The Impact on Cambodia of the U.S. Intervention in Vietnam

Ben Kiernan

Background

In 1975, the “Khmer Rouge,” a Communist organization led by Pol Pot, came to power in Cambodia for four reasons. First, a Khmer Communist movement had emerged in reaction to French colonialism’s attempt to reassert control of Cambodia after its declaration of independence at the end of World War II. This new intrusion frustrated and radicalized Khmer nationalist sentiment and provoked thousands of Cambodian peasants and Buddhist monks to join with Vietnamese Communists against the common colonial enemy. The Vietnamese helped build a grass roots Cambodian Communist organization in the fight for independence. It ran probably the largest mass organization in the country’s history.

Later, rivalry between Vietnamese and Chinese Communists provided openings for younger Cambodian Communists of largely middle-class backgrounds, like Pol Pot, to rise to the top of the party, exchange Vietnamese patrons for Chinese ones, and take the movement in a new direction. After France withdrew from Cambodia in 1954, Pol Pot rose within the local Communist movement. In 1962 he became party leader after his predecessor, a former Buddhist monk, was mysteriously killed. The leadership of the Cambodian Communist Party had been rural, Buddhist, moderate and pro-Vietnamese, but it now became dominated by a group that was urban, French-educated, extremist, and anti-Vietnamese.

This changing of the vanguard was facilitated by the repression launched by the country’s first independent ruler, Prince Norodom Sihanouk. While Pol Pot criticized party members who supported Sihanouk’s neutral foreign policy, the prince’s increasingly brutal autocracy in the 1960s drove such veterans of the country’s independence struggle back into dissidence, where the young party elite subjected them to its plan for a new rebellion.

Finally, although it was indigenous, Pol Pot’s revolution would not have won power without U.S. economic and military destabilization of Cambodia, which began in 1966 after the American escalation in next-door Vietnam, and peaked in 1969–73 with the carpet bombing of Cambodia’s countryside by American B-52s. This was probably the most important single factor in Pol Pot’s rise.

An earlier U.S. impact had also reinforced the other factors. At least from 1950, the United States had backed French efforts to re-establish colonial rule in Vietnam and Cambodia. In 1954, U.S. attempts to partially encircle China had aggravated differences between Vietnamese Communists (who wished to fight on to certain victory) and their Chinese allies (who feared continuing war would bring American troops to their southern border). From 1960, U.S. escalation of the war in Vietnam made Sihanouk’s neutrality increasingly precarious, provoking him to lean toward Hanoi and Beijing in foreign policy while taking ever more repressive measures against the grass-roots and rural domestic left. This cleared the field for the urban, middle-class, pro-Chinese party elite, which was almost untouched by the repression until 1967.

In 1965, Cambodia had a record rice harvest. In 1964, that record was broken. Rice exports soared, and the country’s balance of trade was positive for the first time since 1955. The year 1965 saw another good crop, and National Bank deposits recovered from a long decline. But in the same year, the United States escalated the Vietnam War next door. American troop levels rose from 20,000 to 300,000 by mid-1966, and Saigon forces also increased in number. In response, recruitment and conscription by the National Liberation Front (NLF) opposition quadrupled. The 1964 level of 45,000 new recruits increased to 160,000 in 1965. All these additional soldiers had to be fed and, more importantly, were doing greater damage than ever to Vietnam’s rice production. Large amounts of Cambodian rice now began to be smuggled across the Vietnamese border to the armies of both sides.

Prince Sihanouk’s Cambodia depended on its revenue on taxing rice exports. It now plunged toward bankruptcy. In December 1965, U.S. intelligence noted that Sihanouk was already complaining privately about “considerable loss of revenue” as a result of “the illicit traffic in rice from Cambodia to Vietnam.” Over the next year, taxable rice exports fell by two-thirds, from 490,000 metric tons in 1965 to only 170,000 in 1966 (later figures are not available). About 130,000 metric tons of rice, 40 percent of rice exports for 1966, were smuggled to Vietnam, both to communist agents and to black-market circles in Saigon.

Equally important, the Vietnamese Communists were resorting increasingly to the use of Cambodian territory for sanctuary from American attack. At the end of 1965, according to the U.S. intelligence report, they had established “clandes-
tine and probably temporary facilities" there, but that year there had already been "eight instances of fire fights between Cambodian border forces and the Viet Cong." Meanwhile, Sihanouk’s emissary, Prince Norindeth, on a visit to Australia in 1966, protested against U.S. bombing and strafing of the Cambodian border areas, claiming that "hundreds of our people have already died in these attacks." 7

The U.S. intervention in Vietnam also produced a wave of Khmer refugees. From the early 1960s, ethnic Khmers born in Vietnam began fleeing to Cambodia to escape the Saigon government’s repression in the countryside. In 1962 a Khmer Buddhist monk who had fled the Diem regime with 400 others claimed: "Our schools have all been closed. . . With the slaughter of our people, the destruction of our villages, the repression of our culture and language, it seems our people are to be exterminated." In 1965–68 over 17,000 Khmers, including over 2,300 Buddhist monks, fled South Vietnam for Cambodia.8

Since the early 1960s, U.S. Special Forces teams, too, had been making secret reconnaissance and mine-laying incursions into Cambodian territory. In 1967 and 1968, in Operation Salem House, about 800 such missions were mounted, usually by several American personnel and up to ten local mercenaries, in most cases dressed as Viet Cong. One Green Beret team "inadvertently blew up a Cambodian civilian bus, causing heavy casualties." The code name of the operation was changed to "Daniel Boone," and from early 1969, the number of these secret missions doubled. By the March 18, 1970, coup against Sihanouk, over a thousand more had been mounted. In a total of 1,835 missions, twenty-four prisoners were taken and an unknown number of people were killed or wounded by the "sanitized self-destruct antipersonnel" mines which Daniel Boone teams were authorized to lay up to 30 km. inside Cambodia.9

Another U.S. Special Forces operation in Cambodia was the highly secret Project Gamma, which was formally listed as Detachment B57 but not mentioned under either name in an official army history of the Green Berets. Unlike Salem House and Daniel Boone, Project Gamma, according to a former member, "utilized only ethnic Cambodians in its operations, which were designed to gather tactical intelligence from deep inside Cambodia."10

Starting exactly a year before the coup (on March 18, 1969), over 3,600 secret B-52 raids were also conducted over Cambodian territory. These were code-named "Menu," and the various target areas were called "Breakfast," "Snack," "Lunch," "Dinner," "Dessert," and "Supper."11 About 100,000 metric tons of bombs were dropped; the civilian toll is unknown. The U.S. aim was to destroy the Vietnamese Communist forces in Cambodia, or drive them back into Vietnam. But in September 1969, Lon Nol reported an increase in the number of communist troops in the sanctuaries, which he said was partly "motivated by the cleaning-up operation" of the U.S.-Saigon forces. He added ominously, "In this period, nothing suggests that these foreign units will soon leave our territory."12 Like the failing economy, this was one of the major issues in Sihanouk’s down-

fall at Lon Nol’s hands. Both issues were exacerbated (if not caused) by the U.S. escalation of the Vietnam War.

Thus, by 1970 Cambodia’s frontier with Vietnam was breaking down. It was unable to withstand the pressure exerted by the two mighty contending forces which had been expanding and straining against one another in the limited space of southern Vietnam ever since the U.S. escalation of the war in 1965. The pressure on Cambodia’s frontier was economic and demographic as well as political and military. Cambodia's rice crop drained into devastated Vietnam, while both Khmers and Vietnamese fled into Cambodia, with the U.S. military and air force pursuing them.

The 1970 Coup

Prince Sihanouk has long claimed that the CIA “masterminded” the coup against him. Henry Kissinger, on the other hand, has stated that it “took us completely by surprise”; the United States, he claims, played no role, “at least not at the top level.”13 There is little evidence of CIA involvement in the 1970 Lon Nol coup, but a good deal of evidence points to a role played by sections of the U.S. military establishment and the Army Special Forces. The Australian security specialist Richard Hall made this point in The Secret State:

Although the overthrow of Sihanouk is generally attributed to the CIA, I have heard that disputed in both Canberra and Washington. The counter-story has it the CIA was prepared to live with Sihanouk, who at the time of his overthrow was tilting towards the West and had cut back the movement of supplies through his port, Sihanoukville, to the Viet Cong. But for years the American military had portrayed Sihanouk as an ogre. The existence of an old boy network of Cambodian officers trained in the U.S. enabled the coup to be organized with American army support by-passing the CIA.14

The CIA had already attempted to intervene in Cambodia. Prom Thos, a senior Minister in the post-1970 Lon Nol regime, told me in an interview that he knew of no evidence of U.S. involvement in the coup, but he recalled that in 1965 another of the coup leaders, Long Boret, had told him that he had been approached by an American CIA agent and invited to work for Sihanouk’s overthrow. Boret confided to Prom Thos that he had then approached Lon Nol for his cooperation in such a plan. Lon Nol’s reply in 1965, according to Boret, was neither “yes” nor “no,” but he had asked Boret to “maintain his contacts with the agent.”15 By early March 1970, the secretary of Lon Nol’s own cabinet was also an American intelligence agent. As it turned out, Lon Nol was in contact with a third U.S. intelligence operative, “a Cambodian merchant of Chinese ancestry who regularly travelled between Saigon and Phnom Penh.” This man’s case officer was an American working under cover as an Agency for International Development adviser to the Saigon customs service.16
The most informed account of U.S. involvement in planning the 1970 coup is that of Navy Yeoman Samuel R. Thornton, who says he was "the first person the case officer spoke to after his debriefing of the agent." Thornton worked from May 1968 to May 1969 as an intelligence specialist at the U.S. Navy Command in Saigon.17 Thornton has told journalist Seymour Hersh that he had gained intimate knowledge of coup preparations as early as late 1968. It was at that point, Thornton says, that Lon Nol approached U.S. military intelligence, through the Cambodian merchant, for a commitment to provide him with military, political, and economic support after his proposed overthrow of Sihanouk. The U.S. government was prepared to go further, however. It proposed, according to Thornton, to infiltrate in advance Special Forces–trained Khmer Kampuchea Krom (KKK) troops into "key Cambodian Army units stationed in Phnom Penh in order to support the first stages of the coup," and also "to insert a U.S.-trained assassination team disguised as Viet Cong insurgents into Phnom Penh to kill Prince Sihanouk as a pretext for revolution." The aim was to establish a new regime which would "issue a public request for U.S. military intervention." Thornton says: "I was present at some of the discussions which resulted in this plan, helped prepare the proposal to use Khmer Kampuchea Krom elements, and personally delivered this portion of the proposal to the action office of the MACV [the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] intelligence staff."

Thornton recalls that this proposal, at first code-named "Dirty Tricks" and then rebaptized "Sunshine Park," was given "blanket approval" by "the highest level of government" in Washington in February or March 1969. "Washington, Thornton says, authorized "any and all measures" to overthrow Sihanouk. However, Lon Nol rejected the plan to assassinate Sihanouk as "silly," a case of "criminal insanity." This part of Thornton's account is corroborated by Prom Thos, a leading member of the Lon Nol government from 1970 to 1973. Thos told me in 1980 that planning for the overthrow of Sihanouk had begun "a year before" the March 1970 coup, i.e., in March 1969, when, he said, Prince Sirik Matak had argued for the assassination of Sihanouk, but Lon Nol had opposed it.18

Lon Nol made a counterproposal to Washington. He wanted, Thornton recalls, "to lead a coup when Prince Sihanouk left the country on one of his periodic rest cures...in the south of France. [It] was felt by the general and his advisers that by confronting the Prince with a fait accompli when he was cut off from direct access to his resources they could discourage him from attempting to mount a countercoup."

Lon Nol renewed his original request for "overt United States military support for a possible coup." He wanted weapons, ammunition, and money. The "response," Thornton recalls, "was surprisingly cool considering the original carte blanche authorization." But Lon Nol was then told "unofficially" (by back channels) that "he could in fact expect the requested support." However, the message went on that Lon Nol "must understand that the U.S. was sensitive to international criticism on this point, so that he must be prepared for a show of vacillation and great reluctance on our part to his initial, public requests for military assistance." According to Thornton, Lon Nol "indicated an understanding of this problem and an eagerness to go forward on these terms." Agreement was then reached with Lon Nol on the infiltration of the KKK units into Cambodia.20 In May 1969, indeed, 640 Khmer Krom troops "surrendered" to the Sihanouk government. Their commander became a captain in Lon Nol's army, and fourteen others were appointed as officers.21

In August 1969, Lon Nol became Prime Minister of Cambodia. The next month he made secret contact with Son Ngoc Thanh, a U.S.-supported leader of the Khmer minority in South Vietnam, "and began tentative discussions about overthrowing Sihanouk." But only in February 1970 did Thanh assure Lon Nol of material aid, in the form of the Khmer Special Forces troops still on the U.S. and South Vietnamese payrolls.22 The next year Son Ngoc Thanh told T.D. Allman that, through him, "Lon Nol had requested, and the CIA had approved, a U.S. pledge to send the Khmer Krom troops to support Lon Nol in the event he overthrew Sihanouk."23 It was in February 1970 that U.S. Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird visited South Vietnam and authorized "clandestine South Vietnamese ground attacks across the border to begin at once."24 Also in February 1970, according to Forrest B. Lindley, a Green Beret captain operating near the Cambodian border, "I was told there would be a change of government in Cambodia." The source was higher up the U.S. Special Forces command system. Two companies of Khmer Special Forces troops were then sent into Cambodia. It may have been these KKK units which took part in the sacking of the two Vietnamese Communist embassies in Phnom Penh on March 16, two days before the coup.25 Sihanouk was undergoing a rest cure in France.

While Thornton's allegation that the highest level of the U.S. government was party to the coup plans remains uncorroborated, it is clear that Lon Nol carried out the coup with at least a legitimate expectation of significant U.S. support. William Colby, former director of the U.S. CIA, told William Shawcross that in 1970, "Lon Nol may well have been encouraged by the fact that the United States was working with Son Ngoc Thanh." Colby added: "I don't know of any specific assurances he was given, but the obvious conclusion for him, given the political situation in South Vietnam and Laos, was that he would be given United States support."26 Son Ngoc Thanh himself told T.D. Allman: "Only after I was able to provide assurances that the U.S. would send the Khmer Krom troops, did Lon Nol act." And Lon Nol's brother, Lon Non, told Allman: "We would not have done what we did, had we not been absolutely sure President Nixon would support us."27

The Bombing

Nixon's May 1970 invasion of Cambodia (undertaken without informing Lon Nol) followed simultaneous invasions by Saigon and Vietnamese Communist
forces. It created 130,000 new Khmer refugees, according to the Pentagon. By 1971, 60 percent of refugees surveyed in Cambodia's towns gave U.S. bombing as the main cause of their displacement. The U.S. bombardment of the Cambodian countryside continued until 1973, when Congress imposed a halt. Nearly half of the 540,000 tons of bombs fell in the last six months. In the ashes of rural Cambodia arose a Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) regime, led by Pol Pot. It went on to kill or starve to death over a million Cambodians from 1975 to 1979.

Pol Pot's CPK (known as the Khmer Rouge) had profited greatly from the U.S. bombings. It used the devastation and massacre of civilians as recruitment propaganda and an excuse for its brutal, radical policies and its purge of moderate Communists and Sihanoukists. This is clear from contemporary U.S. government documents, released to me under the Freedom of Information Act, and from interviews in Cambodia with peasant survivors of the bombing.

In the early years of the Cambodian War, Sihanoukists, moderates, and pro-Vietnamese Communists predominated in a factionalized insurgency. The CPK "Center," as the Pol Pot leadership was known, admitted it still needed to "get a tight grasp, filter into every corner." Before defeating Lon Nol, it needed to eclipse its revolutionary rivals and allies.

In 1973 the United States withdrew its troops from Vietnam, but switched its air arm to Cambodia. The secretary of the air force later said that President Richard Nixon "wanted to send a hundred more B-52's. This was appalling. You couldn't even figure out where you were going to put them all, you know..." The early bombing had been disastrous enough. In 1970 a combined U.S. aerial and tank attack in Kompong Cham province had taken the lives of 200 people. When another raid killed seven people nearby, a local peasant recalls, "some people ran away... others joined the revolution."

In 1971, the town of Angkor Borei in southwest Cambodia was heavily bombed by American B-52s and Lon Nol's U.S.-supplied T-28s. It was burned and leveled. Whole families were trapped while hiding in trenches they had dug for protection underneath their homes. Over 100 people were killed and 200 houses destroyed, leaving only two or three standing, local residents say. In the same year, Sihanouk's former adviser Charles Meyer, in his book *Derrière le sourire khmer*, accused the U.S. Air Force of "systematic pillage" of "peaceful and captivating villages, which are disappearing one after another under bombs or napalm," and ended with a prescient observation:

According to direct testimonies, peasants are taking refuge in forest encampments and are maintaining their smiles and their humour, but one might add that it is difficult to imagine the intensity of their hatred towards those who are destroying their villages and their property. Perhaps we should remember that the Cambodians have the deserved reputation for being the most spiritful and vindictive people in all Southeast Asia, and this should in any case hold the attention of President Nixon.

U.S. intelligence soon discovered that many "training camps" on which Lon Nol had requested air strikes "were in fact merely political indoctrination sessions held in village halls and pagodas." Lon Nol intelligence noted that "aerial bombardments against the villagers have caused civilian loss on a large scale," and that the peasant survivors of the U.S. bombing were turning to the CPK for support.

One young Khmer joined the Communists a few days after an aerial attack took the lives of 50 people in his village. Not far away, bombs fell on O Reang Au Market for the first time in 1972, killing 20 people, and twice more in 1973, killing another 25 people, including two Buddhist monks.

When bombs hit Boeng village, it was burned to the ground, and according to peasants, many people were caught in their houses and burned to death. Nearby Chalong village lost over twenty people. An inhabitant told me:

Many monasteries were destroyed by bombs. People in our village were furious with the Americans; they did not know why the Americans had bombed them. Seventy people from Chalong joined the fight against Lon Nol after the bombing.

B-52s scored a direct hit on Trapeang Krapeu village. At least twenty people died. Anlong Trea was napalmed and bombed, killing three people. "Over sixty people from this village then joined the Khmer Communist army out of anger at the bombing," locals recall.

In March 1973, the bombardment spread west across the whole country. Around Phnom Penh, 3,000 civilians were killed in three weeks. UPI reported at the time:

Refugees swarming into the capital from target areas report dozens of villages... have been destroyed and as much as half their population killed or maimed in the current bombing raids.

Days later, the U.S. bombardment intensified, reaching a level of 3,600 tons per day. As William Shawcross reported in his book *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia*, the "wholesale carnage" shocked the chief of the political section in the U.S. embassy, William Harben. One night, he said, "a mass of peasants" went out on a funeral procession and walked straight into a bombing raid. Hundreds were slaughtered. And Donald Dawson, a young air force captain, flew twenty-five B-52 missions but refused to fly again when he heard that a Cambodian wedding party had been razed by B-52s.

As one Cambodian villager put it in April 1973: "The bombers may kill some Communists but they kill everyone else, too." In May 1973 the New York Times reported that "extensive" destruction had wiped out "a whole series of villages" along the main highway, including seven villages in the east of the country, with many people killed. Nothing was left standing for miles: "a few people wander
forlornly through the rubble, stunned by what has happened, skirting the craters, picking at the debris.” Correspondent Sidney Schanberg noted: “The frightened villagers uprooted by the bombing have a great deal to say.” One refugee requested politely, “I would be very glad if the Government would stop sending the planes to bomb,” while a Buddhist monk pleaded with the U.S. government, “Don’t destroy everything in Cambodia.”

But in July and August 1973, the Southwest Zone of Cambodia was carpet-bombed. It was the most intensive B-52 campaign yet. The impact of this bombing in the Southwest was not simply to destroy many more civilian lives. Politically, it tipped what had been a delicate CPK factional balance there, in favor of Pol Pot’s “Center” group.

This political effect of the U.S. bombardment reached the highest level of the CPK in the Southwest Zone, its ruling Party Committee. In 1973–74, four of the six leaders of this zone committee were purged. Two of these CPK moderates were murdered by Pol Pot’s warlord ally Mok. The other two were killed after 1975, when the Southwest became the stronghold of the Pol Pot regime, and Mok went on to purge all other zones in the country.

During the 1973 bombing, a similar process occurred at the local level. In one village in the Southwest, eighty people died when B-52s hit the village and its pagoda. Nearby Wat Angrun village was annihilated; a single family survived, and 120 houses were destroyed in the air raid, peasants told me.

This part of the Southwest was one of the strongholds of the CPK Center. In 1973, Mok’s son-in-law, the local deputy CPK secretary, was promoted to become chief of a new Southwest Zone Brigade, and his wife became district chief.

The CPK were now able to recruit many peasants by highlighting the damage done by U.S. air strikes. The CIA’s Directorate of Operations, after investigations in the Southwest Zone, reported on May 2, 1973, that the CPK had launched a new recruiting drive:

They are using damage caused by B-52 strikes as the main theme of their propaganda. The cadre tell the people that the Government of Lon Nol has requested the airstrikes and is responsible for the damage and the “suffering of innocent villagers.” . . . The only way to stop “the massive destruction of the country” is to . . . defeat Lon Nol and stop the bombing.

This approach has resulted in the successful recruitment of a number of young men. . . . Residents . . . say that the propaganda campaign has been effective with refugees and in areas . . . which have been subject to B-52 strikes.

Mom Lon, a CPK cadre in the Southwest, says that when T-28s and B-52s bombed his village, more than 100 people were killed and wounded. “The people were very angry at the imperialists,” he adds. Soon afterward the CPK’s political line hardened, and a number of cadres, including Lon himself, were dismissed.

Early in 1973, the CPK began a new purge of Sihanoukists, pro-Vietnamese Communists, and other dissidents. Mok rounded up hundreds from all over the Southwest Zone. They were forced to perform hard labor before being executed.

In the Northern Zone of the country, where Pol Pot himself was based, B-52s struck Stung Kambot village one morning in February 1973. They killed 50 villagers and seriously wounded 30 others. Then in March, B-52s and F-111s bombarded an ox-cart caravan in the same district, killing 10 peasants. One local man recalls that “often people were made angry by the bombing and went to join the revolution.”

A peasant youth, Thoun Cheng, says B-52s bombed his village three to six times per day for three months. Over 1,000 people were killed, nearly one-third of the population. Afterward, Cheng says, “there were few people left . . . and it was quiet.”

Chhit Do was a CPK leader near Angkor Wat in northern Kampuchea. In 1979, he fled the country. Australian journalist Bruce Pilling asked him if the Khmer Rouge had made use of the bombing for anti-U.S. propaganda:

Chhit Do: Oh yes, they did. Every time after there had been bombing, they would take the people to see the craters, to see how big and deep the craters were, to see how the earth had been gouged out and scorched . . . The ordinary people . . . sometimes literally slid in their pants when the big bombs and shells came . . . Their minds just froze up and they would wander around mute for three or four days. Terrified and half-crazy, the people were ready to believe what they were told . . . That was what made it so easy for the Khmer Rouge to win the people over. . . . It was because of their dissatisfaction with the bombing that they kept on cooperating with the Khmer Rouge, joining up with the Khmer Rouge, sending their children off to go with them.

Bruce Pilling: So American bombing was a kind of help to the Khmer Rouge?

Chhit Do: Yes, that's right . . . Sometimes the bombs fell and hit little children, and their fathers would be all for the Khmer Rouge . . .

On August 3, 1973, U.S. aircraft bombèd the hill village of Plei Loh, home of Montagnard tribal people. An American agent reported after a follow-up mission that “the village was totally destroyed, with 28 civilians and five VC guerrillas killed.” The next day, B-52s attacked nearby Plei Lon village, “killing twenty people, including children.” On August 10, Plei Lom was bombed again, killing 20 Montagnards. On the same day B-52s struck nearby Plei Blah village: 50 died. The U.S. Army report on this noted that “the Communists intend to use this incident for propaganda purposes.”

Another report to the U.S. Army in July 1973 stated that “the civilian population fears U.S. air attacks far more than they do Communist rocket attacks or scorched-earth tactics.” Up to 150,000 civilian deaths resulted from the U.S. bombing campaigns in Cambodia from 1969 to 1973.
In 1974, Kissinger was unsure if the Cambodian insurgency was “regional” and “factionalized” with only “a veneer of central control,” or whether “the real power” lay with Pol Pot’s central presidency. The tragedy is that the former had been largely true in 1972, the latter was largely true in 1974, and Kissinger and Nixon were largely responsible for the change. Attempts on their part to rewrite the record are not surprising.

CPK cadres told young peasant victims of the bombing that “the killing birds” had come from Phnom Penh (not Guan), and that Phnom Penh must pay for its assault on rural Cambodia. On the day the bombing ended, CPK propaganda leaflets found in bomb craters attacked the “Phnom Penh warriors” who were, they vowed, soon to be defeated. The popular outrage over the U.S. bombing, predictably manipulated by the CPK, was as fatal for the two million inhabitants of Phnom Penh as it was for moderate Khmer Rouge and for Lon Nol’s regime.

In April 1975, when CPK troops took the country’s second largest city, Battambang, they headed straight for the airport. There they found two T-28 tactical bombers of the defeated Lon Nol air force. They tore the planes apart, with their bare hands, according to a witness. “They would have eaten them if they could,” he added. When they forcibly evacuated Battambang and Phnom Penh, CPK forces told the urban population that the exodus was necessary because American B-52s were about to bomb the city. The second phase of the Cambodian tragedy had begun.

Notes

5. See Kiernan, How Pol Pot Came to Power, 228.
11. Shawcross, Sidestep, 27.
13. Norodom Sihanouk, My War with the CIA (New York: Penguin, 1973), 56; Kissinger, quoted in Hersch, The Prince of Power, 180, and in T.D. Allman, Unmanifist Destiny: Mayhem and Illusion in American Foreign Policy from the Monroe Doctrine to Reagan’s War in El Salvador (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 342. Kissinger’s credibility on such matters is underlined by the memorandum of a December 18, 1975, meeting, in which he lambasted his staff for committing to writing their interpretation of U.S. to err on the side of winning, “in view of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, that will leak in three months and it will come out that Kissinger overruled his prime minister and violated the law. . . . You have a responsibility to recognize that we are living in a revolutionary situation. Everything on paper will be used against me . . . it will be a national disaster.” See “Minutes of the Meeting: The Secret Life of Henry Kissinger,” Nation, October 19, 1990, 473, 486–87.
14. Richard Hall, The Secret State: Australia’s Spy Industry (Sydney: Cassell, 1978), 133, Hall adds: “If this is true it might explain why the Australian MO9 head of station was away on leave. . . . Australia maintained two MO9 agents in the [Phnom Penh] embassy and they carried out a variety of tasks for the Americans, although they were not part of the coup operation—indeed the senior MO9 man was out of Cambodia on leave when the coup occurred. His number two was a fairly junior man, certainly not experienced enough to have helped play a major role in the coup.” MO9 operations in Cambodia specifically included “assisting the CIA” (8). Another Australian organization, the Australian Secret Intelligence Service, was apparently credited by George Bush with having performed “unique operations” for the United States in Cambodia. Canberra denies any ASIO role in Sihanouk’s overthrow. ASIO reportedly “provided a vital link with the Australian Embassy in Cambodia during the 1970 coup.” Brian Toohey and Marian Wilkinson, The Book of Leaks (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1987), 117, 121.
15. Author’s interviews with Prom Thos, Paris, February 12 and June 3, 1980. In 1959, a 471-page study entitled “Psychological Operations: Cambodia” had been commissioned by the Pentagon to identify groups “susceptible” to American influence, but found that Cambodians “cannot be counted on to act in any positive way for the benefit of U.S. aims and policies.” Shawcross, Sidestep, 55.
17. Much of the following is from Allman, Unmanifest Destiny, 337–39 (letters from Thomson cited on page 438); and Hersh, The Price of Power, 179–81.

19. Hersh, The Price of Power; and Allman, Unmanifest Destiny; see note 17 above.
27. Ibid., 342–43.
31. See Kiernan, How Pol Pot Came to Power, 323, for the full quotation.
32. Shawcross, Sideshow, 218–19.
33. See Kiernan, How Pol Pot Came to Power, 349–57, for further details.
36. Author’s interviews with Sonn Yan and others, O Reang Au, October 6, 1980.
37. Ibid.
38. Author’s interviews with Chin Chhou, Chhai Chhoeun, Khim Veng, and Yen Yien, at Ampil Tapork, October 6, 1980; and author’s interview with Samb, O Reang Au, October 6, 1980.
39. Author’s interviews with Song Rus and others, Pehk Chrey, October 7, 1980.
43. Kiernan, How Pol Pot Came to Power, chap. 8, esp. 314 ff., 331 ff., 340–47.
44. Author’s interviews with Kus villagers, July 16, 1980.
45. Ibid., and author’s interview with Ieng Thon, Tram Kao, July 16, 1980.
47. See Kiernan, How Pol Pot Came to Power, 354–55, for references.
48. Nou Mouk, interview with the author, Oudong, August 26, 1981.
55. Kissinger in reply to a query by UPI’s Helen Thomas, on Cable News Network TV, Bill Moyers Program, “The Press Goes to War,” January 26, 1991. Kissinger immediately added: “And we were informing major leaders of Congress of that event. And we were waiting for somebody to protest, so that we could ask for a UN investigation.”
59. Staffan Hildebrand, personal communication.
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