

P C Pradhan

**FOREIGN
POLICY OF**

KAMPUCHEA

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by

P. C. PRADHAN

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Preface

After completing my doctoral thesis entitled "Norodom Sihanouk and Cambodian Foreign Policy, 1954-70", my interest was to publish it so that it reaches a wider section of the people who are interested in the affairs of Southeast Asia. But keeping in view the interesting developments taking place in Cambodia during the post-1970 period, I was tempted to bring the story upto the recent days. Location and collection of material particularly primary sources on the recent happenings in Kampuchea was a difficult task. Nevertheless, with the help and guidance of Dr. J. P. Jain, I was able to cover developments in Cambodian foreign policy after the overthrow of Sihanouk in 1970. The present study, therefore, is an attempt to highlight the origin, development and implications of Cambodian foreign policy first under the leadership of Prince Norodom Sihanouk during the period of his rule in Cambodia and then under the regimes of Lon Nol, Pol Pot and Heng Samrin respectively.

Why and how did the foreign policy of Cambodia (now Kampuchea) become in the beginning basically a one man show for nearly two decades? What factors led Sihanouk to

opt for neutrality in foreign policy? Did the domestic conditions in Cambodia in any way influence Sihanouk's foreign policy? How far was Sihanouk's foreign policy influenced by regional and global issues? In what way was the Vietnam War responsible for the ups and down in Cambodian foreign policy? Why did the year 1970 prove to be a year of crisis for Sihanouk? In what direction did the foreign policy of Cambodia move after the overthrow of Sihanouk? This study is an humble attempt to find answers to these questions.

The study is divided into six chapters, besides the conclusion. The first chapter is an introduction to Cambodia and deals with that country's geographical location, anthropological features, racial composition, and economy and concludes with a short survey of its history. The historical survey lays emphasis on Cambodia's border problems with its neighbours and the independence movement in Cambodia. It also discusses the Geneva Conference, which has so much to do with the developments of the later years.

The second chapter is concerned with the formulation of Cambodian foreign policy under the guidance of Norodom Sihanouk. To get a clear picture of the situation then obtaining it throws light on the domestic politics of Cambodia and the rivalry between the super Powers in Southeast Asia. The emergence of the non-aligned bloc and the Bandung Conference, which greatly influenced the foreign policy ideas of Sihanouk, come in for special discussion. Sihanouk's rejection of the idea of alignment with power blocs and his decision to follow a policy of neutrality are also considered.

The third chapter covers the period 1954-63. These years were years of success for Sihanouk's foreign policy, which was at this time directed mainly towards cultivating the countries in Cambodia's neighbourhood and the two power blocs. The chapter extensively covers these two specific areas. It also focuses on the Prince's campaign for international recognition of his country's neutrality. Sihanouk succeeded in implementing his foreign policy primarily because of stability at home. The chapter, therefore, gives due attention to the domestic situation of Cambodia during the period.

The years 1964-69 were problematic for Sihanouk's foreign policy. A number of internal problems combined with certain external factors to create a lot of complications for Sihanouk. This made his task of preserving his country's neutral stand very delicate. During this period Sihanouk followed a three-fold policy. Firstly, he campaigned for widespread recognition of his country's neutrality and territorial integrity. Secondly, he addressed himself to the task of solving the numerous problems he had with the countries in Cambodia's neighbourhood. Thirdly, relations with the Americans, the Chinese, the Vietnamese Communists, and the Soviets called for tactful handling. Chapter Four covers all these complicated issues.

The fifth chapter deals with the years 1970-75. The factors which had been creating problems in previous years came to a head in 1970. Sihanouk was thrown out of power, and monarchy was abolished. The war in Vietnam got escalated and spread to the heart of Cambodia. After experiencing years of peace and stability, Cambodia became a land of death, destruction, and suffering. While Sihanouk, in alliance with Khmer Rouge, continued his fight with the support of China and other anti-imperialist forces, Lon Nol managed to remain in power at Phnom Penh, with the help of the United States, till 1975.

After the defeat of Lon Nol in 1975, the new regime, which came under effective control of the Communist Party of Cambodia under the leadership of Pol Pot, drew closer to China, while strained relations with Vietnam led to frequent border clashes. Meanwhile the ruthless manner in which Pol Pot carried out radical measures for reconstruction and development generated a great deal of suffering and discontent among the people. The Pol Pot regime was overthrown and Heng Samrin came to power in January 1979 with the help and support of Vietnam. While the ousted regime of Pol Pot continued to operate from Kampuchean territory adjacent to the border with Thailand and to look to China for support and sustenance, the new regime developed close ties with Vietnam, the Soviet Union and its allies. Sino-Soviet rivalry continued to find reflection in

the foreign policy orientation of Kampuchean contestants for power. The presence of Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea is the main hurdle in the new regime's efforts towards having friendly relations with its neighbours, particularly the ASEAN countries, or to get its legitimacy recognised at the United Nations (where Democratic Kampuchea continues to represent the country) or among the non-aligned countries (where Kampuchea's seat is being kept vacant). While the Heng Samrin government favours a regional conference to solve the issue, the ASEAN countries, supported by China and USA, want an international solution of the problem on the basis of the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces and free elections in Kampuchea. Chapter six covers all these developments.

The present work is the outcome of a study of the various official sources, memoirs, books, and articles, as also interviews and discussions with persons who had opportunities to watch developments from very close quarters. In deference to the wishes of the persons concerned I have decided not to give details of the interviews and discussions conducted by me.

In writing this book, I have received assistance and inspiration from a number of people who deserve thanks from my side. First of all, I am extremely thankful to Professor Parimal Kumar Das of the Centre for South, Southeast and Central Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, for supervising my research and for guiding and helping me in the completion of my doctoral thesis. I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Professor Vishal Singh and Prof. Bimal Prasad, also of the Centre for South, Southeast and Central Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, for their constant encouragement and guidance. I am grateful to Professor V.M. Reddi of Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, and Prof. V. Suryanarayan of Madras University for their help and guidance. I am grateful to Dr. J.P. Jain for his encouragement regarding the publication and updating of the study so as to cover developments after Sihanouk's overthrow in 1970. I am grateful to him for going through the draft of chapters dealing with the post-1970 developments and offering his valuable suggestions and

critical comments in the matter. His guidance particularly on the recent developments in Kampuchea was of immense help. I am also thankful to Shri R. N. Duggal for his constructive suggestions and critical comments on the analysis of developments covering the period after Sihanouk's overthrow in 1970. I must also compliment Radiant Publishers for undertaking publication of the study and for extending their enthusiastic cooperation.

I cannot forget to thank my family members, particularly Kumud Chandra Pradhan, my elder brother, and Dr. Swatantra Kumari Pradhan, my wife, whose co-operation and inspiration were of great help in the completion of this study. Finally, I heartily thank all my friends at Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, the National Archives of India, and the Indian Council of Historical Research for their help and encouragement.

I am happy to acknowledge the help received from the Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, New Delhi; the Indian Council of World Affairs Library, New Delhi; the library of the United States International Communication Agency, New Delhi; the National Research Council Library, Bangkok; and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Library, Singapore. My thanks are due also to the staff of all these libraries. However, special mention has to be made of my friend Mr. Ashok Jambhekar of the Indian Council of World Affairs Library, New Delhi, for his help, co-operation and encouragement.

New Delhi

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List of Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DRVN	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
FUNK	National United Front of Kampuchea
KCFA	Khmer-Chinese Friendship Association
NLF	National Liberation Front (South Vietnam)
PRG	Provisional Revolutionary Government (of South Vietnam)
RGNUC	Royal Government of the National Union of Cambodia (Kampuchea); also known as GRUNK
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Historical Background

Cambodia (now Kampuchea) is a state in the Indo-Chinese peninsula in South-East Asia with an area of approximately 66,000 square miles. It is bounded in the east and south-east by Vietnam, in the south by the Gulf of Siam, in the west by Thailand, and in the north partly by Thailand and partly by Laos. There is no natural barrier in some parts of the west and the south-east separating the country from Thailand and Vietnam respectively. It is across these open areas that the Thais and the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia in the past. Cambodia shares about a thousand miles of border with Laos and South Vietnam. Although the borders have been delimited by international agreement, the jungle terrain makes them difficult to define, and this has resulted in occasional border violations.

In physical form the country is a great shallow saucer with an elongated bottom, occupied by the Tonle Sap ("Great Lake"). The northern and southern margin of the country are hilly to mountainous, the central-western margin is a rolling plain providing a drainage divide, and the eastern margin is cut by the Mekong River so that the saucer drainage system forms

a Mekong tributary unit.¹ A very large part of Cambodia forms a watery alluvial plain environment that is amenable to some system of human use, and the Cambodian livelihood structure has long utilized both the aquatic and land elements of this rich region. The alluvial plain has a very slight gradient towards the Tonle Sap so that in summer flood season the lake overflows its banks and floods the surrounding regions. The area covered by the lake, which is 1,000 square miles in the dry season, expands three to four times as the seasonal Mekong River flood volume backs into the bottom of the saucer to create a great shallow flood reservoir.²

The pressure of population on the land is minimal and unevenly distributed. The population is densest in the areas adjoining the Mekong River and the Tonle Sap; it is least dense in the mountain regions. The Khmer are the numerically dominant ethnic group and comprise 85 per cent of the total population. The largest minority groups are the Chinese and the Vietnamese, each constituting nearly 7 per cent of the total population. The rest of the population consists of the Khmer Loeu, Cham Malays, Thais, and Laotians and the recently arrived Europeans, Filipinos, Indians, Japanese, and Pakistanis.³ Both the Vietnamese and the Chinese play a dominant role, particularly in the economic life of Cambodia. Many of them are recent immigrants. They came in substantial numbers to Cambodia and settled down there. This settlement of the Vietnamese and the Chinese in different Cambodian provinces like Svay Rieng, Battambang, Kampong Cham, and the capital city of Phnom-penh has considerably influenced the character and course of Cambodian foreign policy.

The language of the indigenous majority is known as Khmer, and in terms of linguistic classification it is included in the Mon-Khmer category, which is related to the Munda language of Western Bengal.⁴ Buddhism is the religion of Cambodia. Eighty-five per cent of the total population is attached to Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhism. The remainder of the population consists of Muslims, Mahayana Buddhists, and Roman Catholics.

In the traditional Cambodian society there were three broad classes of people, viz the peasantry, the Buddhist clergy, and the Royal family and the mandarinat. The Western-educated professional and administrative class emerged only during French rule.⁵ Since the emergence of the country as an independent state, much progress has been achieved in different fields such as education, agriculture, industry, and health and welfare. In spite of all the changes that have taken place the modern Cambodian society reflects a basic stability and historical continuity.⁶ Throughout history Cambodian culture has demonstrated its ability to remain substantially intact even while forced to adapt itself to changing social and political circumstances.

Cambodia's economy is essentially agricultural. Rice is by far the main crop, followed by maize, palm-sugar, and sugarcane. Cambodia also produces rubber, tobacco, copra, palm oil, jute, cotton, and pepper. The country has an exportable surplus of fish, rubber, timber, rice, maize, palm-sugar and pepper. Cambodian industry is small in scale with considerable State participation. "The majority of Cambodia's industrial enterprises are engaged in the processing of agricultural products for export. Other industrial activity is confined mainly to traditional handicrafts and to some textile manufacturing and wood processing."⁷

Until the year 1947, Cambodia had been a monarchy with the King at the apex of power. However, in the year 1947, a royal decree was proclaimed which gave Cambodia a constitutional monarchy. This constitutional monarchy consisted essentially of the King, his Crown Council, the Ministries, a bicameral legislature, and a judiciary.⁸ Article 16 of the Constitution of Cambodia said :

Every Cambodian owes allegiance to the King. It shall be the duty of every Cambodian to respect the Laws, to defend the country and to act in aid of the government by paying such taxes as he is liable to and by all other means provided for by law.⁹

In 1960 Prince Norodom Sihanouk sponsored an amend-

ment to the Constitution creating a new position of Chief of State to be held by a person elected in a national referendum. A referendum was held upon the death of his father and Sihanouk was elected to that position. Originally as King and subsequently as Chief of State, Norodom Sihanouk emerged as the most important personality of Cambodia. For nearly three decades, he dominated the Cambodian political scene. However, a *coup d'etat* occurred in March 1970, and Sihanouk was overthrown. In October 1970 the authorities in Phnom-penh announced the abolition of the monarchy and proclaimed Cambodia a republic.

Cambodia before Independence

"The kingdom of Cambodia is what remains today of the once powerful Khmer empire, which at its height in the 12th and 13th centuries, extended throughout a large part of Southeast Asia, now occupied by Laos, Thailand and Vietnam."¹⁰ The recorded history of Cambodia, however, goes back to the earliest centuries of the Christian era when the Kingdom of Funan was established.¹¹ During that period the Cambodians came in conflict with the great cultures of China and India, especially India. The Funan Empire, however, did not long endure. It started disintegrating in the sixth century "as a result of sustained southward pressure from Chenla, the Khmer state centering at Bassac which was located some distance up the Mekong River."¹²

Then, after centuries of division and confusion, there arose the Khmer Empire. This empire reached its zenith during the reign of Suryavarman II (A.D. 1113-1150) and later under Jayavarman VII (A.D. 1181-1219). The Khmer Empire extended over a vast territory "covering the whole of eastern coast of Indo-China as far north as Hue, the area on both sides of the Mekong as far north as Vientiane, the central Siamese plain and the northern part of Malayan Peninsula."¹³ An important fact about the Khmer rulers is that they established the cult of Devaraja or "God King".¹⁴ Another significant achievement of the Khmer rulers was the construction of the Vishnu temple of Angkorwat, which was "the most splendid

of Khmer architectural monuments and also the most instructive for historical purposes."¹⁵

The political developments of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries contributed materially to the eventual disintegration of the Cambodian Empire. The empire, which had exercised supreme power over mainland South-East Asia, was now threatened by two neighbouring Powers. First of all, a series of forays by the Thais started weakening the great empire. Invasion followed invasion. The attacks mounted in 1394, 1420, and 1432 were particularly fierce.¹⁶ This culminated in the sack of Angkor and the eventual collapse of the empire. The other neighbouring Power which was forever trying to annex the Khmer Empire was Vietnam. Sometimes on the pretext of aiding pretenders to the Cambodian throne and sometimes aiding Cambodians against Thailand, Vietnam gained a big hold even on the internal political affairs of the kingdom; so much so that, by the nineteenth century, Cambodia, being hedged in between two competing neighbours, preserved only a semblance of independence. Thus, during the period 1432-1864 the history of Cambodia was largely an account of the efforts it made to avoid being subjugated by its aggressive neighbours.¹⁷ This process of being squeezed in between the Thais and the Vietnamese might have ended in the nineteenth century with the extinction of Cambodia as a separate Khmer State, but for the interposition of France and its establishment of a protectorate in the 1860s.

Centuries of experience with Thailand and Vietnam taught Cambodia the futility of relying on either of the two for support. King Ang Doung (A.D. 1841-59), overwhelmed by the enormity of the problems of his kingdom, sought for a distant ally, "preferably a European ally". Since British policy seemed especially aggressive in South-East Asia, he turned to France.¹⁸ Consequently France came to dominate the Cambodian political scene for nearly a century.

Ang Doung was succeeded by King Norodom, paternal great-grandfather of Norodom Sihanouk. It was during his reign that the French protectorate was established. In July 1863 the French Governor of Cochin-China, Admiral de la

Grandiere, paid a personal visit to King Norodom at Oudung and offered him French protection against Siam. Despite Siamese attempts to forestall formal ratification, the accord came into effect in April of the following year. The signature of the treaty of 1863 was, however, the result of French pressure.¹⁹

The French had already by this time gained control over Cochinchina and had realized the strategic and economic importance of Cambodia as well. This was why, in 1884, after establishing a protectorate by force over Tonkin, they brought pressure upon the King of Cambodia to sign a convention by which the King bound himself to "accept all the administrative, judicial, financial, and commercial reforms which, in the future, the Government of the Republic will judge it useful to introduce in order to facilitate the accomplishment of its Protectorate."²⁰ The King's relation to the Protectorate after 1884 was "that of a medieval prince trying to escape by Oriental wiles the powerful and tactless foreigners he had been forced to call for his aid."²¹ The whole country with the exception of the King's private domain, passed under French control.

In the year 1887, Cambodia became part of an Indo-Chinese Union which included Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina, Laos, and Kwang Chowwan, the French leased-hold in South-China. The Union was administered under the supervision and direction of the French Governor-General.²² French administration in Cambodia was carried on by a Resident Superior, Residents, and French officials. The Resident Superior presided over the Cambodian Council of Ministers.²³

Sihanouk and the Cambodian Independence Movement

French rule in Cambodia did not go unchallenged. Thousands of Cambodians raised their voice against French colonialism. Two great uprisings took place—one in 1860s and the other in 1880s. These uprisings constitute the foundation of the freedom struggle in Cambodia.²⁴ Although they were both massive eruptions almost unprecedented in Cambodian history and raged with rare fury for quite some time, the

French rigorously suppressed them. The French did not face any serious internal security problem thereafter until the end of the Second World War. Ironically enough, French colonial rule preserved the Cambodian State from extinction. "What it was unable to do, was to safeguard Cambodian territory from Japanese rule, and it was the experience of Japanese rule and French attempts to renew their colonial rule that provoked growth of modern politically-conscious Cambodian nationalism."²⁵

During the first six months of the Pacific War, the Japanese advanced from victory to victory. Their initial crippling of the American fleet at Pearl Harbor left them for a considerable time free from any interference from that quarter. They were thus able to develop their offensive movements in South-East Asia with the advantage of complete naval and air superiority. This, together with their daring and skill in the conduct of operations, enabled them to gain control of a vast land and sea area in a shorter time and with smaller losses than they had themselves bargained for.²⁶

After the Japanese occupation of Cambodia in 1941, Cambodia suffered the same fate as Laos and Vietnam: it was reduced to the status of a sub-protégé of the Japanese. The French recognized the political and economic supremacy of Japan in East Asia, and this meant that Japan was virtually the master of Indo-China. For all its professed objectives in the Great East Asia war—viz to end Western rule and to further the cause of independence of the peoples of the Far East—Japan continued to acknowledge French sovereignty over Indo-China and allowed the French administration to perform its formal peace-time functions.²⁷ It was during this period that the French put Prince Norodom Sihanouk on the throne of Cambodia.

King Sisowath Monivong, successor to King Sisowath, died in April 1941.²⁸ His death raised the issue of succession to the Cambodian throne. The French, as kingmakers, decided to install Prince Norodom Sihanouk in preference to the older and tougher Prince Sisowath Monireth. Norodom Sihanouk was then only eighteen years of age and was studyin