: What are likely to be the long-term effects of the war in Vietnam on your own country and the whole of Indo-China?

Sihanouk: By extending the Vietnam war to Cambodia, President Nixon has but precipitated the defeat of American imperialism in Indochina.

By changing the policy of independence and of neutrality of Cambodia into a policy of alignment with, and subordination to, American imperialism, he has gained nothing, unless it be a new burden: the regime of Lon Nol-Sirik Matak.

But the Vietnamese people (the NLF and PRG of South Vietnam, and the DRV) have gained a new and valuable ally, the Cambodian people.

The transformation by "Washington" of the war in Vietnam into a war in Indochina would necessarily result in transforming the pacific and neutral peoples of Laos and Cambodia into revolutionary peoples, closely allied to the revolutionary peoples of Vietnam. The setting up of the Indochinese People's United Front is the work of these people; but it is also the work of Present Nixon and the Lon Nol-Sirik Matak group, which is under the sway of American imperialism.

This will, one day, leave Indochina, probably in 1973. When once it has left, we shall have a Cambodia, a South Vietnam and a Laos which will all be independent, neutral and (also) progressive, if not socialist, each country having its own characteristics as both State and political system.

Question: Do you plan any further meetings of Indo-Chinese Heads of State?

Sihanouk: I have proposed to the leaders of the Patriotic Front of Laos, the National Liberation Front and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam, and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, that we should all meet at a new "summit" during 1972 at Hanoi to examine the results of our struggle and the co-operation obtained during two years and determine, in outline, the steps we should take for continuing our fight and our co-operation in 1972-1973.

Question: Do you expect to return to Cambodia soon?

Sihanouk: No. The Ministers of the RGNUC and the cadres of the NUFC from the interior of Cambodia insist that I should stay in Peking.

Question: Which governments have already granted formal recognition to your Royal Government of Cambodia? Are you satisfied with the scale of their support?

Sihanouk: There are twenty-four sovereign States that have granted formal recognition to my Government. (Here he asked his aide to bring him a typewritten list so that we could have them in alphabetical order). They are: Albania, Algeria, Central African Republic, People's Republic of China, Congo (Brazzaville), Cuba, Guinea, Iraq, People's Democratic Republic of Korea, Libya, Mali, Mauretania, Rumania, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, UAR, Democratic Republic of North Vietnam, Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam, Arab Republic of North Yemen, People's Republic of South Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zambia.

I am very pleased by the number of States that

have recognised the Royal Government of Cambodia. I hope that all the other socialist, progressive and anti-imperialist governments will soon help us with effective support in our struggle by granting their official recognition to the RGNUC.

Question: Last year a Japanese newspaper reported that Lon Nol's emissary there had stated that the Soviet Government had continued to supply various forms of aid, including military aid, to the Lon Nol regime. Is there any further information on this question?

Sihanouk: I have not had confirmation of the supply or sale of Soviet military equipment to the Lon Nol Sirik-Matak regime. However, it is known that the Soviet Union continued, after the coup d'état of the 18th of March 1970 at Phnom-Penh, to supply "cultural" and "medical" assistance to "Cambodia" — that is, to the Lon Nol Sirik Matak Government.

"Cultural assistance": Soviet teachers for the Technical University and the University of Fine Arts; scholarships to "Lon Nol" students to go and study in the USSR. I would point out, incidentally, that the German Democratic Republic has awarded several new scholarships to the fascist students of Phnom-Penh and sends them to East Germany to continue their higher education.

"Medical assistance" medicines, medical personnel, equipment for the "Khmer-Soviet Friendship" Hospital where the wounded soldiers of Lon Nol, mercenaries of American imperialism, are tended.

Question: Have you any reason to expect a change of policy by the Russian Government in this respect? Why do you think they refrained from offering you their recognition?

Sihanouk: Soviet leaders have informed us, through "indirect" channels, that they could never grant official, or even unofficial, recognition of the Royal Government of National Union of Cambodia. Certain Western diplomats have informed me, off the record, of course, of the opinions of high Soviet officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow, according to which our Government (the RGNUC) is nothing but "a group of emigrés living off the Chinese" and "representing not at all the Cambodian people" that "Sihanouk is a reactionary-despotic-Prince" and that "Lon Nol is an authentic, true, popular leader, having the people and progressive youth with him."

I am deeply grieved to see that the Soviets dissimulate that they are unaware of two very important facts, which are well-known to all the world's anti-imperialist peoples, which are:

Firstly: Ten members of my Government are inside Cambodia proper. They are at the head of a truly popular national administration and a popular army;

Secondly: Lon Nol, the so-called "man of the people and hero of progressive youth" is a sworn enemy of Communism. Lon Nol is responsible for the massacre and deportation, as well as the imprisonment in concentration camps, of tens of thousands of civilian Vietnamese residents (including women, old people, children and babies) accused of being "Communists". This same Lon Nol is the sworn enemy of the NLF and the PRG of South Vietnam and the DRV, who are all allies and comrades in arms of the ideology of the USSR. The Lon Nol regime is at war with these allies of the USSR, whereas Sihanouk was desposed and subsequently condemned to death by Lon Nol's Tribunal for "collaboration" with the "Vietnamese Communists"!

However, if I am to believe those Western diplomats who passed on to me the opinions of the Soviets, the latter consider that, all things being equal, the Lon Nol regime is preferable to that of Sihanouk. because with Lon Nol "it's a Republic" whereas with Sihanouk "it's still a Monarchy".

Question: What sort of society were you creating in Cambodia before the coup?

Sihanouk: Prior to the coup d'état, I was trying to achieve national unity by getting compatriots of different tendencies to unite around common ideals of national independence and neutrality (as regards external policies) and Buddhist socialism (as regards internal policies). "Buddhist socialism:" This meant that I was trying to reconcile both "right" and "left" tendencies by proposing to "reconcile capitalism and socialism through Buddhism", thereby inspiring us to work for the happiness of the people, to achieve social justice whilst respecting individual liberty. "Buddhist socialism" means a spirit of mutual help, the banishment of egoism, love of one's neighbour, and charity, brought on to a national plane, for the happiness of our people, and the advancement of our country.

The coup d'état of the 18th of March 1970 proved that it is not feasible to think of "marrying" the Right (capitalist and pro-imperialist) with the Left (socialist or progressive and anti-imperialist).

Question: What was the nature of American aid to Cambodia before 1963? Why did you cut it off?

Sihanouk: The principal reasons for our rejection of US aid in 1963 were, firstly, the humiliating conditions, incompatible with our independence

and our non-alignment, which went with this aid. For example, when our National Defence lacked fighter planes and other modern weapons, we would not have had the right to get them from the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China. Secondly, US economic aid was designed to thrust our economy irreversibly into the so-called "liberal" system, which, as one can still see in Thailand or South Vietnam, accentuates social injustice and in no way corresponds to the needs of an under-developed country.

US Economic Aid refused to help the Khmer State to set up State-controlled industries and sought only to develop a market for imported consumer goods which suited only the privileged classes in Cambodian society.

Thirdly, military and economic aid was corrupting the heads of the Army and the civil administration to a fantastic degree. The Army has never forgiven me for refusing to encourage US imports and rushed to profit from them in 1970 to the extent of a catastrophic war and unspeakable sufferings on the part of the people.

Finally, this rejection in 1963 came about as a result of a series of plots hatched by certain "not-so-quiet" Americans against my parents and myself, aimed at suppressing or overthrowing us, and as a result of a series of murderous and bloody incursions by American, Saigonese and so-called Free Khmer armed forces directed against neutral Cambodia.

Question: When the USA set up SEATO in 1954, what future did it foresee for Cambodia?

Sihanouk: The SEATO pact was designed to protect the nationalist countries of South-East Asia from any possible "aggression" by neighbouring Communist powers. The Cambodia of Sihanouk declined to be "protected" by SEATO because, firstly, its neutrality was guaranteed by the Geneva agreements of 1954 on Indochina and, secondly, my people and I were sure that China and the Vietnamese Communists would be much better friends of our country and would entirely respect that national independence and internal peace we enjoyed without the umbrella of SEATO. Events have proved us right.

Question: Why was the USA opposed to your Government?

Sihanouk: In Foster Dulles' time, the policy of the USA with regard to the countries of South-East Asia could be summed up in the following formula: Those countries who do not agree to become satellites of the USA are enemies of the USA. And as it happened, Cambodia was precisely a case of a country which sincerely desired friendship with the

USA without however being one of their new colonies.

Subsequently, our relations with the Government in Washington deteriorated after we granted "de jure" recognition of the Government of the People's Republic of China, and later of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and lastly the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam.

Question: What was the role of the USA in the coup of March 1970?

Sihanouk: There were numerous plots formed against me by the CIA in co-operation with governments in South Vietnam and Thailand between the years 1956 — when Cambodia started diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China — and 1965, when, as a consequence of too many murderous aerial bombardments of our national territory by the US Air Force we had to sever diplomatic relations with Washington.

All these plots failed, thanks to the loyalty of the Army and the police, and their Commander-in-Chief, General Lon Nol, the same man who committed treason against me in 1970.

If, in connection with these plots, I have mentioned the names of the CIA, the Saigon Government and the Bangkok Government, it is because material proof regarding them and the identity of their agents was gathered by the secret police, then under General Lon Nol himself.

The CIA and the governments of Saigon and Bangkok have openly maintained the "Army" of Khmers-Serei (Free Cambodians) in South Vietnam and in Thailand. This Army — like the "Free Cubans" trained in Florida to be hurled from time to time against Fidel Castro — was often hurled against me, but was defeated each time by the Royal Army, aided by the militia.

Certain American newspapers have revealed the existence of reports sent by the American military chiefs in Saigon to the Pentagon, in which the authors specifically requested "a change of political orientation" in Cambodia (which meant my overthrow) and the invasion of my country by American forces in order to "destroy the Vietcong sanctuaries". These reports emphasized that unless this was done, the war could not be won by the US in South Vietnam.

President Johnson did not dare adopt this "extreme solution" but now we see both "the change of political orientation" and the invasion by American and satellite forces. All the arguments advanced earlier by the "hawks" in Saigon were repeated in the televised speeches made by Presi-

dent Nixon, and in particular those of April 30 and June 30, 1970.

President Nixon himself has declared that his Government had nothing to do with my being forced out of power in Phnom-Penh. Without questioning the political honesty of the American Chief of State, I must express my astonishment that Mr. Nixon thought he had to do all this — intervention by the American, South Vietnamese and Thai armies; intensive air bombardments of Cambodia without limitation of time or space; official appeal to all countries friendly to the USA to come militarily to the aid of the Lon Nol regime; and offers of very important military and financial aid so that Lon Nol and his regime would survive “at any cost”.

Question: Why as Cambodia invaded from Saigon within six weeks?

Sihanouk: Those who, in different roles, were the architects of my removal did not think of the following possibilities which, in fact, have happened:

First, my refusal to accept defeat. They thought that, like the Ex-Emperor of Vietnam, Bao Dai, I would be satisfied with retirement in France.

Secondly, the setting up of the National United Front of Cambodia (uniting the “Sihanoukists” with the “Red Cambodians”) and of the United Front of the Peoples of Indochina (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam). They thought that, without having to fire a shot, Cambodia, after the overthrow of Sihanouk, would become a “neutralist right-wing” country, meaning a country aligned with the “American camp” and the problem of the “Vietcong sanctuaries” would automatically be solved. But my reaction to the coup d’etat upset this optimistic plan. Thrown into the camp of the “Indochinese Left”, I legitimized the armed intervention of this Left against the illegitimate regime in Phnom-Penh. This regime was about to be overthrown when President Nixon announced, on April 30, his armed intervention in Cambodia.

Serving the interest of his “camp”, Mr. Nixon could not do anything but “enlarge the war”. To allow the camp in which I am now to overthrow the regime of Lon Nol would be to compromise the fate of the American armies in South Vietnam still more than before March 18 1970 (the day of Lon Nol’s coup d’etat).

Question: What is your view of the reports of the Pentagon study which have been appearing in the *New York Times* and elsewhere?

Sihanouk: The publication of these “reports” by the *New York Times* and other important news-

papers renders a great service to the cause of peace. I hope that the American people, in the knowledge of these revelations, which demonstrate that the instigators of war in Indochina were its own US Presidents, and not the North Vietnamese, will oblige President Richard Nixon, sooner or later, totally to disengage the USA and their armed forces from Indochina.

With such disengagement, peace will not be slow to return to South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Question: What role has the British Government played in Indochina since 1954?

Sihanouk: Britain, unfortunately, has not played a useful role in the events in Indochina since 1954, the year in which it became, with the USSR, co-chairman of the Geneva Conference on Indochina. Britain, in reality, has only played the part of “defending counsel for the interest of the USA” and “crusader” against the Vietnam Communists. Being a partisan chairman, Britain could not help to bring back peace in Indochina.

Question: In opposition many spokesmen of the British Labour Party were opposed to the formation of SEATO, believing that it was directed against the movement for national self-determination of the peoples of Asia. Did the British Labour Government take any steps to assist you in the maintenance of a neutralist position?

Sihanouk: I do not recall ever having received from the British Labour Government the slightest assistance whatsoever. The least I could envisage is that, if today Britain were governed by the Labour Party, it would not have adopted a policy of such marked assistance, as that of your actual Government today, to the fascist, bellicose, anti-constitutional and anti-popular regime of Lon Nol. And I would add that the present British Government has on many occasions manifested its disdain of me, and its hostility with regard to the NUFC and the RGNUG.

Question: Have you any news of your family in Phnom-Penh?

Sihanouk: No. The Government of Phnom-Penh does everything in its power to ensure that no news of my mother or my children gets through to me.

Question: Have you any immediate plans to travel outside China?

Sihanouk: I shall be staying in the People’s Republic of Korea next month.

Question: How do you see your personal role after the war?

Sihanouk: I shall not be playing any part in active life after the war is over. I shall definitely retire.