

FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E–12, DOCUMENTS ON EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA, 1973–1976

89. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Scowcroft) to President Ford, Washington, May 10, 1976.^{1 2}

Washington, May 10, 1976

INFORMATION

May 10, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: BRENT SCOWCROFT

SUBJECT: Life Inside Cambodia

Our Embassy in Bangkok has prepared a comprehensive report on “Life Inside Cambodia” (Tab A) based on numerous interviews with Cambodian refugees who have fled to Thailand and on information available from intelligence sources. The report indicates that the Cambodian Communists are radically reconstructing that country using extremely harsh and brutal methods to implement their policies. Some of the more notable comments which the report makes are:

- Since January 1 the Communists have executed former teachers, students, and even low ranking enlisted men of the Lon Nol military forces. Moreover, anyone who shows any sign of being educated also risks arrest or execution.
- Executions are reportedly widespread and in many cases members of the entire family of former government officials or soldiers are executed along with the head of the family. Almost all executions occur in the same manner: several Communist cadre beat the person to death with hoe handles or other blunt instruments.
- The regime is extremely anti-intellectual. One former school teacher described book burnings in Phnom Penh following the Communist takeover including one instance in which the entire contents of the National Library were destroyed.
- Education has virtually ceased to exist save for some ideological training for children between the ages of 7 and 12.

Organized religion is being eradicated. Monks are forced to do work in the fields. Most pagodas have been either dismantled or are being used for other purposes such as to store grain.

- Virtually everyone has been made a member of a “production cooperative” and forced into agricultural work. To [\[Page 2\]](#) exert control over the population, the Communists have divided cooperatives into ten-man and ten-woman work groups. These groups are further subdivided into three person cells with the tenth person serving as group leader. Each person within a cell is responsible for the other two and should any one member flee, the remaining members of the cell may be executed.
- Work hours are from dawn to dusk and sometimes even longer. In one province people worked by torchlight after dark until 9 or 10 p. m., and slept at the work site so they could begin work early the next morning.

Standards of health have declined drastically and disease is rampant. There are widespread epidemics of malaria, dysentery, and cholera in various parts of the country. Remaining medical facilities are open only to Communist cadre. Most doctors are no longer allowed to practice but are either forced into manual labor or executed.

In several areas the family unit is being destroyed with children permanently separated from their parents and husbands and wives placed in separate work groups.

The Embassy report concludes that Cambodia is under the control of a xenophobic collective leadership dedicated to attaining a radical change in the social, political, and economic makeup of the country in the shortest time possible. In its determination to achieve results, it appears willing to use any means possible. Other reports reaching us confirm the level of brutality which this Embassy Bangkok airgram portrays.

1. Source: Ford Library, National Security Adviser, Presidential Country Files for East Asia and the Pacific, Box 3, Cambodia (23). Confidential. Sent for information. Ford initialed the first page of the memorandum; a notation at the top of the document reads: "The President Has Seen." Tab A, Airgram 74 from Bangkok, March 31, is attached but not printed. The NSC staff prepared a second report, "Life Inside Cambodia," May 29, from unclassified sources for public dissemination. (Ibid., White House Central Files, Subject Files, Box 10, CO 26, Khmer Republic, Cambodia) Kissinger discussed Southeast Asian issues, including the Cambodian internal situation, with Australian Prime Minister Fraser on July 27. (See Document 62)↵
2. Scowcroft summarized for President Ford a Department of State report on life inside Cambodia.↵