

Cambodia 1970-
1975: us backed
coup to replace
sihaunook with lon
nol essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In my essay I will shed light of the period of Cambodian history from 1970 to 1975. The essay will bear a retrospective character in order to narrate the detailed story of overthrowing monarchy, five years of civil war and establishing the regime of the Khmer Rouge who shared communist ideology. Also, the paper will include the discussion of some controversial points of the history, such as the Arclight missions, supporting the argumentation with the viewpoints of contemporary historians, politicians, and the military men participated in Cambodian war.

Additionally, the essay will suggest the opinion on why the authority of Sihanouk declined in the forces of the coalition, and what were the weak points of the republican army. The civil war and its hazards, violence and tragic character constitute the topic of the paper. The task of the research is to trace the historic events from 1970 to 1975 in the way that reveals logicity of the history and explains the outcomes.

In the conclusion the main findings of the paper will be analyzed. On March 1970 General Lon Nol, being in alliance with the USA, launched his coup d'etat to take the advantage of the absence of the king Sihanouk who was away on his trip to Moscow. On the eighteenth of March the National Assembly gathered and voted to dispose Sihanouk. Consequently, the emergency powers came to Lon Nol, who had been occupying the position of prime minister.

However, Sirik Matak, the cousin of Norodom Sihanouk, who had been an ultraconservative royal prince until the French dismissed him in 1941, retained his post as deputy prime minister. These revolutionary changes and

transfer of the government were proclaimed as totally legal and constitutional. As a result the uprising and the new government of Cambodia were recognized by most of the foreign governments around the world. The uprising of General Lon Nol split Cambodian society into two parts.

The middle-class and educated Khmers welcomed the deeds of General Lon Nol, while Cambodian peasants still favoured the old regime of King Sihanouk and his methods of ruling the country. When the uprising occurred, King Sihanouk was in Beijing, and from there he broadcasted his appeal to the people to resist the army of General Lon Nol. This appeal gained immediate support among peasants and those officials who lost their power because of the new regime. The country was flooded with demonstrations and riots.

On March 29 a demonstration of about 40 000 people march on the streets of the capital to demand the reinstatement of the disposed king. This demonstration was violently dispersed with many casualties by the armed forces of Lon Nol and the Khmer Serei. The response of King Sihanouk to the suppression of peasants and the casualties of March 29 demonstration was quick to follow. He proclaimed his intention to establish National United Front of Kampuchea (Front Uni National du Kampuchea which will be mentioned further under the abbreviature of FUNK).

According to the speech of the prince, the created front would bear the chief importance for the future of the country and thus it would be nation-wide and embrace all people of all ranks and all levels: " all Khmer both inside and outside the country- including the faithful, religious people, military men,

civilians, and men and women who cherish the ideals of independence, democracy, neutrality, progressivism, socialism, Buddhism, nationalism, territorial integrity, and anti-imperialism." (Article " Cambodia" from Library of Congress Country Studies).

This decision was favoured by the coalition made between Sihanouk and the KCP that was brokered by the Chinese. On the fifth of May, 1970, came the announcement of the two antirevolutionary organizations: the Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea (Gouvernement Royal d'Union Nationale du Kampuchea, further named in the paper under the abbreviation of GRUNK) and the previously mentioned FUNK.

Sihanouk appointed himself to be GRUNK head of state and the post of prime minister was given to Penn Nouth, one of the most loyal supporters of the monarch. Other ranks of Sihanouk's government were distributed among the following officials: Khieu Samphan was announced to be deputy prime minister, serving also as minister of defence, and commander in chief of the armed forces of GRUNK (however Pol Pot directed actual military operations); the duties of minister of information came to Hu Nim; Hou Yuon became minister of interior, communal reforms, and cooperatives.

This government was claimed to possess full power and its government-in-exile character was denied on the basis of the fact that the part of it was still in the country, for instance, Khieu Samphan remained in Cambodia. The alliance of Sihanouk and the KCP was a marriage of convenience. Peasants who preserved their loyalty to monarchy were highly motivated to rally to the FUNK cause. The popularity of the Sihanouk-KCP coalition grew very fast

after Lon Nol had proclaimed the abolishment of the monarchy in Cambodia and on the ninth of October, 1970, re-designated the country as the Khmer Republic.

Most of Cambodian villagers rejected the concept of republic because they had grown up with the belief that Cambodia without a monarch would collapse and the future of their children would be in a serious danger. On the background of the rising popularity of Sihanouk, GRUNK built its functioning in and out of the country. Sihanouk and his loyalists stayed out of country in Beijing, though sometimes paid short but safe visits to the “liberated areas” of the country. One of the visits was made by Sihanouk himself to Angkor Wat in March 1973.

The KCP- functioned inside Cambodia by giving commands to the insurgency. Such a situation meant that Sihanouk neither participated in planning the operations, nor had a decisive role on the battlefield, which enlarged the distance between the prince and the actual ruling of the force. The prince lived abroad and was far from the real state of things in his country as well as the hazards of the war, thus playing his role only as a symbol of monarchy. Gradually, the role of the prince was diminished and Sihanouk’s power in GRUNK was reduced.

As it was expressed in a historical source, “prince was deprived of everything but a passive, figurehead role in the coalition.” (Cambodian Civil War, Wikipedia). The KCP, which had a real access to the battlefield inside the country, forbade people to demonstrate their support for the prince. Moreover, it was said that any expression of one’s support for Sihanouk

would cause his/her violent liquidation. As a result, when the disposed prince appeared in public, he was treated with open contempt.

The popularity of Sihanouk was going down and even the loyalists of the prince in GRUNK hurried to change their political viewpoints in order to retain their positions in the government. Those loyal officials who still preserved their favouring of Sihanouk were dismissed all of GRUNK's ministries. The prince remarked with resentment to Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci that when " they [the Khmer Rouge] no longer need me, they will spit me out like a cherry pit! " (Article " Cambodia" from Library of Congress Country Studies).

Soon the escalating armed conflict between the forces of the coalition and General Lon Nol unleashed a real war in the country. The government troops were given the name of the Khmer National Armed Forces (Forces Armees Nationales Khmeres abbreviated as FANK). This army was reported in the press as notwithstanding because it consisted mainly of thousands of young urban Cambodians, who joined the army at the beginning of the coup and made the republican government forces larger in number in comparison with the army of their opposition. However, training and leadership were the weak points of FANK.

Due to the enormous expansion, the government forces started to absorb the new inductees beyond their capacity. As a result, FANK's troops had an insufficient time to gain all the necessary skills and to receive a complete military training. Such state of things led inevitably to the collapse of the whole army. For example, while some individual soldiers or units or troops

were fighting bravely, the leaders of the army were incapable of building proficient strategy, working out tactics or planning. The head of republican army with some exceptions was corrupt and incompetent.

Consequently, “ Arrayed against an armed force of such limited capability was arguably the best light infantry in the world at the time—the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong. And when their forces were supplanted, it was by the tough, rigidly indoctrinated peasant army of the CPNLF with its core of Khmer Rouge leaders. ” (Cambodian Civil War, Wikipedia). While the war was progressing more and more, the authority of Sihanouk completely declined in Cambodia. This event testified political crisis in the forces of the coalition and favoured the possibility of setting a pro-Western regime.

The North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong were alarmed at this prospect because it might allow the military presence of the USA on the western flank of Cambodia. In order to prevent this, the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong started transferring their military installation into the deeper areas of Cambodian territory. They established a new command centre in Kracheh (Kratie). The prospect of Cambodia being overrun, on the other hand, prompted the units of South Vietnamese and United States to take offensive to destroy the headquarters for Viet Cong and North Vietnamese combat operations located in South Vietnam.

According to the reports from the units of the United States, huge logistical installations and great amounts of supplies were destroyed, but still larger amounts of material attempted to move deeper into Cambodia. (Cambodian Civil War, Wikipedia). The army of the North Vietnamese turned on the army

of the government forces and in three months FANK was swept away from the north-eastern third of the country. When the government forces were defeated, the newly won territories turned over to the local insurgents.

Other “liberated areas” which operated independently of the Vietnamese, were established by the Khmer Rouge in the south-western parts of Cambodia. Such a relatively quick victory, according to the viewpoints of the historical sources, was mainly due to the KCP’s alliance with the North Vietnamese: “The KCP’s debt to the North Vietnamese after March 1970 was one that Pol Pot was loath to acknowledge; however, it is clear that without North Vietnamese and Viet Cong assistance, the revolutionary struggle would have dragged on much longer than it did.” (Cambodian Civil War, Wikipedia).

The opposite alliance of General Lon Nol with American forces led to American bombing of the enemy troop dispositions in 1973. Then Arclight, or intense aerial bombardment, was used to stop the assault of Khmer Rouge on Phnom Penh. This operation gave more time to the forces of the Lon Nol government, but it “did not stem the momentum of the communist forces.” (Cambodian Civil War, Wikipedia). According to the US official documents, the amount of 539, 129 tons of ordnance were dropped on Cambodia by B-52 and F-111 aircraft.

It is three times more than the estimated 153, 000 tons dropped by the US aircraft on Japan during the period of World War II. However, the bombs dropped in Cambodia struck different areas: starting from almost uninhabited ones in the mountains or forests, and going to the most densely

populated provinces, such as Kampong Chhnang, Province Siemreab Province, and the region of Phnom Penh. The exact numbers of the deaths resulted from the bombing was difficult to estimate and thus it varied in American, UN and CIA papers. The lowest point fixed was 30 000 and it ranged up to 800, 000, while UN and CIA counted not less than 600, 000 or even more.

The outcomes of American bombing received much critics and in August 15, 1973 the United States Congress stopped the Arclight missions over Cambodia. Today the bombing is considered to be the most controversial aspect of American mission in Cambodia. One of the critics of the Arclight missions, William Shawcross argues in his book *Sideshow* that bombing contributed to the growth of brutal and single-mindedly fanatical movement of Khmer Rouge. (Shawcross W. 1979). Also, other critics claim that this extreme step taken by the USA roughly saying “drove the Cambodian people into the arms of the Khmer Rouge.” (Shawcross W. 1979).

In addition to the huge extent of casualties, estimated deaths of children, women and old people, bombing broke the structure of life in many of Cambodian villages. Nevertheless, Emory C. Swank, the former ambassador to Cambodia, and General John W. Vogt, the former Air Force commander in Thailand, attempted to advocate the Arclight missions in Cambodia stressing mainly on the urgent necessity of such step and suggesting apology taken from the disposition of the forces and the situation on the battlefield. (Shawcross W. 1979).

On the other hand, the Khmer Rouge viewed the severity of the bombings as retaliation for the treachery of the North Vietnamese. On January 27, 1973 the North Vietnam signed with the United States the Paris Peace Accords while the Khmer Rouge refused to participate in the Paris peace talks. As a result of the peace treaty with America, the bombing over Vietnam and Laos was terminated. The US aviation thus released was commanded to strike the positions Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

However, neither the severity of the bombings, nor the alliance with the US and the subsequent US aid helped to hamper the victory of Communists in Cambodia. Moreover, Communist victory was fastened in 1973 by the end of the bombing, cuts of American aid, and the following in 1975 lack of ammunition in the forces of the Lon Nol government. Cambodian life under the Khmer Rouge was brightly described by Ith Sarin, a school administrator in 1973. Ith Sarin joined the movement of the Khmer Rouge after becoming disillusioned with the government of Lon Nol and his ruling of the Khmer Republic.

Later Ith Sarin nearly became a member of the KCP, but decided to leave the party. Ith Sarin returned to Phnom Penh after being nine months in the underground. The work of Ith Sarin named Regrets for the Khmer Soul (in language of Khmer, Sranaoh Pralung Khmer) managed to reveal the secret of how the existence of the communist party was concealed the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge did not mention communism or name it directly instead they referred to it by the term Angkar Loeu (that is translated as High Organization), or Angkar in short.

The Central Committee of the KCP was named the Kena Mocchhim (this term means Committee Machine, where mocchhim is close to the term “machine”). According to Ith Sarin, the ruling of the territories under Angkar was perfectly organized and controlled. The Angkar-controlled bodies had a five-level hierarchy and reached from the six areas, named phumphaek. Thus, the whole country was divided down to phum level or the level of hamlet. The grim regime imposed by Angkar, as Ith Sarin noted, cultivated the hatred for the enemies of the Khmer Rouge, such as Lon Nol, the North Vietnamese “allies” and the Americans.

Also, the Khmer Rouge discouraged and even forbade any expressions of support for the former king Sihanouk. To provide the control of human minds and viewpoints, Angkar encouraged Cambodian people to spy on each other. The discipline set in the territories of Angkar was unremittingly harsh. The author of *Regrets for the Khmer Soul* concluded that the majority of the people who experienced the regime of Angkar would not like it and as well as the collective way of life imposed by its ideology.

Cambodians, according to Ith Sarin, even would prefer the old regime of monarchy but they would lose their hopes that Sihanouk would ever come back to power. Moreover, the victims of Angkar, Ith Sarin stated in his book, would support the Khmer Republic if it fulfilled its genuine reforms. However, later the book *Regrets for the Khmer Soul* was banned by Lon Nol's security forces on the grounds that it spread “pro-communist” ideology. This was not true because the book provided with a history based on real facts and anticipated the outcomes of the Khmer Rouge that Cambodian people would endure after 1975.

<https://assignbuster.com/cambodia-1970-1975-us-backed-coup-to-replace-sihanouk-with-lon-nol-essay/>

In March 1974 the disturbing stories of the Khmer Rouge started to surface as the communists dealt the coup de grace to the Khmer Republic. The communists captured the city of Odongk, situated in the north of Phnom Penh, and violently destroyed it. About 20, 000 inhabitants of Odongk were dispersed into the countryside; severe tortures were committed over the civil servants and teachers. Then, in the village of Sar Sarsdam, Siemreab Province, sixty people, including children and women were brutally murdered by the troops of the Khmer Rouge.

The terror committed by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia horrified even foreign officials and soldiers. For example, Donald Kirk, one of the observers, described the methods with which the Khmer Rouge treated ordinary Cambodians, as a “ sweeping, almost cosmic policy” of indiscriminate terror. All in all, the war 1970-1975 in Cambodia, among other things, produced 2. 5 million of refugees who “ sought to escape not only the United States bombing and the ground fighting, but the harshness of life under the Angkar. ” (Kirk D. , 11: 3 (March 1971), pp. 238-255).

On January 1, 1975 started their dry-season offensive to capture the capital of Cambodia. The troops of the Khmer Rouge controlled the banks of Mekong and thus they could rig ingenious mines to get rid of convoys bringing supplies of fuel, food, and ammunition to the starving city. When the river was blocked completely at the beginning of February, America began airlifts of supplies. Under that condition, this step was really risky because of rockets of the Khmer Rouge. Also the communists fired rockets into the city, causing a great number of civilian deaths.

The units of republican soldiers who were around the capital ran out of ammunition, and became absolutely helpless to fight the troops of the Khmer Rouge. As a result of dry-season offensive of the Khmer Rouge, and their victory, President Lon Nol resigned and on April 1, 1975 he left the country. The acting president of a government became Saukham Khoy who lived less than three weeks. The most members of Lon Nol's cabinet were executed on April 17, 1975, when Khmer Rouge units entered the city of Phnom Penh.

Thus, the paper discusses the history of Cambodian civil war from 1970 to 1975. It was found out that there were three major forces that became involved in the military action in order to establish their regimes in the country. These forces were: General Lon Nol who acted in alliance with the USA, Sihanouk, the disposed king who was supported by the forces of the coalition, and the Khmer Rouge. The victory the Khmer Rouge can be explained by the sequence of events and the mistakes made by the other two rivals.

First, is the political crisis in the forces of the coalition and the elimination of Sihanouk; second, is the bombing of Cambodia by the USA air forces; third, is the disagreement in the alliance of General Lon Nol and the USA, which weakened the army of republicans. Among other things, the army of General Lon Nol government lacked training and competent leadership. The army of the coalition and the army of the United States appeared to be also weak before the troops the Khmer Rouge because they pursued their own interests and acted without common agreement.