

# Pacific Daily News

## **Many factors led to Khmer Rouge rise**

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Cambodia is a very old country. Her recorded history dates back to the first century A.D.

But she has a very large young population. One source estimates that one-third of Cambodia's total population of 14 million is below the age of 15 years.

It is no wonder that this young population appears to have little or no sense of why as many as two million people in Cambodia were killed from 1975-1979 by Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime.

Yet Cambodians seem receptive of the view that U.S. B-52 bombings of Cambodia resulted in the radicalization of the Khmer Rouge, and the U.S. invasion of Cambodia eventually brought Pol Pot to power.

After all, Cambodians, young and old, frequently hear Premier Hun Sen's reminder: The killings wouldn't have occurred had Lon Nol's coup not taken place. This effective political socialization method has brought now King Father Sihanouk to describe Sen's ruling Cambodian People's Party as the "younger sibling" and has diverted attention from KRT's investigation of other "suspects" involved in the Killing Fields. Sen was a Khmer Rouge northeastern regional commander.

The search for truth that presents only one side of the coin is at best an incomplete interpretation of historical facts -- a half-truth, if not a manipulation of facts.

Former Congressman Stephen Solarz said in 1985 that Americans "have partial responsibility, but by no means exclusive responsibility" for the Khmer Rouge's success. He said, Sihanouk, the Khmer demi-god, who in 1970 called on the people to overturn the government that had replaced his own, "had as much if not more to do with the ultimate success of the Khmer Rouge than the American bombing."

Former national security adviser Henry Kissinger wrote that Hanoi brought the war to Cambodia and "made possible the genocide by the Khmer Rouge."

Australian journalist John Pilger's "Cambodia's empty dock," in the Feb. 21 Guardian, said the U.S. bombings provided "a catalyst" for Pol Pot, who came to power because Nixon and Kissinger had "attacked neutral Cambodia." Pilger called the KRT "a farce" if

"those who sided with Pol Pot's mass murders" escape trial.

But Australian academic Stephen Morris's "Vietnam and Cambodian Communism" of April 2007 posited, "Without the support of the Vietnamese and Chinese communists, the regime known as Democratic Kampuchea would never have existed," and, "Vietnam played a vital role in the rise of the Khmer Rouge to power."

Readers in Cambodia e-mailed to remind me that the U.S. bombed Cambodia.

Recently, a Cambodian who says he was only 7 when Pol Pot came to power, who has lived in the U.S. for 26 years now, wrote on the Internet that he has learned quite a bit: "America is the country that bombed Cambodia in the 1970s, thereby giving strength to the ultra-extremist Khmer Rouge to come to power in 1975 full of thirst for blood."

What do available historical records show?

A "protocol" to the agreement for China's military aid to Cambodia, signed by Cambodia's Lon Nol and China's Lo Jui-ching on Nov. 25, 1965, stipulates Cambodia agreed to Vietnamese communist "command posts," "passage," "refuge," and "protection if necessary," in the frontier region; and "passage of material coming from China" for the Vietnamese.

Read Pyongyang's KCNA News Service Release of April 30, 1972, which lists aid given to the Vietnamese communists by the Cambodian government beginning in 1963: food, medical supplies and commercial agreement; establishment of "small bases" for rest and medical care; free access to the Sihanoukville seaport by ships "carrying arms and military equipment" for the Vietnamese National Liberation Front; and transport by trucks belonging to the royal armed forces from the seaport to the border.

Cambodia's neutrality was thus destroyed since 1963 because of the belief the communists were going to be the future masters of the region.

When Jacqueline Kennedy visited Cambodia on Nov. 1, 1967, George McArthur and Horst Faas of The Associated Press, and Ray Herndon of United Press International, slipped out of Phnom Penh to the South Vietnamese border and found a Vietnamese communist campsite four miles inside Cambodia, in Kompong Cham.

Robert Shaplen's "Time Out of Hand" reported that in the late 1960s, Sihanouk told The Washington Post he wouldn't mind American actions against illegal Vietnamese communist presence in Cambodia's uninhabited areas. Vietnam War critic William Shawcross wrote in "Sideshow" that by that time, U.S. Special Forces teams had already operated 18.75 miles inside Cambodia. In December 1967, the U.S. presented to the Cambodian government, through Australia, findings of a classified project code named "Vesuvius" that documented communists' use of Cambodian land and resources during the Vietnam War.

In "White House Years," Kissinger wrote that Sihanouk, at a May 13, 1969, news conference, talked about "the first report" on "several B-52 bombings," saying he could not protest -- "an affair between the Americans and the Viet Cong-Viet Minh without any Khmer witnesses," as not even a buffalo was killed.

Yet, 10 days after the first series of B-52 bombing strikes three to five miles inside Cambodia, Sihanouk presented to the press corps a detailed map of the location of Vietnamese communist troops "by entire battalions and regions" from northeastern Ratanakiri to the sea in the south -- an area of 3,500 square kilometers. His monthly political magazine "Le Sangkum" placed Vietnamese communist strength along the borders at 35,000 to 40,000 men.

A scholar posited in Foreign Policy Research Institute Online, "History teaches above all that there is no such thing as history, only historical interpretation."

Based on available historical records, how did the Khmer Rouge rise to power?

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