

# Cambodia's Foreign Policy: The Portrait of Leadership on the brink of the Second Indochina War — the Missing Piece

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## カンボジアの外交政策

— 第二次インドシナ戦争期におけるリーダーシップ — 失われたジグソーパズルのピース —

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### Abstract

This work seeks to engage in the analysis of Cambodia's foreign policy in the Second Indochina War by applying levels of analysis (individual leaders, state and the Second Indochina War) along with political psychology as a conceptual framework. This paper aims to re-examine Cambodia's foreign policy under the Lon Nol administration. The main research question — "What went wrong in Cambodia's foreign policy?" — serves as the backbone in understanding the failures and troubles of foreign policy that led to the ending of the war and the genocide that killed almost half of the country's population. With political psychology and levels of analysis, this paper uncovers the underlying factors that influenced Cambodia's foreign policy cognitively; in this respect, this work is not just another historical work. The paper contributes to the current works of literature with the in-depth observation of the Lon Nol administration's foreign policy instead of analysis on social or military aspects of the administration. Furthermore, this paper highlights possible factors deemed to influence Lon Nol's leadership under the historical context of Cambodia as a small state in Southeast Asia which was dragged into the Second Indochina War soon after her independence from the colonial power.

**Key Words** : Cambodia's foreign policy, the Second Indochina War, Political Psychology, Sihanouk, Lon Nol.

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## 1. Introduction

Sihanouk told the *National Guardian* in 1965.

...You can't give the Asian peoples only a choice between the U.S. and communism. Another choice is needed: nationalism and real liberty under democracy (Sihanouk and Worthy 1965, p.3).

Cambodia was just another newly independent country in Southeast Asia when the Second Indochina War flared up along her border; the war that eventually tore the country apart with decades of civil war and the genocide that shocked the world. With respects to the matter of the foreign policy of Cambodia, there are a handful of academic works that cover up to the first half of the Second Indochina War during the Sihanouk administration while the foreign policy of the successor, Lon Nol is barely examined.

This paper seeks to re-examine Cambodia's foreign policy in the Second Indochina War by observing the Lon Nol administration (1970-1975). The main question in this work is "what went wrong in Cambodia's foreign policy? — leading to the ending of the Second Indochina War and the genocide that killed almost half of the country's population. In other words, the paper aims to examine the underlying aspects that influenced the foreign policy of Cambodia at the end of the Second Indochina War.

To observe the subject matter, the author employs levels of analysis (individual leaders, state and the Second Indochina War) and political psychology as the framework of analysis. However, in this work, the author would like to observe in-depth only on the individual level through the lens of political psychology. For the state level, the author would like to assume that the newly independent states in Southeast Asia mainly conduct their foreign policy for the sake of nation-building and such policy was determined by the individual leader (Clapham 1977). Also, the Second Indochina War is taken for granted as a fixed political phenomenon that Cambodia had to encounter. Therefore, what this paper offers is unveiling a crucial missing piece of the puzzle; yet, is still far from completing the entire portrait of Lon Nol's leadership.

### 1.1 Relevant Literature

When it comes to the Second Indochina War, a majority of studies discuss the matters regarding military tactics between Vietnam and the U.S., the U.S. foreign policy in the war, and the impacts of the war on Vietnam. Below are some relevant works concerning the history of the Second Indochina War in Cambodia and her foreign policy.

Michael Leifer, one of the prominent authors, contributes the chronicle of Sihanouk's Neutrality since the early stages of the independence as the country had to confront both domestic and external affairs (Leifer 1962a, 1964b, 1967c). Leifer discusses Cambodia's foreign policy concerning her two bigger neighbours Thailand and Vietnam; the *neutrality* was meant to protect the country's sovereignty and integrity. He highlights the fact that Sihanouk depended on aligning with both

blocs of ideologies so that Cambodia was able to secure her small territory from her neighbours. (Leifer 1961d).

Roger M. Smith discusses the diplomatic history of Cambodia in the wake of independence. While sharing similar thoughts that neutrality served as an important backbone in maintaining the country's security, Smith analyses further on dilemmas Cambodia had to encounter down the road of neutrality as the war escalated and the situation called for Cambodia to pick sides among the great powers (Smith 1965). Similar to Smith, Bernard K. Gordon emphasizes the troubled background of Cambodia's relationship with Thailand and Vietnam and within the international context. The fundamental goal of Cambodia's foreign policy, as Gordon projects, is the continued existence of the state and that Sihanouk's choice of neutrality is, in fact, understandable (Gordon 1965).

Leifer, contrastingly, put more of a burden on Sihanouk and his leadership as he began leaning towards Communist China; Leifer posits the question on Sihanouk's expectation towards the U.S. regarding the intervention in the issues of Thailand and Vietnam and what value would the U.S. gain from pressuring Thailand and South Vietnam especially when the U.S. was of no obligation to do so for the sake of Cambodia (Leifer 1965e). Akin to Smith and Gordon, Sok Udom Deth, a Cambodian scholar, studies contextual analyzation regarding the Cold War and the Vietnam War and the reasons behind the tragedy Cambodia suffered in the following decades in the post-Second Indochina War. His arguments rest on three factors: the Vietnam war, the legacy of French colonial rule (the country's territorial disputes with her neighbours), and the rivalry of the hegemonic powers in the region under the circumstances of the Cold War (Deth 2009). Yet, the aspects of foreign policy and the in-depth analyzation of decision-makers are not included in the equation.

On the individual level, there are a handful of works that can be referenced. Some renowned works closely examine Sihanouk and his foreign policy, like that of Milton E. Osborne (1994) who endeavours to give a deeper observation on Sihanouk as a leader who influenced the fate of the country. Tracing from the beginning of his political life and how the young monarch matured in his political career. Osborne presents a portrait of Sihanouk's personality in handling Cambodia's affairs throughout the Second Indochina War which contributes to a better understanding of Sihanouk's personality and his leadership style.

John Lawrence Scott Girling (1971) also examines Sihanouk's perspective concerning both domestic and external affairs. In particular, he studies how Sihanouk's "personification" myths were linked to his overthrow in 1970. Girling shows how Sihanouk imposed his myths on the nation leading to his miscalculations in conducting foreign policy. Sothiary Toch, another Cambodian scholar, also briefly examines Sihanouk's leadership but mainly under the context of contemporary Cambodia based upon three factors: strategic, operational and responsive instead of wartime. Meanwhile, the Sihanouk and Lon Nol administrations, in particular, were introduced merely as background information (Toch 2018).

The topic that seems to be of great interest to historians would be about Cambodia under the Sihanouk administration in the post-independent era, the military history of the civil war, and

the causes leading to the genocide that wiped out more than half of the country's population. Yet, currently, the scholarly works that study the details of Sihanouk's successor, the Lon Nol administration remain scarce in number.

For example, Kenneth J. Conboy (2013) studies the CIA covert operations in Cambodia as an effort of the U.S. to assist the anti-Communist forces in Cambodia and to support the U.S. military stations in the Vietnam War. He analyses the period of the U.S. assistance to the Khmer Republic and the period of Reagan and Bush presidencies (1981-1991); mainly highlighting the dark side of the role of the U.S. and the CIA in Cambodia's civil war. Likewise, Conboy (2011) lists comprehensive details of military armed forces within the period of the Khmer Republic. Although his work focuses purely on military history, the book consists of detailed descriptions of the Khmer Republic armed forces from names of commanders in charge, to military regions, to the subdivisions of regiments, air force, navy, etc. Kenneth R. Bowra (1983) writes in his thesis about the military assistance provided by the U.S. to Cambodia within the period of 1970-1975. He focuses on the delivery of military equipment teams and the analyzation of such assistance programs in the field of military training and tactics in which the U.S. had exercised at the time.

Similarly, Sak Sutsakhan (1980) a high-ranking military officer during the Khmer Republic, wrote a monograph of the situation in Cambodia while the Republic was on the verge of collapse. The monograph includes precise details of major military operations, the military equipment under the U.S. assistance program together with the political situation in Cambodia under the Republic regime. Another Cambodian author, Boraden Nhem (2018) also studies the military history of Cambodia; only with a different timeframe, 1979-1991. His work — *The Chronicle of a People's War* — narrates Cambodia's civil war history. With the brief background of the Lon Nol administration as the starting point, he examines the military tactics, decision making in historical battles, the relations of weapon technology and tactics employed in the battlefields at the time of the civil war. Sorpong Peou (2001) observes from a societal perspective within Cambodia throughout various political administrations. The book covers a series of issues from armed conflicts, violence, legal development, the transition towards democracy, gender, racial and economic development. In short, the book accumulates journal articles that offer insight regarding complex developments and transition within Cambodia society that could lead to either further conflict or peace.

## **1.2 Knowledge Gap and Contributions**

It is almost rare to find scholarly works written by Cambodian scholars that focus on the perspective of Cambodia, a country that became heavily involved in the war since the initial stage until the very end. Also, large proportions of studies on Cambodia during the Second Indochina war mainly stopped at Sihanouk's regime and his policy of neutrality while the Lon Nol administration has not been thoroughly discussed.

In this respect, this paper contributes to the current works of literature with the in-depth observation of the Lon Nol administration regarding foreign policy analysis. Furthermore, this

paper highlights the perspectives of Cambodia as a small state in Southeast Asia which was dragged into the Second Indochina War soon after her independence. Essentially, this article contributions also lie exclusively in thorough elucidations on the individual leaders which focus on Sihanouk's successor, the Lon Nol administration. The adoption of political psychology intersecting with history will unveil the underlying determining factors in the making of Cambodia's foreign policy in the Second Indochina War from a broader dimension.

## **2. Cambodia under Prince Sihanouk-the Sangkum**

The post-independent Cambodia was fragile; her economy and military strength were not strong enough to shield from the fear of bigger neighbours Thailand and Vietnam; the neighbours she had shared relatively love-hate relations even before the arrival of the French. To Cambodia, rather than ideologies there was something else even more significant; at least, under Sihanouk's vision. Inspired by the speech of President Nehru of India back in the Afro-Asian Conference in 1955, Neutrality was the foreign policy for Cambodia chosen by Sihanouk in the early 1950s (Fifield 1958, pp.504-510).<sup>1</sup> Neutrality would enable Cambodia to rely on foreign assistance from both blocs without having to choose. Diplomatic ties were established with both ends of the spectrum. The U.S. was among the earliest to officially established diplomatic relations with Cambodia since 1950,<sup>2</sup> Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Soviet Union in 1956; and China in 1958 and other nations followed (CIA 1970a, p.8). Along with the U.S. as a major donor, France, Japan, Germany also contributed to the country's infrastructure (Chhair and Luyna 2013, p.3).

In the early 1960s, Cambodia and her neighbours, Thailand and South-Vietnam were having their die-hard territory disputes; only this time, they were closely allied with the U.S. While Cambodia expected that the U.S. would be able to intervene effectively in the disputes, the U.S. responded otherwise.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Cambodia had to bring the issues to the U.N. Cambodia won the case with Thailand over the issue of Preah Vihear temple;<sup>4</sup> however, the diplomatic relations with Thailand ended in 1961. Meanwhile, the case of South Vietnam troops intruding into Cambodia territory was set aside; only in 1964 did the U.N Security Council issue a resolution calling for further investigation on the cause of incidents and compensation from the South-Vietnam to the Cambodian government. But Cambodia had already chosen to cease diplomatic relations with South-Vietnam in 1963 followed by the rejection of the U.S. aid and eventually ended the diplomatic ties in 1965 (Smith 1965, p.205). As the U.S. now out of the picture, Sihanouk's version of neutrality was under watchful eyes, not only by the U.S. but also by his people and subordinates.

Terminating diplomatic relations with the U.S. who had always been the biggest donors, did not just hurt Cambodia's economy, the public opinion was also divided as Sihanouk shifted the entire ship towards new possible donors. The fright that the west and the pro-American faction in Cambodia had been trying to avoid had now turned into reality; the next donors in line were of the Communist bloc, the Soviet Union and China. Just as the neutrality standpoint began to crumble, Sihanouk shifted back to the U.S. once again as he sensed the widening communism inside the

country and the South-Vietnam was not the only threat; the communist of North-Vietnam could no longer be ignored (CIA 1970a, p.11). In 1969, Cambodia re-established diplomatic ties with the U.S. though merely on the *Chargé d' Affaires ad interim* level (Rust 2016, pp.84-85). Getting back to the U.S. did not soothe down the tension brewing within the society. In March 1970, the Sangkum regime was ended abruptly by a military coup on March 18, 1970.

### **3. Lon Nol – Turning over a New Leaf under the Republic**

As soon as the military coup took place, General Lon Nol who held the military power and his accomplice, Prince Sirik Matak, Sihanouk's cousin who had secured support from most of the National Assembly members to be able to gain the anticipated votes to remove Sihanouk from his position as the Chief of state in the afternoon of the same day (Corfield 2009, pp.72-73; Osborne 1994, pp.209-216). The new government was soon formed—*The Khmer Republic* (Kiernan 2002, pp.483-495). Two years after Sihanouk's overthrow, the new constitution was ready to enter into force after the referendum on April 30, 1972.<sup>5</sup> The roadmap for Cambodia under the new regime was clearly stated in the preamble of the 1972 Constitution; promoting democracy, devoted to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and so on.<sup>6</sup> In his book — *Neo-Khmerisme*, Lon Nol wrote the main visions of the republican government as follows.<sup>7</sup>

- The present time is the War of resistance.
- With this war, we will obtain independence from outsiders, the North-Vietnam and Vietcongs. Monarchy is now obsolete.
- After this and at the same time, proceeding to the internal unification between and among all the republicans who are all Khmer citizens.
- And finally, the war is being fought for reconstruction and rebirth of the country, the spread of traditional culture and the absorption of the thoughts of world civilization in search of property for the people.

Lon Nol made it clear that Sihanouk was no longer welcomed. The new administration embraced the *laissez faire* approach in reconstructing the country's economy (Chhair and Luyna 2013, pp.3-4). Primary agricultural products like rice, rubber, corn, etc. were intendedly be harvested and "preserved for [the] population."<sup>8</sup> However, the actual implementation of this new policy was disturbed by civil war and Cambodia still depended heavily on foreign aid, particularly from the U.S. Lon Nol and the U.S. had been on good terms even under the Sihanouk administration (Rust 2016, pp.243-247); even though he had kept a low profile under Sihanouk's leadership. To fend off intruders from entering Cambodia's territory, especially the Communist from Vietnam, the Lon Nol's government soon had to seek further military assistance from the non-communist bloc; the U.S. once again became the biggest supplier (CIA 1970a, p.17). Neutrality was no longer an option.

Lasted only five years (1970-1975), Lon Nol's regime went down in history as a regime torn

apart by civil war, bombing raids, and violence (Peou 2001). The new government that promised to uphold the principles of democracy and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights soon turned into a military dictatorship determined to repel the Communists from her country (Spector 2014). Ethnic Vietnamese who resided in Cambodia were forced to flee back to Vietnam while some were killed (Kiernan 2002, p.485). With the Paris Peace Accords spelling the end of the Second Indochina War in 1973, the Lon Nol administration remained hectic in negotiations with Vietnam regarding the exchange of civilian prisoners.<sup>9</sup> As the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam, the military support channelled through the South-Vietnam too was soon terminated. The Republic now left with scars from the heavy U.S. bombardment and lost to the real revolutionary troops; the extreme leftist — the Khmer Rouge on April 17, 1975. The Collapse of the Khmer Republic marked the ending of a decades-long civil war inside the country but also the starting point where Cambodia met her tragic fate; the genocide bathed with bloodshed lasted just long enough to wipe out almost half of the nation's population.

#### **4. Conceptual Framework**

This paper references the three levels of analysis: the individual, the states and the war.<sup>10</sup> As mentioned earlier in the introductory part that this paper only observes in-depth on the individual level — Lon Nol.

Joseph De Rivera writes “One danger of taking psychology for granted is the danger of failing to see that things could have happened differently if man had behaved differently—something he is quite capable of doing when he achieves an awareness of his determinants. ... Any analysis that divorces history, political science, psychology, and other social sciences is apt to be incomplete and somewhat misleading.” (De Rivera 1968, p.2) The study of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) no longer solely belongs to political science nor international relations.

Anticipating such trends, some scholars also follow the roadmap and adopt an interdisciplinary approach in their works. For instance, Valerie M. Hudson (2005) bridges the history, political psychology and international relations theories in conceptualizing the FPA; paving a new way towards a better understanding of the conventional IR theories by dissecting the subject of observation into micro-level — Actor-specific. Linking with individual attitudes, Fred I. Greenstein (1967; see also 2009) observes human motivation, their belief system and the impacts of individual personality on politics. His works trigger further studies of leadership also the personality of political leaders. Alexander L. George (1969) in *The Operational Code* reveals significant aspects of political leader's belief concerning political circumstances and how such beliefs along with historical events shape their political choice. James D. Barber (1972) hypothesizes the connections of leaders' childhood, character, worldview, and style of leadership.

Another prominent scholar in the field, Margaret G. Hermann (1978a, p.56) in *Why Nations Act* links personal characteristics of political leaders to their behaviour in conducting foreign policy. In her later works, Hermann takes a step further asking the question of whether or

not personal characteristics of political leaders have any impact on their foreign policymaking behaviour (Hermann 1980b). To examine extensively political leaders' characteristics, Hermann also suggested a conceptual scheme — *the Ingredients of Leadership*, the combinations of leaders' personal characteristics along with other contextual factors (Hermann 1986c, pp.167-192).

In this paper, the author employs five personal characteristics of political leaders commonly used by journalists and scholars summarized in the table below.<sup>11</sup>

Table 1: Five Personal Characteristics

<b>Political Beliefs</b>	Each political leader is bounded by his/her own basic political beliefs; such beliefs determine the strategies or route in which he/she would lead the country.
<b>Leadership Style</b>	How a leader interacts with his/her political units. The leader's preference in working individually or with a team, for instance, can indicate his or her effects on the subordinates.
<b>Motivation</b>	The main motivation to be in one political position, for example, to seek approval or recognition, will drive the leader to take action to achieve that motive.
<b>Reactions to Stress</b>	Being a political leader by no means makes them resilient to stress; yet, with such challenging and supreme positions, stressful situations serve as trials to his/her leadership.
<b>Background Factors</b>	The background factors such as previous political experiences, how he/she was recruited into the position; and the political context when he/she starts to rule would help determine the political behavior afterward.

Source: Compiled by this author to simplify *Personal Characteristics* of political leaders uses to further analyze the political leadership of political leaders based upon Rhodes, Rod AW, and Paul T. Hart (2014).

It should be noted that a majority of the works of political psychology are conducted by relying on empirical data of WEIRD states<sup>12</sup> or mainly via analysis of interviews of a limited number of top leaders (Rasler, Thompson and Chester 1980, p.49). Although personality traits or assumptions suggested by scholars in the field of political psychology they mostly overlook the complex Southeast Asian cultures and histories and might not be able to explain the exact elements that could alter the decision of the leaders in this region, at least their scholarly works can serve as a backbone for the analytical part.

## 5. The Portrait of Leadership – *Lon Nol – The Khmer Republic*

**Political Beliefs:** In the wake of independence, Sihanouk's vision was to lead Cambodia on the road of neutrality that could guarantee her full sovereignty, territorial integrity and self-sufficiency free from foreign intervention in her choice of conducting both internal and external affairs. Sihanouk believed Cambodia is united unless with the "long-standing tradition of monarchy" (Sihanouk 1958). On numerous occasions, Sihanouk would express his view on the U.S. by penning down his opinions in articles including *Realites Cambodgiennes*, the *Foreign Affair*, *Le Monde Politique*, etc.. In the *Foreign Affair* 1958, Sihanouk wrote that the U.S. seemed to be confused by Cambodia's notion of "Neutral" which differs from that of Egypt or Indonesia (Sihanouk 1958; Smith



1965, p.137). In his interview with *The National Guardian* in early 1965, he pointed out his stance about Cambodia embracing *Neutrality* (Sihanouk and Worthy 1965, p.3).

Lon Nol, similar to Sihanouk, strived for territorial integrity of the country whilst embraced the notion of Buddhism. In many accounts, Lon Nol was described by his passion for Buddhism (Kann 1970).<sup>13</sup> Corfield recorded that Lon Nol and his beliefs in Buddhism, as well as astrology, had cost him approximately US\$20,000 per month in astrological fortune-telling (Corfield 1994, p.41). And with no doubt, Lon Nol did not forget to incorporate his belief in Buddhism into his vision for the Khmer Republic. In *Neo-Khemrisme*, Lon Nol repeatedly mentioned the principles within Buddhism of “sincerity and justice”, “the sense of peace and brotherhood” that Cambodia had long been embracing since ancient times along with the legacy of the Angkorian Kings (Maréchal Lon Nol 1972, p.2).

The vision for Lon Nol’s nation-building was to lead Cambodia toward the modern idea of Democracy. The arrival of Communism in Cambodia is “...the dismissal of the monks into the rice field followed by fratricidal war... of the Atheist ...” (Maréchal Lon Nol 1972, p.3); that is the equivalent to the end of Buddhism and the 2000 years of the ancient Khmer civilization. Thus, one thing that is crystal clear for Lon Nol’s political belief —Communism is most definitely not for Cambodia. And in contrast to Sihanouk’s Neutrality, Lon Nol turned his compass toward the U.S. for military assistance (Osborne 1994, p.209).

**Leadership Style** – Hermann explains, “leaders willing to challenge constraints often come to their positions with an agenda and seek ‘true believers’ ...They are interested in controlling the flow of information...unless they pertain to or affect the implementation of their agenda.” (Rhodes, Rod, and Paul’T. 2014) Sihanouk appeared as Hermann termed—“go it alone” and sought to challenge the constraints and restrictions in the environment. A clear example of this is when Sihanouk abolished his throne to seek more freedom in his political career; everyone took the news by surprise. No one was aware he had such intentions; not even his parents (Osborne 1994, p.91) He was the very first king in Cambodia’s history to challenge such a tradition.

Yet, there is another pattern of leadership style besides the *challenging* type; that is, those who instead “focus on respecting constraints often seek out other perspectives, are interested in diverse opinions, work well in a team, and focus on building consensus and working towards compromise.” (Rhodes, Rod, and Paul’T. 2014) Not necessarily contrasting to the challenging style, but to some extent, Lon Nol’s style is leaning towards the *respecting* type compared to Sihanouk’s. In other words, Lon Nol was not as “go it alone” as Sihanouk.

Although being known as an introvert compared to his brother Lon Non, Lon Nol had his share of popularity among his military men and Cambodian citizens due to his dedication and passionate belief in Buddhism (Rust 2016, p.120; Thomson 1970). Furthermore, in addition to Lon Non, in respect to bureaucratic life, there were several men that Lon Nol placed his trust, especially his military officers, including Prince Sirik Matak, Srey Saman, Sak Suthskan (CIA 1973b; Thomson 1970). And compared to Sihanouk, Lon Nol might have put his trust too much on his subordinates, to the point that the matter of accuracy in the reporting on actual situations was being questioned

by from outside the circles of the government (CIA 1973b). Issues of corruption and nepotism soon plagued the Lon Nol administration (Sutsakhan 1980, pp.36-42).

***Motivation for Position*** – the research by Hermann suggests that “aggressive leaders are high in need for power...distrust of others, nationalistic...” while leaders whose motive are in high need for affiliation would be more likely to trust others, “low in nationalism, and likely to exhibit little belief in their own ability to control the events in which they are involved.” (Hermann 1980b, p.8) Based on such suggestions, it can be interpreted that Lon Nol’s motive is in need for affiliation; to a certain extent judging by the way he placed his trust in his subordinates. However, this is by no mean ensure that his level of nationalism was any lower than that of Sihanouk’s. Lon Nol was famous for his nationalism that was deeply embedded within his faith in Buddhism (Kann 1970). Did this condition of being nationalistic make him an aggressive leader and instead make Sihanouk the leader in need for affiliation? Even though driving by the motive to ward off communism from Cambodia led Lon Nol’s government to drift closer towards the U.S., caused further fracture inside the divided society, and threatened the stability of his new republic, Lon Nol did not shy away from his “war of resistance.”

***Reaction to Stress*** – With merely five years of administration, there are a handful of records regarding Lon Nol’s private’s life compared to Sihanouk. Unlike Sihanouk, Lon Nol’s artistic side was rarely heard of.<sup>14</sup> Apart from being referred to as an introvert that became even more reserved as time went by, Lon Nol as Thomson wrote, “settled for his quiet home in the country, away from even the modestly fashionable areas;” and compared with Sihanouk who enjoyed being welcomed and applauded by crowds, Lon Nol often travelled with minimal crowds of armed forces; “the quiet, almost aloof general.” (Thomson 1970) Similarly, Corfield and Kann also note Lon Nol’s modesty including the passion Lon Nol had for the Buddhist way of life, how Lon Nol situated his villa far from crowds and other high ranking elites, and how “Buddhist monks are always welcome.” (Kann 1970) Sharing Buddhist wisdom and great vision through meditations appeared to be more of Lon Nol’s preference rather than penning down political articles, directing films or other sources of entertainment; it was the passive life that he embraced.

### ***Background Factors***

***Past Political Experiences***— the young Lon Nol was born in a civil servant family in Prey Veng province during the French administration in 1913 (Osborne 1994, p.74). Kerr penned down brief information of Lon Nol’s career paying tribute to the late Lon Nol as follows. He was well-educated at the Lycee Chasseloup-Laubat in Saigon; the high school shared by other elites including Sihanouk and Sirik Matak. Lon Nol served in an administrative post for almost ten years then became the governor of Kratie province. His experience in administrative service soon earned him a higher post as a director of administrative service in Phnom Penh in 1949. He became a lieutenant colonel in 1952; then a military Chief by 1955. As he rose to be lieutenant general in 1961, Lon Nol gained trust from Sihanouk due to his contribution in fighting for the country’s independence (Kerr 1985). Up until the overthrow of Sihanouk in 1970, Lon Nol remained the most powerful man second

only to Sihanouk (Thomson 1970).

*How he was recruited into the position*—Lon Nol was known for his utmost loyalty to the prince since his early days as the Chief of State. Before Sihanouk travelled to Peking and Moscow, Lon Nol was entrusted as the Prime Minister to the new government to restore the fragments inside Cambodia (Shawcross 2002, p.113). Until the last moment, as Osborne describes, Lon Nol was threatened by Sirik Matak to join in the Coup or be shot; the initial plan also included the killing of the prince but Lon Nol refused the latter option (Osborne 1994, pp.202-216). Despite his position as the leader of the Republic, Lon Nol maintained his humble character regardless of his newfound power (Thomson 1970).

*Political Context when he starts Ruling*—What Lon Nol inherited from the Sangkum was a country with a troubled economy and divided public opinion. Now that he embarked on uprooting Communism from the Country, financial assistance from the Communist bloc was no longer an option. The Republic government heavily depended on U.S. assistance. The corruption among the elites was still looming over the new government while the society was torn between the republican, the pro-Sihanouk, the communists, and the U.S. bombardment. The complications and tricky political issues even Sihanouk had long been tackling for almost two decades still needed some time to sort out.

## **6. Conclusion**

Cambodia under Sihanouk, as the Chief of state, endorsed the foreign policy of neutrality; this stance continued through the early stage of the Second Indochina War. It was until the late 1960s that the neutrality came crumbling down along with the Sihanouk administration in 1970. Lon Nol switched to aligning with the U.S. and embarked on *War of resistance* against Communism. Nonetheless, the later administration could not survive the aftermath of the Second Indochina War and ultimately collapsed in 1975.

With regards to various components that build up traits of leadership, the background in which Sihanouk, as the first ruler of the new Cambodia after decades of colonial rule, handed him a favourable condition to accumulate enough support and power from his people to self-design the foreign policy for his new country. Meanwhile, Lon Nol, the successor of the popular prince, came into power amidst the chaos both domestically and externally; despite his effort in trying to create what he labelled *Neo-Khmerisme*— a new route to democracy built upon the ash of the Sangkum, the regime, however, lasted too short and was followed by decades of civil war and genocide leaving little evidence for further analyzation on his leadership compared to Sihanouk.

Hence, without observing deeper on the underlying factors that he had been going through in his political life, one would simply assume that Lon Nol was a crude and brutal leader. However, as a military man in most of his political life, Lon Nol was not involved as much in the political struggles and pressures from both blocs as his predecessor, Sihanouk. Instead of standing alone, Lon Nol's foreign policy sought alignment with the greater power, the U.S. to combat communism inside the

country. His style of leadership was to seek affiliation instead of isolation.

In answering what went wrong in the Lon Nol's foreign policy, the strongest evidence points to the context of when he gained his role as the leader of the country; the burden he inherited from the Sihanouk government was too great for him to repair within merely a few years. Consequently, Lon Nol, the person who upheld Buddhism principles and appeared as a humble introvert, instead, went down in history whose regime torn with civil war, bombing raids, and violence; and was ousted by the Khmer Rouge forces that stained Cambodia's history with tragedy and bloodshed of genocide. It is the differences in various underlying factors experienced by Lon Nol and Sihanouk that forbid them from taking the same course concerning the foreign policy of the country in the Second Indochina War.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For further details on the notion of Neutrality see Sihanouk's speech in Abdulgani, Roeslan (1981). *The Bandung connection: the Asia-Africa conference in Bandung in 1955*. Gunung Agung. 34.
- <sup>2</sup> See details in *Le Programme de L'Aide Economique Americaine au Cambodge 1955-1959*, Administration de Cooperation Internationale Mission D'Aide Americaine au Cambodge, (Phnom Penh, 1960).
- <sup>3</sup> *Le Rejet de L'Aide Americaine: Trois Exposés de S.A.R Le Prince Norodom Sihanouk*. Ministry of Information of Cambodia, 15.
- <sup>4</sup> For further detail on dispute over the Preah Vihear Temple see UN Security Council, *Security Council resolution 189 (1964) [Complaint concerning acts of aggression against the territory and civilian population of Cambodia]*, 4 June 1964, S/RES/189 (1964).
- <sup>5</sup> See further detail in the official Website of Constitutional Council of Cambodia, [https://www.ccc.gov.kh/historyccc\\_en.php](https://www.ccc.gov.kh/historyccc_en.php).
- <sup>6</sup> National Archive of Cambodia (NAC). Box 363. Collections of Constitutions of Cambodia 1947-1993, [ប្រជុំរដ្ឋធម្មនុញ្ញកម្ពុជា១៩៤៧-១៩៩៣], pp 27-47.
- <sup>7</sup> Maréchal Lon Nol. (1972). *Néo-Khmerisme* (Phnom Penh, 1972), 5.
- <sup>8</sup> A secret Letter from U.S embassy in Phnom Penh to Washington on December 15, 1970, recorded the conversation between General Haig, Lt. Col Bonner with General Lon Nol. The letter wrote about Lon Nol's optimistic view on the ongoing civil war despise being lost in a few battles previously. Lon Nol mentioned the rice harvesting was for the use of population; requesting further support of heavy weapons and other artillery. See Digital National Security Archive (DNSA) Collection: Vietnam War II, 1969-1975. "Conversation with Lon Nol." Declassified document E.O. 12958. Approved release date: September 05, 2002.
- <sup>9</sup> Memorandum of Conversation Between Kissinger and President Lon Nol, October 22, 1973; JOHN NEGROPONTE NEGOTIATIONS FILES 1972-1973. Vol. II; Box 3; National Security Council Files: POW MIA: Vietnam Subject Files. <http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/2019-07/Conversation%20>

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Henry%20Kissinger%20and%20President%20Lon%20Nol%2022%20Oct.%201972.pdf. (October 1, 2019). See also National Archive of Cambodia. Box 332. "Declaration of Marshal Lon Nol, President of the Khmer Republic, after the Paris Conference Held on February 26, 1973.

<sup>10</sup> For original concept see Waltz's *Man, the State and War*.

<sup>11</sup> For further explanation on personal characteristics of political leaders see also *The Oxford handbook of political leadership* by Rhodes, Rod AW, and Paul T. Hart, eds. (2014).

<sup>12</sup> WEIRD states, according to Rappoport, refer to states in which majority of psychological studies have focused on including: Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic. For further explanation see "Cognitive Approaches to Foreign Policy Analysis" by Aaron Rappoport (2017).

<sup>13</sup> See also Thomson, John R. (1970). "Lon Nol: Cambodia's Confident Leader." *Human Events*, Sep 12 1970, DNSA p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> For further details on Sihanouk's artistic side, see also Saphan, LinDa. (2013). "Norodom Sihanouk and the political agenda of Cambodian music, 1955–1970." *The Newsletter* 64: 4-5.

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