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CRISIS IN JULY

REPORT ON THE ARMED INSURRECTION :

ITS ORIGINS, HISTORY, AND AFTERMATH

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CRISIS IN JULY

A Report on the Armed Insurrection: Its Origins, History, and Aftermath

INTRODUCTION

Since the events of early July, there has been a general lack of information concerning the circumstances and contributing factors leading up to and including the actions taken on 5-6 July 1997 in Cambodia. No reliable report exists concerning the prelude to the breakdown of civil order, the nature of the fighting in Phnom Penh, or the results of the investigations after the disturbance was over.

The confusion among Cambodian citizens as well as among interested parties in the international community as to what precisely occurred has been compounded by erroneous information presented by the foreign media. Some of the misinterpretations of events by reporters who are based outside of Cambodia happened because of the lack of knowledge about the local situation. Known as "pack journalism," these reporters simply reflect the views of other reporters who are supposedly more knowledgeable about Cambodia. For the correspondents who are based in Cambodia, they frequently have their own axe to grind. Sympathetic with those who are fluent in foreign languages such as English and French and who have lived abroad, many of these reporters developed political affiliations during the 1980s with those who fought in the border war against the People's Republic of Kampuchea. Those affiliations continue to this day, and many reporters inside and outside Cambodia make their bias obvious. Following the reporting over the past four years, the news can hardly be called objective.

Soon after the fighting, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation issued a White Paper in order to clarify how the extreme situation developed over the previous year and a half.¹ The principle thesis of the paper was that the coalition government, which had worked surprisingly well in the early years of the Royal Government, came under great strain because of a calculated policy of provocation on the part of some extremists in the government, led by Prince Ranariddh.² The White Paper detailed a number of turning points which led to a deterioration of the political and security situation in Cambodia.

In view of the press reporting about events in Cambodia and the reaction of some foreign governments, the strategy of confrontation adopted by Prince Ranariddh produced some results. He was able to engineer a military confrontation, and make it appear as if the rest of the government was attempting to have a coup d'etat. His collegial relations with the press appear to have paid large dividends as much of the media accepted uncritically his account of events.

Although it is widely believed among the international press that the Second Prime Minister, Samdech Hun Sen, had a coup in early July, the facts are quite the contrary. While the purpose of the White Paper was to outline the political and security decisions on the part of Prince Ranariddh and his cohorts that led to the crisis in July, it is the purpose of this paper to give a proper history of the events in late June and July. We will use not only the public sources that are available to any careful and objective analyst, but also documents captured after the fighting that will contribute to a greater understanding of what happened and why.

In view of the unparalleled uniformity of press reporting about the history of the conflict, and the fact that some of Cambodia's most severe critics in foreign governments are relying solely on the biased reporting and the highly suspect word of a small number of renegades who have placed themselves in self-imposed exile, any objective observer should be interested in considering a documented paper, subject to external verification. If fairness and truth have any merit, then the critics must put aside their bias and consider the facts and documentation presented in this paper.

I. BACKGROUND TO DANGER

After a year long build-up in tension, as documented in the White Paper, the months of May and June witnessed a deteriorating security situation. The key events leading up to the clash on 5-6 July includes the following:

A. Prince Ranariddh's Illegal Importation of "Spare Parts"

On 26 May 1997, nearly three tons of weapons and ammunition were seized on the docks in Sihanoukville as being illegally imported into Cambodia. The documents associated with the shipment labelled the goods as "spare parts" and were addressed to Prince Ranariddh.³ The former First Prime Minister later claimed that it was his right to import the munitions and linked them to his bodyguard units. However, he did not explain why, if it was perfectly legal for him to import the weapons without any other authorization, he chose to deceptively describe the arms and ammunition as "spare parts."

In fact, it was not legal for him to bring an arsenal into the country without authorization. According to General Choa Phirun, head of the Ministry of National Defence's Department of Material and Technique (in charge of the storage and management of arms and ammunition), Prince Ranariddh's "spare parts" arrived without the "knowledge of, and consultation with, my department, and without the approval of the General Staff, the Ministry of National Defence, the co-commanders-in-chief, or the Royal Government."⁴

As became evident after the fighting was over, in addition to the one shipment of arms that was seized, there were other

illegal shipments of arms which Prince Ranariddh brought into Cambodia undetected.

However, the build-up of his bodyguard units and the increase quantitatively and qualitatively of their armaments led to increasingly belligerent actions. On the night of 17 June 1997, fighting erupted on the streets of Phnom Penh between the bodyguards of Prince Ranariddh and those of the Chief of the National Police, Gen. Hok Lundy. The two officials' residences are close to one another, and the fighting occurred in the area between the houses. Although Ranariddh's security adviser, Serey Kosal, later claimed that this action was an attack on Prince Ranariddh and that no fighting occurred at Hok Lundy's house, reporters noted the next day that shell casings littered the street in front of the residence of the Chief of the National Police.

B. Illegal Troop Movements and Establishment of Illegal Garrisons Near Phnom Penh

The clashes that occurred were only surface manifestations of greater insecurities due to the illegal movement of troops toward Phnom Penh. Prior to the fighting in early July in Phnom Penh, there were many indications that Prince Ranariddh and his most trusted military advisers, General Nhiek Bun Chhay, General Ho Sok, General Chao Sambath, and Serey Kosal, were engaged in a military build-up in the nation's capital.

The transfer of soldiers to increase Prince Ranariddh's forces in the capital had been occurring months prior to the fighting.⁵ It was no secret and a cursory review of the pro-Ranariddh foreign press proves that the arrival of these forces was done openly. For example, according to an article in the Phnom Penh Post on May 3-15 1997, a number of Khmer Rouge soldiers had been brought into Phnom Penh as bodyguards for Ranariddh-loyalist Serey Kosal.

According to the newspaper article, the soldiers from former KR division 505 were brought into Phnom Penh at least since February 1997.⁶ Although the article did not know how many KR soldiers had been redeployed from the northwest to the capital, it identified the Khmer Rouge soldiers as being deployed not only as Serey Kosal's bodyguards, but also at FUNCINPEC party headquarters, Prince Ranariddh's residence, and at an otherwise unidentified "safe house."⁷ Thus, one witnessed the unusual situation that, for the first time since 1979, armed Khmer Rouge soldiers were on the streets of Phnom Penh.

The arrival of Khmer Rouge soldiers in large numbers in Phnom Penh in February was only part of a larger redeployment of troops to Phnom Penh on the part of Prince Ranariddh and his clique. The Royal Government was aware of other troop movements - primarily from units stationed in the northwest to Phnom Penh or areas adjacent to the capital. These movements include:

* In late May, 559 soldiers from Khmer Rouge Division 3 were moved from Kampot Province to the Tang Krasang Military Barracks, the base of Prince Ranariddh's bodyguards. Others in the government complained about the movement of these soldiers being moved to Phnom Penh and being garrisoned with Ranariddh's bodyguards. After the Joint Commission on Conflict Resolution met on the issue, there was agreement to move the KR out of the compound. However, although the KR soldiers were removed, they were relocated just 40 metres from the barracks.⁸ They remained at that location until the fighting on 5-6 July 1997.

* In early June, government officials became aware of a continuing build-up of forces at key locations in Phnom Penh, including the residences of General Nhiek Bun Chhay, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF), and General Chao Sambath, the Deputy Director of Intelligence for the General Staff. For example, not only was there an unauthorized increase in the number of bodyguards at the house of General Chao Sambath, but heavy weapons were being deployed to his residence as well. These weapons, which did not have official sanction, included crew-served heavy machine guns such as the 12.7 and K-57 machine guns and the DKZ-82 anti-tank weapons. This military build-up included houses adjacent to Chao Sambath's residence, as well as a nearby pagoda. This concentration of forces was later to play an important role in the breakdown of civil order in Phnom Penh in July.

* On 23 & 24 June 1997, 74 soldiers from Divisions 3 and 12 were arrested in Battambang. Wearing civilian clothes, they were being transported in three vehicles to Phnom Penh.⁹

* The issue of Khmer Rouge troops being stationed at the Tang Krasang barracks was not finished with the case of the 559 soldiers moved in late May and early June. On 24 June 1997, a former Khmer Rouge Colonel, Phon Pheap, held a press conference, stating that he and nine other Khmer Rouge soldiers had fled the Tang Krasang barracks where a number of KR soldiers were hidden. He charged that they had been brought from their posts in the northwest camps on 24 April by orders of General Nhiek Bun Chhay.¹⁰ A subsequent inquiry at the military base was inconclusive, although General Mol Roeup, who conducted the investigation, charged that, since everyone already knew that the inquiry was underway, the KR had been moved away from Tang Krasang prior to the inquiry.¹¹

* By June 25 1997, the situation had become so bad that government officials revealed that an investigation was underway to determine the number and location of the illegal soldiers. Secretary of State for Information, Khieu Kanharith, stated that the Khmer Rouge infiltrators may be more than those brought in from areas now affiliated with the Royal Government -- he stated that "There are indications that some are Khmer Rouge commanders from

Anlong Veng."

* In late June, orders for the transfer of troops were intercepted. The letter, written on FUNCINPEC Party stationery, was from the Party President in Banteay Meanchey province to Ranariddh loyalist General Nhiek Bun Chhay. It announced the transfer of 690 army soldiers, police and Khmer Rouge to Kampong Speu Province, near Phnom Penh. Dated 21 June 1997, this was a clear violation of law as the transfer was not being done with authorization from the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces but at the request of Ranariddh security adviser Serey Kosal.¹²

* On 27 June 1997, the Second Prime Minister made public a complaint from the French Embassy. The Embassy reported that a number of Khmer Rouge were being housed at the Funcinpec Party Headquarters, which is adjacent to the Embassy grounds.¹³ In fact, the French Ambassador had made the complaint to the Foreign Minister, H.E. Ung Huot. The Foreign Minister, in turn, complained to Serey Kosal. The latter wrote a letter of apology to the French Ambassador, but did not remove the soldiers.

* By 30 June the Second Prime Minister issues what the Cambodia Daily calls "his strongest warning yet" concerning the issue of Khmer Rouge in the capital: "If necessary, we have to take actions against any place that contains illegal Khmer Rouge forces."

* In early July, the District Chief of Ang Snuol in Kompong Speu province (near Phnom Penh) became aware that an illegal barracks had been created at Wat Phniet. Since these illegal forces were under the command of General Nhiek Bun Chhay, he was requested to dismantle the base. The General refused to do so. The presence of this illegal military installation played an important role in the outbreak of fighting on 5-6 July.

* On 2 July 1997, fighting erupted at the Preak Taten Naval Base, 25 kilometres northwest of the capital on the Tonle Sap River. The basis of the outbreak of hostilities was that a number of troops who been illegally moved from Oddar Meanchey province to the naval base near Phnom Penh had not been paid for months. RCAF forces were called in to quell the fighting.

* On the eve of the breakdown of order in Phnom Penh, there were reports being published in local newspapers concerning unusual troop movements toward Phnom Penh. According to one account, an official of the Takeo Provincial Governor's Office reported that forces belonging to Ho Sok and the Funcinpec military were travelling on National Routes 2 and 3 toward Phnom Penh. He reported that they were travelling by taxi and were wearing civilian clothes.¹⁴

The illegality of these unauthorized movements of troops to Phnom Penh and adjacent areas cannot be in doubt. They were contrary to an order signed by the co-prime ministers (who also are co-Commanders-in-Chief of the RCAF) on 26 February 1997 which governed the movement of troops. Approval of troop movement could only be done with the order of the senior command. In addition, the recruitment of soldiers and provision of weapons without proper authority was prohibited.¹⁵

Another order violated by these troop movements was an order issued by the Chief of the General Staff of the RCAF in April. General Ke Kim Yan instructed all units of the armed forces that all units must stay at their base, and no troop movements were allowed without orders from the General Chief of Staff.¹⁶ In addition, the transfer violated the Order of the Joint Commission on Conflict Resolution, signed by eight senior officials from the Ministry of National Defense, RCAF, and the Ministry of the Interior. Finally, movement of police without authorization from the Ministry of Interior was strictly prohibited.¹⁷

II. OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES ON 5-6 JULY

A. Just Who Called for a Coup?

On 5 July 1997, Cambodians awoke to a Voice of America broadcast in which Prince Ranariddh accused Hun Sen of initiating a coup d'etat. No one was more surprised at this information than the Second Prime Minister, who was on holiday at the beach resort of Vung Tau in Vietnam.

Much has been made of the locations of the co-prime ministers on 5 July, when the fighting erupted. But the manner in which the co-prime ministers traded locales -- with one being out of the country at the start of hostilities and the other leaving the country just prior to the action -- is a good indication of who was to blame for the fighting.

Since the inception of the coalition government in 1993, it has always been the practice, prior to the departure of either Prime Minister from the country, that notice must be given to both the co-prime minister as well as to the Council of Ministers.¹⁸ This notice includes details of the travel plans. In keeping with this well-established procedure, the Second Prime Minister, Samdech Hun Sen, notified the rest of the government that he would be on vacation from 1 July 1997 until 7 July 1997. The Second Prime Minister has three children studying abroad in the United States, Singapore, and France, and all would be on vacation at that time. Therefore, he gave notice that he would be on holiday with his family in the beach resort town of Vung Tau in Vietnam for the week of his absence.

On the other hand, Prince Norodom Ranariddh gave notice to the government that he would depart for France on 9 July 1997. However, his plans abruptly changed, for on 4 July 1997 -- the

eve of the outbreak of hostilities -- the First Prime Minister suddenly and secretly left the country.

In the early hours of Saturday morning, 5 July 1997, when the Second Prime Minister was informed of the crisis brewing in Phnom Penh, he made arrangements to fly back to Cambodia. He arrived in Phnom Penh at about 10:00 am.

By itself, and without any other documentation, this chronology gives the lie to the allegation made by Prince Ranariddh, broadcasting at 5:30 am from some unknown location via Voice of America, that the Second Prime Minister was staging a coup. First, if it had been Hun Sen's intention to stage a coup, he hardly would have been on vacation abroad. He would have been in Phnom Penh to manage the actions. How could Prince Ranariddh claim that Hun Sen was holding a coup if he was not even in the country when the former First Prime Minister made the accusation?

Second, the sequence of events suggest that it was Prince Ranariddh, having been in the country for a number of days while Hun Sen was absent, that set in motion the plan for confrontation and conflict. Having done so, he fled the country prior to the outbreak of hostilities so that he could reach a safe haven so that he could place the blame for the fighting on the Second Prime Minister.

Thus, the common perception in some circles is that Hun Sen plotted and held a coup d'etat in early July. This is based on two factors: first, Prince Ranariddh made the assertion and it was widely reported; and second, the Second Prime Minister was in Cambodia during the fighting and thus gave the appearance that he organized the action in the absence of Prince Ranariddh. In fact, the accusation was made over the Voice of America and troops started to be deployed outside of the Tang Krasang barracks while Hun Sen was out of the country. It was Prince Ranariddh who was best able to orchestrate the breakdown of civil order since he was present in Phnom Penh prior to the start of hostile actions. As this chronology will show, his extremist elements precipitated the fighting.

B. July 5: Prelude to War

Two illegal military strongpoints played key roles in the breakdown of civil order on 5 July: the illegal garrison at Wat Phniet in Kompong Speu province and the forces in and around the residence of General Chao Sambath.

1. Wat Phniet: As mentioned previously, the District Chief of the Ang Snuol District had previously complained about the establishment of an illegal military post at Wat Phniet. General Nhiek Bun Chhay was asked to remove the soldiers and place them in the legal barracks at Tang Krasang. He refused to do so. Thus on the night of 4 July and extending into the early morning hours of 5 July, the Chief of Staff of the RCAF, General Ke Kim Yan repeatedly attempted to negotiate with General Nhiek Bun Chhay

in order that the illegal garrison be closed and the forces moved to Tang Krasang. His repeated pleas were met with repeated delays by General Nhiek Bun Chhay. This dialogue went on all night, and finally the Chief of Staff issued an ultimatum to General Nhiek Bun Chhay: by 5:30 am the base had to be removed.

By 5:00, it was apparent that General Nhiek Bun Chhay was stalling. General Ke Kim Yan ordered that Wat Phniet be surrounded, and at 6:30 the RCAF entered the camp and met no resistance. The RCAF forces began disarming the illegal soldiers. They arrested 154 illegal troops and seized 236 firearms and two armoured personnel carriers.

2. Residence of General Chao Sambath: As was mentioned previously, there had been a build-up of soldiers and weapons both in and around General Chao Sambath's house in early June. This included the deployment of 80 soldiers to a pagoda near his residence. However, the soldiers at the pagoda were not in uniform, and when their presence became known, it spurred an investigation in early June. Even General Tea Chamrath, the FUNCINPEC Co-Minister of Defense, did not know who these soldiers were, and he asked the Deputy Director of the Military Police to investigate. Ironically, General Sao Sokha initially thought these soldiers belonged to a RCAF unit. However, when he went to the pagoda, the Deputy Director of the Military Police determined that the soldiers were at the pagoda under orders from General Chao Sambath.

General Sao Sokha reported the problem of the illegal increase in troops and arms at General Chao Sambath's house both to the Joint Commission on Conflict Resolution and the Unified Command of Phnom Penh (composed of the District Chief, the Chief of Military Police in the District, and the Chief of Police for the District). After several weeks elapsed, during which the Joint Commission deliberated and attempted to resolve the situation, no results were forthcoming. Thereafter, the Unified Command decided to act. At 8:00 am on 5 July, the Deputy Chief of the Unified Command, Phnom Penh, went to General Chao Sambath's house to discuss the problem. At that time, the General refused to discuss the matter or allow any investigation on the premises. After the Deputy Chief left, General Chao Sambath left his house to go to the Tang Krasang Military Base.

At approximately 11:00 am on 5 July, the First Deputy Governor of Phnom Penh, H.E. Chea Sophara, called upon the Military Police to negotiate with the Deputy Director of Intelligence, General Chao Sambath. At that time, General Men Vichit of the General Staff of the Military Police telephoned General Sambath. The latter stated that he would not turn over any of the arms at his residence and then turned off his telephone.

General Men Vichit then ordered the Deputy Director of the Military Police to go to the residence to negotiate a surrender of the illegal weapons. At noon of 5 July, General Sao Sokha went to the house of Chao Sambath. Later, he was joined by the

District Chief, who used a loud speaker to address the troops inside the residence of Chao Sambath.

3. Seizure of Pochentong Airport: After the action at Wat Phniet on Saturday morning, 5 July, troops under the command of General Nhiek Bun Chhay but who were based at Pochentong Airport seized the airport and shut it down. In so doing, they arrested a number of officials. No further movement of aircraft occurred, and these soldiers denied access to everyone. At about 5:00 pm on the 5th of July, more of Nhiek Bun Chhay's troops moved out from the Tang Krasang Military Base, moved down National Route 4, joined the other elements loyal to Prince Ranariddh at Pochentong in order to reinforce their position.

This was an important step for the forces of Prince Ranariddh. In any crisis situation, control of the airports is an important military objective, and this objective was easily obtained as there was no significant force to oppose them. The airport of the occupation had particular significance since its closure could mean that the Second Prime Minister could not return to the country by normal means.

4. Attempts to Defuse the Tense Situation: As reported earlier, by mid-morning on 5 July, the Second Prime Minister returned from holiday at the Vung Tau beach resort, flying by helicopter to his residence in Takmau, south of Phnom Penh. By late morning, he made a public address on television, appealing for calm. Hun Sen asked all military units to return to their barracks. For those troops who were following false or illegal orders, he assured them that if they returned peacefully to their respective bases, no harm would come to them.¹⁹

Later in the day, Deputy Prime Minister and Co-Minister of the Interior, H.E. Sar Kheng (CPP), discussed the rising tensions with his ministerial counterpart, H.E. You Hockry (Funcinpec). At the Ministry of the Interior, both ministers had enjoyed a cordial working relationship over the previous four years. However, in the resulting conversations, no resolution of the problem could be found.

5. The Fighting Begins: At about 3:00 pm on the 5th, Military Police (MP) approached the house of General Chao Sambath, where the considerable number of soldiers and arms had been concentrated without authorization. They came under fire, not only from those inside his residence, but also from adjacent buildings and from the pagoda. Four military police were injured in the shooting. The MP's then brought a T-55 tank up to the residence in an effort to show the serious nature of the extremists' actions. Using an Ambrush anti-tank weapon, those inside the residence blew the tread off the tank, thereby disabling it. The Military Police did not attack the residence as it was in a heavily populated area and they were fearful of causing civilian casualties. They therefore informed the local residents that they should leave the area.

The action at the house of General Chao Sambath triggered bombardments against a variety of targets in Phnom Penh, including targets in Toul Kork and Chamkarmon. The firing emanated from the residences of General Chao Sambath, General Nhiek Bun Chhay, the Pochentong Airport area, and the Tang Krasaing Military Base. Included among the weapons used were DK 82 mm mortars, DK 75 guns mounted on armoured personnel carriers, and 100 mm guns mounted on tanks.

As night fell on 5 July, the sporadic fighting stopped.

C. 6 July : The Decisive Day

All during the night of 5-6 July, the national command, led by the Second Prime Minister, reviewed the situation. At 1:30 in the morning of 6 July, it was decided that a general "mopping up" operation should be carried out that day, starting at 5:30 am. The targets included the Tang Krasaing Barracks, Pochentong area, and the houses of General Nhiek Bun Chhay and General Chao Sambath.

However, the extremist forces of Prince Ranariddh gained the upper hand on the morning of 6 July as two columns of tanks and soldiers moved out of the Tang Krasaing Barracks at 4:00 am. One column of troops moved toward the capital on National Route 4, and the other column followed a parallel path using the railroad tracks. When the government authorities realized that Nhiek Bun Chhay had stolen a march on them, they ordered the Military Police deployed around the house of General Chao Sambath to redeploy in a blocking position to prevent the two columns from entering Phnom Penh.

As Nhiek Bun Chhay's forces advanced along Route 4, they captured an arms warehouse which stored much of the illegal shipment of arms which Prince Ranariddh had attempted to bring into the country as "spare parts." The Special Force guarding that warehouse were too few in number to successfully defend the position against the advancing column, so they retreated to the line prepared by the Military Police to block the columns entry into the capital.

By 8:00 the forces of Nhiek Bun Chhay had reached the Pet Lok Sang (Buddhist Hospital) and the Tralauk Bek (two Lions) intersection. Fighting began in earnest, with the Military Police holding their position against a superior force.

Realizing the perilous situation the government forces were in, Hun Sen ordered his bodyguard unit from Takmau to rush to join the line of defense. This unit, attached to Regiment 70, was used because other elements of the RCAF were deployed in the city to maintain security, and it would have taken time to bring in units stationed in the provinces. At 9:30 am, his unit, supported by three tanks and three armoured personnel carriers, arrived to support the Military Police and Special Force. During the

fighting, two of their tanks were destroyed. The fighting raged all morning.

By early afternoon, the forces located at Prince Ranariddh's residence and along Street 214 where it is located began firing from their positions. Forces belonging to Serey Kosal moved down Street 214 and attacked the house of the Minister in charge of the Offices of the Council of Ministers, H.E. Sok An. They were forced back, and government forces laid siege to Prince Ranariddh's house. After a short while, the forces along Street 214 surrendered to the competent authorities.

At about the same time, at 2:30 on Sunday afternoon, the extremist forces located at the Funcinpec Party Headquarters near the Chroy Changva Bridge opened fire on government security forces in the area. The main purpose of those forces was to block any RCAF reinforcements coming across the bridge in order to reinforce the city. However, within a short period of time, the extremists were defeated.

By 3:30 that afternoon, more reinforcements came to assist the Hun Sen bodyguards and Military Police to the western outskirts of the city. Forces from Military Region 2 arrived, following their operations against the Funcinpec Party Headquarters. Also, Brigade 444 from Military Region 3, supported by 6 tanks, arrived from Kampong Speu. These forces advanced along National Route 4, and attacked General Nhiek Bun Chhay's forces from the rear. Heavy casualties were inflicted upon the extremist elements from the Tang Krasaing Military Base.

By late afternoon, forces were shifted to subdue hostile forces at the houses of the two generals. By 6:00 pm, elements of Brigade 444 had taken the residence of General Chao Sambath, and by 7:00 most of the extremists were either in full retreat or surrendering to the competent governmental authorities. The fighting was finished at that time.

III. After the War Was Over: Key Issues About the Insurgency

A. Whose Coup Was It?

As the record clearly implies, the events of 5-6 July should not be referred to as Hun Sen's coup -- they are more properly called Prince Ranariddh's attempted coup. The chronology of events indicates that it was Prince Ranariddh who set the wheels in motion in early July that led to the outbreak of fighting. Ironically, in his Voice of America address on the morning of 6 July, Prince Ranariddh accused "Hun Sen has taken advantage of my absence" in order to have a coup.²⁰ But who had been outside of Cambodia and who had been inside Cambodia immediately prior to the action? It was Prince Ranariddh who remained in Cambodia until the eve of the fighting, and it was the Second Prime Minister who was on holiday with his family. The beach resort of

Vung Tau is a most unlikely place from which to initiate a coup.

But there is other evidence of the intention of Prince Ranariddh to have a coup. The actions of the former First Prime Minister precipitated the fighting. The refusal by General Nhiek Bun Chhay to remove the illegal barracks at Wat Phniet, the refusal of General Chao Sambath to reduce the troop build-up at his house and turn in illegal weapons -- these events directly led to the fighting. For some, the question of who fired the first shot is an important one. The answer is clear: the renegades inside and around the residence of Chao Sambath initiated the action.

In addition, one can see that the extremists were prepared for the fighting and the government forces were not. On Saturday morning, 5 July, two actions were conducted by the Royal Government's forces and they were directed against two locations where there had been an illegal build-up of arms and troops. The Royal Government's forces deployed limited troops for limited objectives. However, who launched the first offensive action which could be understood as the first step in a coup d'etat? The seizure of the airport and the deployment of troops there out of the Tang Krasang barracks can only be understood as the first step in an offensive action against the whole government.

And who launched an offensive on Sunday morning, and who was ill-prepared to stop it? It was General Nhiek Bun Chhay's troops who left their barracks and took the fight into the city of Phnom Penh,²¹ and it was the out-numbered and out-gunned government forces that were in a defensive posture until reinforcements could arrive later in the day. If the Second Prime Minister had planned a coup, as Prince Ranariddh has alleged, would his principal forces been in the provinces rather than in the city itself? The position of Prince Ranariddh defies logic.

And just as the forces of Ranariddh were prepared for the full-scale fighting that erupted, and the government forces were not, the local authorities were not prepared for the aftermath of the fighting. A number of officials of the Royal Government have observed that, if it was the rest of the Royal Government which prepared a coup, there was no contingency plan for the aftermath. Had a coup been planned, there would have been a plan to manage security after the fighting. However, it was quite evident on Monday, 7 July, that there was a general breakdown in law and order on the streets of Phnom Penh. There was no plan to secure the city, and it took a full day to get control of the situation. This constitutes circumstantial evidence that the Second Prime Minister and officials of the Interior Ministry and Ministry of National Defense did not plan for a coup or even for the fighting that transpired.

Moreover, documentary evidence has come to light of the full scope of the plans of the insurgents. In the personal effects of General Nhiek Bun Chhay and General Ho Sok of the Interior Ministry, nearly identical maps were found which detailed Prince Ranariddh's coup de main: an attack on the residence of the

Second Prime Minister. It was part of their plan to kill Hun Sen as part of their overthrow of the legal government.²²

Also, other evidence was uncovered regarding this aspect of Prince Ranariddh's plan. After the fighting was over, a weapons cache was discovered. An informant from the Tang Krasang Military Base led investigators to a spot where a number of weapons and munitions had been buried. Their intended use was for the assault on Takmau.²³

Finally, one last bizarre piece of evidence gives testimony to the plot to kill Hun Sen. In another video camera recorded event, Ranariddh's Chief of Cabinet, Ly Tuch, is recorded telephoning a regional reporter and a foreign embassy in Phnom Penh. Wearing a shoulder holster with a pistol, Ly Tuch gives the identical message in both telephone calls: he informs the recipient of the call of the news that Hun Sen has been killed by his own bodyguards! The implication of these telephone calls is that Ranariddh's people were laying the groundwork for the story of how Hun Sen was killed so that, after they killed him, they would not get the blame.

The plan to attack Takmau and kill Hun Sen was only part of the plan for Ranariddh's coup. The attack on the house of H.E. Sok An can be seen in the same light -- to eliminate their rivals in the government.

B. Importation of Illegal Weapons and Illegal Troop Movements

After the fighting was over, more evidence came to light concerning the illegal importation of weapons into Cambodia for use by Prince Ranariddh's forces. First, there were a number of arms found in the inventory of weapons which the RCAF did not know about. Weapons such as AK-74 assault rifles with silencers, and Stinger missiles had not been introduced into the RCAF inventories. In addition, there were weapons found which, although the RCAF had them in their warehouses, had not been distributed and tight control had been exercised over them. For example, the Ambrush anti-tank weapon had been purchased in small quantities, and all of those purchased by the RCAF were still in the inventory. Yet these anti-tank missiles were used by Ranariddh's forces during the fighting. This means that they were purchased and illegally smuggled into Cambodia by Prince Ranariddh, just like the three tons of "spare parts" seized in Sihanoukville.²⁴

In addition, many other illegal weapons were found after the fighting. Country-wide, more than 10,000 weapons were found which did not appear in any inventory or registration papers. Of this number, 4,000 were discovered in the Phnom Penh area alone. While some of these undoubtedly came from the Khmer Rouge, others must have been brought in illegally.

Finally, evidence was found concerning the shipment of arms

and ammunition to the Phnom Penh area for the coup by Prince Ranariddh. After the events of early July, a number of pilots gave testimony about the transport of arms and munitions by plane from the northwest to the capital. For example, Major Prak Thonwooth, who flies Mi-17 and XU-023 aircraft, testified that on two occasions in May 1997 he flew bags of handguns and hand grenades from Battambang to the VIP arrival area of Pochentong Airport, where cars were waiting to pick them up. Another Mi-17 helicopter pilot, Youch Saren, testified that, on different occasions, he transported AK-47s, B-40 rockets, and 2 tons of AK-47 ammunition to the Tang Krasang Military Base, landing at night. These pilots also testify as to having transported regular and Khmer Rouge soldiers as well.

All of these activities were highly illegal: it has already been detailed that the importation, storage, and movement of arms and ammunition must be controlled by the proper RCAF authorities. All of these activities occurred outside the legal framework. And the movement of troops also had to be sanctioned by the higher authorities at the General Staff. This was not done.²⁵ A former Senior Military Adviser to Prince Ranariddh, General Tum Sambol, recently acknowledged that his former boss had smuggled weapons into Cambodia, and is ready to testify to that effect at trial.

C. Negotiating A Military and Political Alliance With the Khmer Rouge Hardliners: The Documentary Record

One of the key political issues, albeit one with security implications, that was raised prior to the breakdown of civil order in Phnom Penh was Prince Ranariddh's secret negotiations with the Pol Potists at Anlong Veng. Although he claimed that he was acting in the best interests of the nation in order to secure peace, in fact Prince Ranariddh was forging a political and military alliance with the KR hardliners so as to strike at his coalition partner.

Although his negotiations with the Khmer Rouge at Anlong Veng began secretly, the existence of the talks soon became known. Even after the existence of the talks became apparent, Prince Ranariddh and General Nhiek Bun Chhay attempted to keep them as secret as possible. According to the testimony of various helicopter pilots who flew Nhiek Bun Chhay to these secret talks, the pilots never knew where they were going until the helicopters were airborne.²⁶ The substance of the negotiations were kept from the rest of the Royal Government -- only Prince Ranariddh and a handful of his close associates knew what was being negotiated.

There were two issues which worried the Second Prime Minister. First, Prince Ranariddh was talking to the very people for whom the 1994 anti-Khmer Rouge law was intended to prosecute. The legislation outlawing the Khmer Rouge was designed to permit amnesty for those lower ranking officials who were not involved in the genocidal policies of the Pol Pot regime.²⁷ However, it was intended to prosecute those senior officials of Democratic

Kampuchea who had orchestrated the death and destruction of millions of their fellow citizens. Yet, Prince Ranariddh was dealing with these very elements. Included in the negotiations was Ta Mok, the notorious KR commander known as "The Butcher," who was requesting amnesty and the right to control the Anlong Veng area.²⁸ By negotiating with these notorious killers, Prince Ranariddh was breaking the law.

The second issue was that the criminal element in Anlong Veng with whom Prince Ranariddh was making his alliance were the sworn enemies of the government and of the Second Prime Minister. Unlike other rebels who had defected a year earlier, who stopped fighting to negotiate with the Royal Government, the KR hardliners at Anlong Veng continued their attacks on RCAF forces while negotiations proceeded.²⁹ At the same time that military operations continued to be carried out against the RCAF, Khmer Rouge radio continued its vitriolic attacks on Hun Sen and the Cambodian People's Party, a key party in the coalition government.³⁰

As the negotiations proceeded in secret, the Second Prime Minister became more and more concerned. Not only was the former First Prime Minister breaking the law by negotiating with the Pol Potists, but he was intending to make an alliance and bring into the government those very renegades who were dedicated to the destruction of him and his party. At this time, he repeatedly asked Prince Ranariddh to make a choice -- the First Prime Minister either had to choose Hun Sen or the long-time KR "nominal leader" Khieu Samphan. On 23 June 1997, Prince Ranariddh announced his choice: he chose Khieu Samphan.³¹

Because of the events of 5-6 July, the desired alliance between Prince Ranariddh and the hardliner Khmer Rouge never came to complete fruition. However, after the fighting, documents were uncovered which gave a more complete picture of the negotiations as they transpired. The first document in the series is a letter from Khieu Samphan to Prince Ranariddh, dated 26 June 1997. It contains two key elements: first, that the Khmer Rouge hardliners will "unite with all forces of the nation against the Vietnamese... and their puppets...." This clearly is a reference to a military alliance against the CPP, since the Khmer Rouge routinely refer to the party as "Vietnamese puppets." Second, there is a clear willingness to join the anti-CPP political front created by Prince Ranariddh, known as the National United Front (NUF). Thus, in these two points, the Khmer Rouge are entering into a political and military alliance with Prince Ranariddh.³²

On 27 June 1997, Prince Ranariddh sent back a revised version of the statement, which was prepared in Phnom Penh and had notations by both the former First Prime Minister and his principal interlocutor, General Nhiek Bun Chhay.³³ Subsequently, the final version of the joint statement was first signed by Prince Ranariddh, as well as by Nhiek Bun Chhay and Tep Khun Nal, a Minister of the Khmer Rouge Provisional Government,³⁴ and finally joined by Khieu Samphan.³⁵ The joint declaration was finished on or about 3 July 1997, but its importance was soon

diminished by events in Phnom Penh.

Although some in the media have swallowed the Ranariddh line that he was searching for peace in Cambodia, they ignore the political alliance which was being created. This was not a move to strengthen the Cambodian government -- it was designed to weaken the government while enhancing Prince Ranariddh's position.

An observer will notice that the reference to the military alliance, prominently mentioned in the first document by Khieu Samphan, is dropped from later versions of the joint declaration. One can only supposed that Prince Ranariddh was uncomfortable with making his intentions for a Khmer Rouge military alliance publicly known. This is the only logical conclusion since there can be no doubt that there already was a de facto military alliance. For example, after the fighting in Phnom Penh, General Nhiek Bun Chhay's diary was discovered. In that diary, there were the notes from a meeting in Banteay Meanchey on 4 June 1997, as well as from a meeting with the Fourth Military Region on 6 June 1997.³⁶ His assessment of forces that he could count on his side of the ledger not only includes former Khmer Rouge but also active Khmer Rouge, including those from the Anlong Veng redoubt. Thus, for Nhiek Bun Chhay, there was no doubt where the Khmer Rouge stood militarily. They were already in a de facto alliance with them.

Thus, the negotiations with the Pol Potists at Anlong Veng were not only illegal, but were designed with the dissolution of the Royal Government in mind. A military and political alliance with the old-line Khmer Rouge hardliners would strike at the core of the government. But since Prince Ranariddh was playing a reckless game, perhaps he did not care. It appears that this is what he desired.