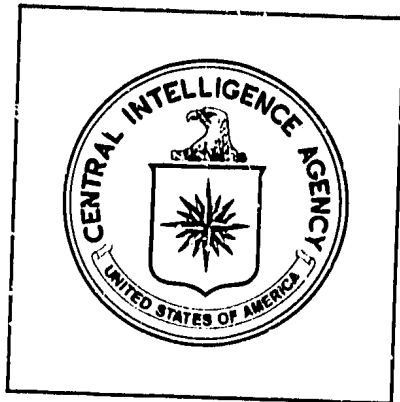


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STAFF NOTES:

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA



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CAMBODIA

A Look at the Khmer Communists

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With the Cambodian conflict now approaching what may be the final stage, the Khmer Communist Party and their administrative apparatus stand ready to take the reins of power in Phnom Penh. The handful of leading communist figures known in the West probably will assume prominent positions in a successor regime, but some important leaders will remain behind the scenes or occupy positions that are not commensurate with their actual power in the covert party organization.

Since they were created five years ago, the National United Front of Cambodia and the Cambodian People's National Liberation Armed Forces have been the overt administrative and military organizations of the insurgency. Although Sihanouk's Royal Government of National Union--now dominated by the communists--may eventually be installed in Phnom Penh, to date it has had no significant role in Cambodia, serving instead merely as the institutional conduit for the insurgents' external relations. The insurgent apparatus in Cambodia is controlled and directed by the Khmer Communist Party, which traces its origins back to the early 1950s and Ho Chi Minh's Indochina Communist Party but which apparently only assumed a formal organizational identity in 1961. From a handful of senior Cambodian cadre of the Viet Minh and leftist revolutionaries, the Khmer party has expanded to a membership of over 10,000, led by a central committee of about 20 members. In classic communist fashion, the covert party's command structure is indistinguishable from that of its overt instruments: Party members occupy virtually all key positions in the front and in its mass organizations, from the national to the local level, and party cadre form the backbone of the insurgency's military arm.

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Prince Sihanouk poses with Khmer Communist leaders during a meeting in Cambodia in 1973. The photo from *China Pictorial* is the only known photograph of the leaders together. Front row, left to right: Hou Yuon, Sihanouk, Khieu Samphan, Hu Nim, and Ieng Sary. Back row, left to right: Unknown, Saloth Sar, Unknown, and Koy Thuon.

While a fairly clear picture of the form and structure of the party has emerged, the composition of the party's central committee has remained a closely guarded secret. Sihanouk's "defense minister" and "deputy prime minister" Khieu Samphan is the best known of the senior leaders, but it is generally believed that Saloth Sar is the party secretary general and probably outranks Khieu in the

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central committee. Widely traveled but innocuously titled Ieng Sary--who now handles most direct contacts with Peking and Hanoi--also appears to occupy a position of strength in the committee hierarchy. From there on the picture dims. A number of other central committee members have been identified with varying degrees of certainty. These include better known individuals such as Hou Yuon and Hu Nim as well as lesser knowns such as Son Sen, Nuon Chea, Sok Thuok, Chou Chet, Tiv Ol, and Koy Thuon. Other top insurgent military commanders and regional party chairmen also appear to be on the central committee. Their true identities have never been firmly established, however, and only their code names are known. The relative rankings of the lower echelons of the central committee are matters of conjecture. Hou Yuon and Hu Nim, for example, are given broad propaganda coverage and were once thought to be influential leaders, but [redacted] claim that they actually wield little power. Given the emphasis on the "armed struggle," it would seem only natural that military leaders like Nuon Chea and Son Sen would have more clout in the central committee than their civilian colleagues.

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Even allowing for a liberal sprinkling of anonymous "peasant-soldiers" at the policy-making level, enough is known about the background of a significant portion of the top leadership for reasonable speculation about its complexion. Of the individuals whose central committee membership is fairly well established, for example, all are in their 40s. Most qualify as Cambodian intellectuals, having been educated

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during the 1950s in France--where they got their leftist if not their communist ideology--and having subsequently worked as journalists or teachers. Khieu Samphan and Hou Yuon, in fact, have doctorates in economics. A significant number have had considerable experience in politics: Khieu Samphan, Hou Yuon, and Hu Nim held cabinet portfolios under Sihanouk during the 1960s, and several other ranking communists were active in partisan politics. Almost all the known or suspected party leaders are remembered as tough nationalists and articulate, unyielding ideologues even before their active involvement in the insurgency. Another collective trait appears to be long-standing opposition, and in many cases personal enmity toward Prince Sihanouk. Saloth Sar, Ieng Sary, and Son Sen, for example, are among a number of current communist leaders who fled into the bush in 1963 following one of Sihanouk's periodic crackdowns on leftists. Despite sometimes intense persecution by the prince, others such as Khieu Samphan, Hou Yuon, and Hu Nim stuck it out until 1967 before bolting the capital.

All these common bonds can only have grown stronger after eight or more years of joint service, helping to explain the remarkable cohesiveness and determination with which the party has prosecuted the war. The party leaders are clearly tough-minded people who may have had their differences but have also been able to submerge or resolve them and work together once a decision has been reached. Given the apparent intellectual sophistication of most of the leaders, it is not surprising that there is some evidence of ideological friction. Reports of heated debate among Khmer communist figures previously attached to Sihanouk's entourage in Peking, and claims of "Soviet" and "Maoist" factions within the leadership, for example, suggest that the party's position on international communist issues is one bone of contention. An apparently authoritative party history prepared for the party's "22nd anniversary" last September pointed

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toward such debate in referring to a "state of disunity still existing in the party" and to "partisan factions," although it failed to identify specific personalities or issues.

A related and more clearly defined cause of internal friction has been the question of the party's foreign ties, particularly those with Hanoi. The Khmer Communist Party's relationship with the Vietnamese communists has always been ambivalent. Hanoi nurtured the Cambodian party while Sihanouk was in power, and the ties became even closer after the Vietnamese increased their support during the initial years of the current conflict. From the beginning, however, Hanoi has had to buck an undercurrent of Khmer suspicion and distrust rooted in Cambodia's historical experience with Vietnamese expansionism. As the party expanded and assumed greater responsibility for its own military and political affairs in recent years, its Vietnamese connection appears to have become even more contentious.

Again the lines of division are murky, but a number of reports have identified Ieng Sary--who, along with several other top leaders, is supposed to have received training in North Vietnam--as the leading proponent of continued close ties with Hanoi. Khieu Samphan has frequently been reported as heading a more nationalistic faction, which has apparently had some success in strengthening the party's ties with Peking in order to balance Hanoi's influence. The Chinese, for their part, have appeared eager to cultivate ties with the insurgents, both to prevent Vietnamese dominance over the Cambodians and foreclose any possible intrusion of Soviet influence.

The party's already discernible drift toward some middle ground between Peking and Hanoi may involve some practical considerations. North Vietnam's ability to extend post-war reconstruction aid to a communist-controlled Cambodia is limited, while Peking will

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be in a position to provide liberal assistance to help rebuild the country's war-torn economy. The party, in fact, seems keenly aware of the major problems it will encounter in the period immediately following the end of the fighting, and it has been careful to keep open all potential sources of foreign aid. A policy statement issued by a recent "congress" of party front organizations, for example, juxtaposed a promise of an "independent and non-aligned foreign policy" with a statement that it would accept all "unconditional aid."

The leadership's current policy toward Sihanouk also appears to have been developed with an eye to the future. It now seems fairly certain that the party plans to retain Sihanouk as nominal leader if and when the insurgents win a military victory or the current government capitulates. Party leaders have long recognized that the prince has given their movement a legitimacy both inside and outside Cambodia that it would not otherwise have had. During a period of post-war consolidation, Sihanouk's value as a domestic rallying point and his ability to attract international recognition and economic support will be just as important to the party. In this regard, the prince's close relationship with Chinese leaders was probably a consideration, and the party may, in fact, have been under some pressure from Peking to retain him.

Nevertheless, the decision to accept even a severely circumscribed post-war role for Sihanouk must have been a bitter pill for many leaders. The prince symbolizes the old order at whose hands many party leaders suffered and which the party has been struggling to replace with a revolutionary order. The party leaders know first hand that Sihanouk is an unscrupulous and adroit political operator. They are probably more than a little suspicious of his intentions and concerned about his ability to make mischief for the party. Sihanouk, for his part, appears painfully aware of the party's Machiavellian

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attitude toward him. His recent claims that he will not involve himself in post-war domestic affairs, limiting his activities instead to foreign relations, may in fact reflect the arrangement he has been forced to accept as the price for any future role at all. Similarly, his frequent references to the possibility of an early retirement probably reflect Sihanouk's recognition that his usefulness will decline and the pressures to jettison him will increase as the party gains confidence in its ability to rule internally and the new regime's international position becomes established.

As for its post-war domestic policy, the party's self-professed aim is to impose its own brand of Marxism on Cambodian society. Essentially, this would mean the implementation on a country-wide basis of programs long underway in the communist zone. These include:

- Destruction of the traditional administrative system and its replacement by a centralized government controlled by the party.
- Confiscation of privately owned land and the tools of agriculture, and the establishment of government-run communes.
- Nationalization of all industry and means of commerce.
- Gradual replacement of Buddhism with communist-controlled mass organizations.

Such measures have not gone down well with the land-proud and independent-minded Cambodian peasants.

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Over the years, they have caused countless thousands of villagers to flee the communist zone. Smoldering resentment among those who have remained behind has on occasion resulted in small-scale uprisings, which the communists have put down ruthlessly. Even if the communists won full control of the country, they can expect to meet similar resistance to their programs. The Khmer Communist Party leadership lacks the large pool of well-trained cadre possessed by its Asian allies, but it can be expected to push its efforts to regiment and collectivize Khmer society relentlessly, using force when necessary.

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LAOS

Souphanouvong Courts the King

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Some major steps have been taken recently that could have an important bearing on communist Prince Souphanouvong's eventual acceptability as the country's next prime minister. Two recent announcements closely identify the King with the communist prince. First, the long-delayed coronation of King Savang has finally been scheduled for no later than December 1976, with Souphanouvong in charge of arrangements. Second, Souphanouvong has invited the King to visit the Pathet Lao zone later this year, possibly soon after the Lao new year festivities in mid-April.

Savang has been king since 1959, but has always said he would not accept the crown until Laos is unified under a single administration. The country is clearly not yet unified except in theory, but the King--who is a staunch nationalist--probably views a coronation, with Pathet Lao involvement, as a way to help ensure the survival of the monarchy beyond his reign. The King, who is now 67, may also feel that a visit to Sam Neua would have a unifying influence and help mitigate the existing sharp division between the communist and non-communist zones of Laos.

Little is known about the negotiations that led to the recently announced decisions, but they probably evolved from lengthy discussions held between the King, Souphanouvong, and Souvanna during the Prime Minister's extended convalescence in Luang Prabang. For his part, Souvanna probably views a coronation as an important step toward national reconciliation, and will undoubtedly exploit his communist half-brother's leading role in the proceedings to lessen the rightists' distrust of the Pathet Lao leader.

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Prince Souphanouvong, by arranging a royal visit to Sam Neua and playing a leading role in the King's eventual coronation, stands to reap important political benefits. The prince's anticipated close association with the King over the next few months should bolster his image as a Lao nationalist and help to overcome his strong identification with Lao communist hard liners and with the North Vietnamese.

Souphanouvong's popularity should also receive a boost. Many Lao do not view the prince as a mere figurehead manipulated by the communists. He has a degree of genuine popularity in Laos that derives largely from his strong personal qualities of leadership and his prominent family background. Moreover, since the Pathet Lao's beginnings, Souphanouvong has been presented to the Lao people as the most important figure in the revolutionary movement and many probably assume that he will one day lead the government.

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