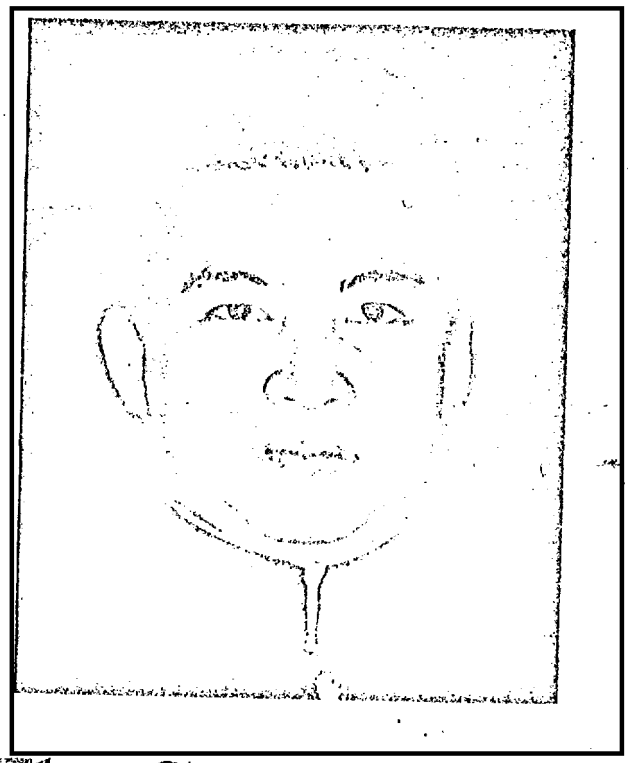
RAMPARTS
July 1972



The Story of My Overthrow and Resistance

[MOSCOW - PEKING]

"YOU MUST NOT GO, SAMDECH SIHANOUK. It's Friday, the thirteenth." These words were spoken to me, half in jest, by one of my aides on the way to Orly Airport for the plane which was to take me from Paris to Moscow. It was the morning of March 13, 1970. Unlike many of my countrymen, I am not superstitious, so I laughed, and flew off to meet the Russian leaders. Five days later, while still in Moscow, I was deposed as Cambodia's Head of State so it was an unlucky day after all.

President Podgorny met my flight, but there were no elaborate welcoming ceremonies, because mine was a political and not a state visit. After greeting me he said there was a plane waiting to take me straight home to Phnom Penh.

"Take an overnight rest in Moscow, if you like," he said, "but fly on to Phnom Penh in the morning. We have confidence in you, Sihanouk. You are really the indispensable leader of your people. But you must go back and take charge of Cambodia's affairs. See that they don't fall into the hands of Lon Nol and Sirik Matak. You must ensure that Cambodia doesn't drift into an American takeover, prevent Lon Nol and Sirik Matak from creating difficulties for the South Vietnamese people who are waging a heroic struggle for the liberation of their country." I replied that I'd have to think things over very carefully.

There was much to think about. On March 8, there had been anti-Vietnamese demonstrations in Svay Rieng Province—the reports reaching me showed that Lon Nol was behind them. On March 11, a mob—ostensibly of students and school children—attacked the embassy of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam (the NLF) and, a few hours later, that of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Hanoi). My reports showed it to be the work of the Army—specifically Lon Nol. The nucleus of the attackers was, in both cases, some fifty military men in civilian clothes, commanded by Lon Nol's younger brother, Colonel Lon Non. This was a far cry from the "spontaneous demonstrations" naively reported in the European press and on American television. Signs had been prepared in English, a language rarely used in public display in my country. Photographers and TV crews had been alerted. Everything pointed to a scenario drawn up well in advance.

As soon as I heard of the attacks on the embassies, I sent a cablegram to my mother, the Queen, condemning the violence as "acts of personalities attaching greater importance to their personal and clan interests than to the country's future and to the fate of the people." I warned of the possibility of a rightist coup and said that I would return for a confrontation with those responsible, but added that, if the people chose to follow them "along a path that will turn Cambodia into a second Laos, they will compel me to resign."

The answer to my message to the Queen came in the form of further demonstrations and more attacks

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