

# What It's All About

Hugo Hill

1970

VIENTIANE, Laos (LNS)—Nixon's desperate plunge into Cambodia, like his earlier escalation here in Laos, has made public an old secret: that the U.S. campaign to stall the Southeast Asian revolution is an international conspiracy. This campaign, involving half a dozen Asian client states, respects no boundaries and no laws.

Nixon did not invent that policy. It grew out of historical necessity and was practiced with equal consistency, though less fanfare, by all his predecessors. A look at the regional record:

## Cambodia

Since independence in 1953, Prince Sihanouk tried to keep his kingdom out of the eye of the storm by pursuing a scrupulous policy of neutrality, while at the same time developing the country's colonialist-ravished economy. The U.S. response, under Eisenhower, was to try to seize control of the Cambodian economy through a commercial import program which substituted Japanese machine-made goods for local crafts and at the same time created a dollar-addicted comprador (merchant) class subservient to the interests of foreign capitalism. Sihanouk, no longer the boyish prince, expelled the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) program.

To the early clumsy efforts at subjugating Cambodia, John Kennedy added style, dash and guns. The Green Berets, now the principal agent for subverting the neutral kingdom, organized Cambodian residents in South Vietnam into a disciplined corps of mercenaries under their direct control.

From their border camps, Kennedy's Special Forces carried out nocturnal terrorist raids into Cambodian territory. In cooperation with the CIA, they organized the Khmer Serai (Cambodian equivalent of the right-wing Minutemen), and dispatched them to assassinate village leaders loyal to Sihanouk. Kennedy also encouraged the Saigon puppet army to put political pressure on Sihanouk by crossing the border and challenging the Prince to do something about it.

Two years ago I had dinner with several Khmer Serai hatchet-men in Saigon. Believing me to be a fellow fascist, they openly boasted of their murderous exploits and said they had assurances from their American advisers that after Vietnam was "cleaned up" the U.S. would move into Cambodia and take care of Sihanouk.

"In a few years, we'll be in Phnom Penh," said the grinning leader. I dismissed them as deluded, though dangerous. Last week the Khmer Serai formally turned over their American weapons to the Lon Nol government. And the Cambodian Minutemen are now in Phnom Penh.

Lyndon Johnson didn't have Kennedy's style, but he compensated for that lack with more guns. Soon after taking office he sent American bombers to level Cambodian villages close to the border and "advised" the Saigon puppet army to pay no attention to the border. On June 4, 1964, the U.N. Security Council voted to "deplore" those attacks on Cambodian territory.

On the other side of Cambodia, another U.S. puppet—Thailand—was encouraged to keep the pressure on its neutralist neighbor with border raids of its own. Sihanouk, helpless to prevent the attacks, was nevertheless kept distracted from economic development.

The March 18 coup fundamentally changed the Cambodian situation by installing a right-wing government and transforming Sihanouk into a rebel. Nixon apparently concluded that there was no further need for secrecy. He could now intensify and make public what had long been small-scale and secret—the U.S. attempt to make Cambodia a new American colony.

## Laos

As Senator Symington's subcommittee hearings revealed, the United States has been fighting a secret war in Laos since before the French left. Eisenhower founded the Royal Armed Forces of Laos, and those forces have been trained, paid, armed and led by Americans for almost 15 years. Furthermore, in Laos, unlike Cambodia, the restrictions on American aggression have never been severe.

American jets, taking off from their sanctuaries in Thailand, have pounded the Laotian countryside with the same ferocity with which they pound Vietnam. Highly-paid ex-Green Berets lead counter-guerrilla patrols in the jungles; and Thai troops, ferried in by Air America (a CIA creation), fight side by side with the incompetent Laotian puppets. Air America itself, which controls virtually all transportation here, is staffed by mercenary Filipinos and Kuomintang Chinese.

Throughout Southeast Asia, the United States has developed an integrated system of counter-revolution. For years, the "Vietnam war" has been an international war, with Vietnam as its focal point. The invasion of Cambodia has only dramatized that policy.

The revolutionaries, unfortunately, have been slow to respond to the international threat. Although there are armed struggles in all the countries of Southeast Asia, there has been only a minimum of coordination among them. By and large, the people of each country have had to wage an isolated struggle against a frighteningly well coordinated enemy.

But now the situation is changing. Last month Prince Sihanouk met with the leaders of North Vietnam, the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, and the Pathet Lao in an attempt to forge a united front against U.S. imperialism and its local hirelings. The summit conference issued a resolution promising to fight on to complete victory for the independence of the Indo-Chinese peoples.

Though no formal organization seems to have emerged from the conference, it is clear that the revolutionaries, by pooling their strength for common benefit, have launched a new phase in their resistance struggle. It is a multinational struggle now—something that the U.S. government should understand well enough.

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Fifth Estate #106, May 28-June 10, 1970

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