
POL POT'S STRATEGY OF SURVIVAL

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Between 1975 and 1978 in Cambodia the Pol Pot regime conducted one of the most ruthless and widespread genocides the world has known. Pol Pot's expulsion in 1978, and his replacement by a Vietnamese-backed regime, did little to relieve the suffering of the Cambodian people. Cambodia's political situation remains unstable and efforts to negotiate a lasting peace appear futile. Suriya Chindawongse examines the origins and evolution of Pol Pot's social and political strategy and suggests that the present chaos could provide Pol Pot with the perfect opportunity to maneuver his way back into power.

Cambodia's ongoing civil war is one more chapter in the nation's long and bloody history of violent political struggle. However, the current political strife comes at a critical juncture in Cambodian history. Although international efforts are focused on negotiating a lasting peace, the Pol Pot leadership has never been more determined or more advantageously positioned to prevent this peace.¹

The Pol Pot faction of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) has struggled for political power in Cambodia since the 1950s.² Throughout four decades its political objective has remained unchanged: to drastically transform Cambodian society in order to obtain absolute control over it. The Pol Pot leadership has relied on a strategy of armed struggle and systematic terror to defeat external enemies as well as opponents within the CPK. Prolonged warfare conditions and the lack of political stability in Cambodia facilitated the Pol Pot faction's rise to power in 1975.

This article analyzes the development and implementation of Pol Pot's ideology and his strategy for achieving a monopoly of political power, focusing

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1. The original Pol Pot leadership primarily consisted of Pol Pot and the colleagues with whom he studied in France. These included Ieng Sary, Son Sen, Khieu Ponnary, and Khieu Thirinth. Other colleagues who later joined the Communist Party of Kampuchea but were not part of Pol Pot's inner core were Khieu Samphan, Hou Youn, Hu Nin, and Thiounn Mumm. There were also individuals who were not affiliated with the Paris intellectuals but who later became part of the inner core. Ta Mok, a veteran revolutionary, is an example.
2. The Pol Pot faction is commonly known as the Khmer Rouge. Prince Norodom Sihanouk coined the term in the 1960s. The term refers to the Communist Party of Kampuchea (and its predecessors, the Workers Party of Kampuchea and the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party). More specifically, the term refers to those elements of the left-wing independence movements that refused to come aboveground following the signing of the Geneva Accords in 1954. Following the triumph of the CPK in 1975, the term Khmer Rouge came to be associated with the faction of the CPK led by Pol Pot. Khmer Rouge should not be confused with Khmer, which is the Cambodian term referring to all ethnic Cambodians.

particularly on the period from 1967 to 1976. However, many of the ideological precepts discussed accurately reflect the thinking of the Pol Pot leadership both before and after that time. The first section provides a brief review of the history of the CPK until 1967. The second section discusses the ideological framework within which Pol Pot's strategy developed, as well as the Cambodian political environment and culture at that time. The third section lays out the tenets of Pol Pot's strategy. The final section analyzes the implementation of this strategy between 1967 and 1976, demonstrating Pol Pot's use of terror to overcome both external and party challenges to his quest for power and arguing that ideology may have been largely responsible for the success or failure of the various campaigns and tactics used by the CPK.

Historical Background of the Communist Party of Kampuchea

Despite the relative serenity of the Cambodian political landscape throughout the period of French colonial rule from 1863 to 1954,³ political resistance to French domination existed. Peasant rebellions, for example, revealed rural dissatisfaction with localized economic issues and foreign usurpation of the Cambodian monarch's heavenly mandate.⁴

Vietnamese nationalism fostered the first modern movements that sought to develop a post-colonial political system for Cambodia. The Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) was created in 1930 to cultivate anti-colonial sentiments throughout French Indochina.⁵ Throughout the 1930s and 1940s the Vietnamese dominated the ICP cadre and membership structure in Cambodia and dictated the activities of the ICP in Cambodia.⁶ Despite a cosmetic name

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3. King Norodom of Cambodia signed a secret agreement with French colonial authorities in 1863 inviting French intervention against Siam's enforcement of suzerain rights. The consequent de facto displacement of Siamese control by French rule was formalized in the Franco-Siamese Treaty of 1867. Department of Publicity, *Thailand: How Thailand Lost Her Territories to France* (Bangkok: Department of Publicity, 1940), 1-3. Although France transferred political power to King Sihanouk in 1953, it was the signing of the 1954 Geneva Accords that removed French control of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces—the last vestige of formal French rule.
 4. The Khmer population throughout history exhibited strong resistance to extended periods of foreign domination. Therefore these rebellions were more than spontaneous reactions to the hardships imposed by the colonial economy. See Milton E. Osborne, *The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia: Rule and Response, 1859-1905* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1969), 206-22; and V. M. Reddi, *A History of the Cambodian Independence Movement: 1865-1955* (Tirupati, India: Sri Venkatesvara University, 1970).
 5. Scholars are uncertain if the formation of the ICP indicated that the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) wanted to extend control over the entire region. Some evidence supports the view that the VCP's leadership, especially Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh), did not want to divert scarce resources to promote revolution in Cambodia, and only agreed to such a course because of intense pressure from the Comintern. In fact, the Comintern denounced the decision to create the VCP, asserting that it promoted narrow national chauvinism. As a result, the ICP was created to fulfill the Comintern's goal of promoting proletarian internationalism. See Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism: 1925 to 1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 123-41; and Gareth Porter, "Vietnamese Communist Policy Towards Kampuchea, 1930-1970," in *Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays*, ed. David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 57-98. French Indochina included Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina, Laos, and Cambodia, although the focus of anti-colonialism was in Tonkin.
 6. Ben Kiernan, "Origins of Khmer Communism," *Southeast Asian Affairs* Vol. 11 (1981): 161-63. For an in-depth analysis see Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: a History of Communism in Kampuchea, 1930 to 1975* (London: Verso, 1985), 7-33.

change in 1951,⁷ Vietnamese control continued unabated until the signing of the Geneva Accords in 1954.⁸ In the early 1950s, for example, there were 1,800 Vietnamese in the ICP operating in Cambodia, compared to 150 Khmers.⁹ Beginning in 1954, an ideological schism developed within the Cambodian Communist movement between pro-Vietnamese veterans and independent newcomers (including Pol Pot), who distrusted Vietnamese motives and exhibited hatred toward the Vietnamese as an ethnic group. The Geneva Accords exacerbated this rift by exiling one thousand Vietnamese-trained Khmer revolutionaries to Hanoi.¹⁰

The 1954 Geneva Accords led to the division of the CPK into three distinct factions: the first consisted of veteran CPK leaders exiled to Vietnam; the second contained the veteran CPK leaders remaining in Cambodia; and the third faction included young intellectuals pressing for armed struggle against the regime of Prince Norodom Sihanouk. The first two factions of the CPK formulated their strategy within the ideological framework of Indochinese solidarity. Their strategy for gaining power in Cambodia was based on two principles: coordinated revolution throughout Indochina and political warfare against Sihanouk. Political warfare involved secret alliances with members of Sihanouk's political party, the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (Sangkum), political competition through legitimate front organizations, and covert development of grassroots support for the CPK. The third faction, on the other hand, considered Indochinese revolution a euphemism for Vietnamese domination, and regarded political warfare as a poor substitute for direct armed struggle. This faction emphasized underground military activity, rural support, and independence from Vietnam.

Meanwhile, despite enjoying overwhelming rural support, Sihanouk considered the CPK an intolerable threat to his rule. He consolidated his authority by making the Sangkum the chief organ of the state. He then began a campaign to eliminate all known left-wing forces, which threw the CPK into complete political disarray.¹¹ By exploiting the factionalism within the CPK, Sihanouk succeeded in removing leftist politicians sympathetic to the CPK

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7. In order to give the movement more legitimacy with the indigenous populations, the Vietnamese leadership divided the ICP into three national parties—the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), the Lao Issara Party, and the Vietnamese Workers' Party. The KPRP changed its name several times, becoming the Workers' Party of Kampuchea (WPK) in 1963 and the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) in 1966. For the sake of clarity, Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) will be used throughout this article.
 8. The Geneva Accords of 1954 provided for the removal of French forces from Cambodia and recognized Prince Norodom Sihanouk as the ruler of Cambodia. The Accords also called for the armed Communists in Cambodia either to lay down their arms and participate in the new political system or to regroup outside of the country.
 9. Kiernan, *Pol Pot*, 83.
 10. *Ibid.*, 154. See also Elizabeth Becker, *When the War was Over: Cambodia's Revolution and the Voices of its People* (New York: Simon and Schuster Inc., 1986), 95.
 11. In 1954 the CPK divided itself into an urban and a rural committee. Sieu Heng, the chairman of the rural committee, had been an agent of Lon Nol (a high-ranking military commander under Sihanouk) since 1955 and openly defected to the Sihanouk regime in 1959. His betrayal was responsible for the subsequent destruction of 90 percent of the CPK's rural infrastructure, and it dealt a fatal blow to the reputation of the CPK veteran leadership. See Kiernan, "Origins," 175-77.

and party cadres who had infiltrated Cambodia's political parties or who had participated openly in front organizations.¹²

The 1950s and the early 1960s were witness to two trends within the Cambodian Communist movement that had enormous implications for the evolution of the CPK's strategy for seizing power. First, division plagued the CPK and provided Pol Pot with an opportunity to improve his position within the movement. In order to pursue the political struggle on many fronts, the CPK initially divided itself into semi-autonomous geographical units. This plan backfired as the regions lost contact with each other and group cohesion disintegrated. The self-imposed exile of the pro-Vietnamese veteran cadres to Hanoi as a protective measure caused these leaders to lose influence within the CPK and led the cadres remaining in Cambodia to accuse them of irresponsibility and indifference.

. . . Pol Pot's primary concern was the achievement of absolute political power. Transforming Cambodia's economic, social, and political structures to create a truly classless agrarian society was merely a technique for reorganizing and indoctrinating the population.

Furthermore, the anti-Communist posture of the Sihanouk regime severely constrained efforts by the Pracheachon Party (a front for the CPK) to coordinate its activities with the CPK's clandestine urban committees. Similarly, sympathetic intellectuals within the Sangkum were preoccupied with their own political survival so that they could ensure the implementation of at least minimal reforms; as a result they established little direct cooperation with the CPK. At the same time, the Pol Pot faction still lacked the necessary strength to establish itself as the dominant force within the movement. In short, subdividing the CPK in order to pursue the political struggle against Sihanouk on many fronts merely aggravated existing factionalism within the CPK and facilitated its near destruction at the hands of the Sihanouk regime.

Second, disunity within the CPK and government repression made open resistance to the Sihanouk regime more difficult. As a result, the option of underground political struggle became more attractive. Following the signing of the 1954 Geneva Accords, the CPK veteran leadership emphasized political struggle, calling for the development of party cells in the rural areas and

12. In the 1950s several French-educated leftist intellectuals were briefly given portfolios within Sihanouk's cabinet. They were eventually ostracized by the Sangkum in the 1960s and forced to go underground in 1967. Kiernan, *Pol Pot*, 157.

partial cooperation with Sihanouk in developing a leftist political agenda.¹³ On the other hand, the Pol Pot faction increasingly pressed for the pursuit of armed struggle involving total warfare against the Sihanouk regime. During the 1960 CPK Congress, Pol Pot unsuccessfully tried to convince the CPK to support a combined political-armed struggle.¹⁴ The remaining veteran leadership, however, was against such a move, believing that the CPK was not yet physically prepared to confront Sihanouk directly. The Hanoi-based CPK leaders opposed armed resistance to Sihanouk because North Vietnam was attempting to achieve a *modus vivendi* with Sihanouk in preparation for its war efforts in South Vietnam. The dismantling of the CPK's rural infrastructure by 1959 and the curtailment of all open front activities in the urban areas by 1962 finally led to the adoption of Pol Pot's aggressive strategy.

In 1960 the Pol Pot faction began to rise rapidly within the CPK hierarchy. In doing so, it decreased the power of the Hanoi-based faction. The 1960 CPK Congress promoted Pol Pot and two other members of his faction to three of the top positions in the Central Committee. This provided Pol Pot's faction with a voice in the upper echelons of the CPK for the first time.¹⁵ The 1963 CPK Congress formally affirmed Pol Pot as the secretary general.¹⁶ He immediately dispersed the exposed elements of the CPK to remote regions of Cambodia to protect them from Sihanouk.

By 1967 Pol Pot was in a position to induce the CPK to begin guerrilla warfare against the Sihanouk regime. However, as the CPK stood poised to commence this struggle, the internal suspicion present since the political schism of 1954 intensified. The ferocity of repression conducted by Sihanouk against the aboveground organs of the CPK, coupled with his successful infiltration of the CPK rural structure in the 1950s, instilled a sense of paranoia in the Pol Pot leadership. Therefore, Pol Pot's strategy to achieve absolute political control had to focus not only on armed struggle against external enemies but also on eradication of internal opposition.

13. The CPK's partial cooperation with Sihanouk was intended to lay the groundwork for later destabilization of the regime. CPK members also engaged in open competition in electoral politics to achieve this goal. For a discussion of the movement's infrastructure see Eastern Region Military-Political Service, "Summary of Annotated Party History (1973)," in *Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death*, ed. Karl D. Jackson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 256-58.

14. Kiernan, *Pol Pot*, 192.

15. *Ibid.*, 190-91. Pol Pot, Moong (alias Koy Thuon), and Ieng Sary were given key positions in the CPK's Central Committee by virtue of their influence within the Phnom Penh branch of the CPK's urban committee. The meteoric rise of these young urban-based leaders was the by-product of the annihilation of the CPK's rural arm following the betrayal of Sieu Heng. In a sense, the 1960 Congress reflected the shift in the balance of power from the rural committee to the urban committee. It is ironic that Pol Pot and his faction would later abandon the urban infrastructure in favor of rebuilding the rural infrastructure.

16. Following the mysterious death of Tou Samouth, chairman of the CPK's urban committee and secretary general of the CPK, Pol Pot became the interim secretary general of the party in 1962 by virtue of his influence in the Phnom Penh branch. Although Pol Pot's rise to secretary general was a triumph for the French-educated intellectuals who had dominated the CPK's urban committee, the post of secretary general did not confer complete and centralized authority on Pol Pot. *Ibid.*, 200-01.

Forces Affecting Pol Pot's Strategy

After Pol Pot became CPK secretary general in 1963, the new core of party leaders used ideology to legitimize their strategy of revolutionary warfare, to prepare for the transformation of Cambodian society, and to eliminate internal opposition. The Pol Pot leadership regarded ideology as an instrument of policy rather than an idealized blueprint of objectives to be achieved. Its ultimate objective was to create conditions within the CPK and to restructure social and economic relationships in Cambodia to foster the achievement and perpetuation of a political power monopoly. The Pol Pot leadership based its goal of creating a peasant-based society—meticulously organized into work brigades and sustained by traditional Khmer values—on the assumption that such a society would be most conducive to perpetuating CPK control.

Influential Political Philosophies

Several strands of ideology influenced the Pol Pot leadership in its struggle to achieve absolute political control. The Pol Pot leadership admired and emulated Stalin's calculated use of violence against both the masses and party members to control the state and the party.¹⁷ The Jacobin tradition of pursuing violence for violence's sake also influenced Pol Pot.¹⁸ Glorification of violence imbued the Pol Pot leadership with a militancy that it directed against the Sihanouk regime, the faction-ridden CPK, and, ultimately, the entire Khmer population.

Marxist-Leninist class analysis was also part of Pol Pot's ideology. To justify its attempt to transform the social, economic, and political structures in Cambodia, the Pol Pot faction claimed that the current system perpetuated the interests of the aristocratic and proto-capitalist minority who represented foreign interests. It argued that continuing the existing system would only intensify the impoverishment of the rural population and increase Cambodia's dependency on capital-exporting countries.¹⁹ Believing that the rural peasantry (which represented 85 percent of the Cambodian population) was potentially

17. The intense factionalism within the CPK made Stalin's methodology and rationale for the perpetual elimination of intra-party challenges apropos. They served as a blueprint for action and a source of historical justification for the elimination of competing factions within the CPK. Much of Pol Pot's exposure to Stalinist ideology occurred during his time as a student in France in the late 1940s to early 1950s. The French Communist Party supported Stalin's genocidal practices as an historical necessity. The political debates convinced Pol Pot that the techniques of violence and perpetual liquidation of class enemies were necessary features of revolutionary warfare which must be applied to the Cambodian situation. See Craig Etcheson, *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1984), 32.

18. Ibid.

19. Leftist intellectuals such as Hou Youn and Hu Nim noted the increasing landlessness amongst the peasantry in the 1950s and 1960s and foresaw that usury and unfavorable world prices eventually would force lower class peasants to transfer land ownership, thus aggravating the uneven distribution of wealth. See Hu Nim, "Land Tenure and Social Structure in Kampuchea," in *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981*, ed. Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua (London: Zed Press, 1982), 69-86. Furthermore, the deteriorating competitiveness of Cambodia's agriculture increased Cambodia's dependency on capitalist countries. See Khieu Samphan, *Cambodia's Economy and Industrial Development*, trans. Laura Summers (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, Department of Asian Studies, Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper No. 111, 1979).

the most productive sector of the economy, Pol Pot wished to use the peasantry as the basis of his new social order. To achieve this end, the rural population would have to participate in the revolutionary armed struggle against the status quo regime.²⁰

Pol Pot's ideology was also laced with Khmer racism and chauvinism.²¹ It portrayed the puritan values of the Khmer race, as they relate to love of the soil and shunning of luxury, as ideal traits for the "new" Khmer man. Pol Pot used the past grandeur of the Angkor Era and Khmer culture to generate contempt for the process of westernization that had contaminated the Khmer elite.²² In effect, Pol Pot's emphasis on indigenous Khmer values depicted Sihanouk's regime as tainted by Western influence, and Pol Pot used this to legitimize a cultural crusade to reclaim the genuine Khmer identity. In this process, he attempted to supplant the Khmer's general image of Sihanouk as a god-king with a view of Sihanouk as the embodiment of decadent, foreign urban culture—an image repugnant to traditional Khmer rural values. He also used this process to foment race hatred toward the Vietnamese and to denigrate the legitimacy of other CPK factions.²³

The Cambodian Political Environment

The Cambodian political environment was conducive to Pol Pot's strategy of armed struggle. The Cambodian ruling elite suffered from a long history of fragmentation. Rather than forming internal alliances to secure their political positions, factions within the elite often preferred to relinquish independence in exchange for foreign intervention on their behalf.²⁴ Thus, the pervasiveness of ties with foreign powers further complicated political factionalism in Cambodia. Aside from Sihanouk, who balanced the interests of the major

20. Pol Pot once noted that "if we could liberate the peasant class we would be able to liberate the entire country." Nevertheless, he exhibited a bias toward the lower strata of the peasantry since the middle and upper sectors of the peasantry tended to exhibit strong loyalty to Sihanouk. *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS): East Asia*, 4 October 1977, H12.

21. Pol Pot glorified the grandeur of the Khmer ethnic group and advocated the elimination of minority groups including the Chinese and the Chams. These policies were pursued in order to maintain party security and ideological purity. For further discussion of this issue see Hurst Hannum, "International Law and Cambodian Genocide: the Sounds of Silence," *Human Rights Quarterly* Vol. 11, No. 1 (February 1989): 86-88.

22. Both Khmers and foreign scholars typically identify the Angkor Era that lasted from the ninth to the fifteenth century as the pinnacle of Khmer civilization. At the height of their power, the Angkor rulers controlled much of Southeast Asia. See Becker, *When the War was Over*, 46. During Pol Pot's sojourn in Paris he adopted the pseudonym Khmer Doem or "Original Khmer." *Ibid.*, 77.

23. Pol Pot rewrote history in order to increase his importance. He completely ignored, for example, the CPK's history of dependence on Vietnam. *The Black Paper* (Phnom Penh: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Democratic Kampuchea, 1978). See also David P. Chandler, "Seeing Red: Perceptions of Cambodian History in Democratic Kampuchea," in *Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea*, 34-56.

24. For example, between 1809 and 1847, extensive reliance on foreign intervention by rival claimants to the Cambodian throne resulted in a thirty-eight year war between Siam and Vietnam, which reduced Cambodia to the status of a tributary to both countries. Michael Eiland, "Rivalry for Cambodia—An Old Affair," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 10 November 1983, 50-52. See also Michael D. Eiland, *Dragon and Elephant: Relations Between Vietnam and Siam, 1782-1847* (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1989).

powers to ensure his position, and Pol Pot, who espoused self-reliance, the major Cambodian factions closely bound themselves to foreign sponsors.²⁵

This situation affected the CPK strategy for achieving exclusive political power. On one hand, political fragmentation prevented the Sihanouk political coalition from responding effectively to economic issues of poverty and landlessness and thereby justified CPK efforts to mobilize the indigent segments of the peasantry. On the other hand, the Hanoi authorities used the veteran elements within the CPK to frustrate Pol Pot's efforts to conduct war against Sihanouk. In short, political considerations forced Pol Pot to confront internal and external obstacles.

. . . The level of secrecy practiced by the Pol Pot faction was so intense that until 1977 the existence of the CPK was kept hidden from the general population, and the Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes never knew the identities of the party leadership.

The lack of stable political institutions was another factor that aided the Pol Pot leadership. Sihanouk's regime did little more than attempt to reconcile the increasingly incompatible interests of the aboveground right and left wing forces.²⁶ Although Sihanouk's constant personal intervention temporarily averted civil strife, it also prevented the emergence of a political system able to contain social conflict.²⁷ Such a system would have decreased the leverage of Pol Pot's extremist faction within the CPK, and could have presented the option of legitimate political reform. The lack of a stable political system forced the CPK underground, thereby improving the position of Pol Pot's faction within the party and increasing the attractiveness of armed struggle.

The conditions of warfare in Cambodia, caused by the intensifying war in South Vietnam, also provided an important justification for the use of arms as the centerpiece of CPK strategy. Because of increased pressure from US military forces and the South Vietnamese government, the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) began to rely more

25. The military under Lon Nol was aligned with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and later the United States, the urban bourgeoisie intellectuals with France and the PRC, and the veteran leaders of the CPK with North Vietnam.

26. The right-wing faction, led by Lon Nol, pressed for an aggressive extension of central authority in the eastern frontier regions to displace the Vietnamese Communist presence. Leftist intellectuals, such as Khieu Samphan, advocated greater decentralization of government control in the frontier regions as the foundation for land redistribution.

27. Michael Leifer, "The Failure of Political Institutionalization in Cambodia," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 2 (1968): 125-40, n.b. 137.

heavily on eastern Cambodia as a sanctuary.²⁸ This in turn prompted the United States to initiate limited bombing missions and a series of ground force interventions in Cambodia.²⁹ However, the large-scale bombing campaigns conducted by the US Air Force from 1970 to 1973 dwarfed these earlier missions. The unprecedented destruction of the 1970-1973 campaigns hardened Khmer will and accelerated popular support for Pol Pot's strategy of revolutionary warfare.³⁰

In addition, Cambodia's political culture played an important role in facilitating the formulation and implementation of Pol Pot's strategy. By reviving the notion of Khmer regional superiority and playing upon the images of a greater Cambodia, the Khmer leaders were able to mobilize mass support for organized violence. After centuries of foreign domination, the Khmers tended to view themselves and their nation as unwilling pawns in regional politics. This perception has traditionally made the Khmer population vulnerable to manipulation by self-proclaimed crusaders calling for the return of Cambodia to the position of political primacy it enjoyed during the Angkor Era.³¹

Rifts in Cambodian society also facilitated the CPK's implementation of revolutionary warfare. Traditionally, Cambodian society fostered a marked dichotomy between urban life and village culture, creating a strong sense of mutual hostility. The rural peasants have never trusted the urban population whom they view as intruders into their world. This urban/rural tension persists and has become part of the belief system of both worlds.³² Consequently, it was not difficult for the CPK to draw upon animosity between village and town to generate rural support for its struggle against the authorities in Phnom Penh.

Lastly, although the outside world often associated Khmer society with its veneer of civility and gentleness, Khmer culture in fact implicitly condones violence in certain circumstances as a legitimate means of social expression. Khmer folklore and contemporary practice attach a sense of romanticism to rural banditry, even when such banditry results in terrible atrocities.³³ Violence against the enemy has been institutionalized in ritual: for example, eating an opponent's liver, an accepted cultural rite, has been practiced by all

28. By 1969 the Cambodian military estimated that between 35,000 to 40,000 NVA/NLF units were operating in eastern Cambodia. Kiernan, *Pol Pot*, 286.

29. *Ibid.*, 285.

30. In 1970 the Lon Nol government, which had deposed Sihanouk, allied itself with the United States in the war against North Vietnam. After this, the peasantry increasingly perceived Lon Nol as an instrument for US attacks in Cambodia. See William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia* (New York: Simon and Schuster Inc., 1979).

31. Sihanouk, Lon Nol, and Pol Pot all attempted to depict themselves as having nationalistic aspirations with grandiose goals for the Cambodian state. Sihanouk wanted to make Cambodia the model for all Third World states; Lon Nol wanted to create an ideal Buddhist state with enlarged boundaries; and Pol Pot wanted to transform Cambodia into an egalitarian society taken to its greatest extremes. See Marie Alexander Martin, "Social Rules and Political Power in Cambodia," *Indochina Report* No. 22 (January-March 1990): 11-12.

32. For a further analysis of this rural-urban social dichotomy see Michael Vickery, *Cambodia: 1975 to 1982* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 1-26.

33. *Ibid.*

sides throughout the six decades of warfare since 1930.³⁴ As a result, the strategy of pursuing selective uses of political violence (and later, arbitrary use of violence on a massive scale) finds reverberations in the depths of the Khmer individual and social psyche.³⁵

Key Elements of Pol Pot's Strategy

Pol Pot's primary concern was not the inversion of the existing social pyramid, but rather the achievement of absolute political power. Transforming Cambodia's economic, social, and political structures to create a truly classless agrarian society was merely a technique for reorganizing and indoctrinating the population. A thirst for complete political security and a hunger for the ability to use political power were the driving forces behind the Pol Pot faction's efforts to survive and control the CPK.³⁶

To achieve this objective, Pol Pot's strategy revolved around the following axioms:

1. *Enemies are everywhere, both within the party and without.* More specifically, the enemies within the CPK were identified as competing factions that either advocated greater cooperation with North Vietnam (DRV) or pressed for a more grass roots orientation emulating Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution. Both these approaches threatened the Pol Pot leadership's control over CPK ideology. The enemy without included Sihanouk, Lon Nol, and later Heng Samrin, all of whom were identified as being aligned to external powers. From Pol Pot's perspective, enemies were the by-product of incorrect thinking and the fallibilities of human nature; they therefore often transcended ideological factions and time. Consequently, a state of siege was perceived to be in perpetual existence.

2. *Uncompromising, total armed struggle is necessary to destroy all alternative political systems and factions in Cambodia.* Armed struggle was the only way to ensure the enemy's complete destruction and maintain the political momentum of the Pol Pot leadership. Pol Pot believed that anything less than total success would be unacceptable, for if they failed the enemy would destroy the CPK.

34. For a further discussion of the institutionalization of violence in Khmer culture see the classic work by Charles Meyer, *Derrière le Sourire Khmer* (Paris: Plon, 1971).

35. See Becker, *When the War was Over*, 82-85; see also Vickery, *Cambodia*, 1-26.

36. For example, the genocide of 1975 through 1978 and the social experiment in increasing the country's economic output by totally ignoring fundamental relationships between different factors of production (especially technology) indicate that Pol Pot placed a premium on relieving paranoia and satisfying group ego rather than on achieving an equitable and just social order for the Khmer people. For further information on the genocide in Cambodia, see *United Nations Report on Allegations of Human Rights Violations in Kampuchea*, U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/1335 (1979). For an examination of Pol Pot's economic program see "The Party's Four Year Plan to Build Socialism in all Fields, 1977-1980," in *Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977*, ed. David P. Chandler, Ben Kiernan, and Chanthou Boua (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 45-119 (a classified party document translated by Chanthou Boua).

In this regard, political activity merely served as a supporting device for armed conflict.

3. A *dual-faceted approach must be used to formulate and implement all revolutionary activities*. The inner core of the leadership created policies to generate an external critical mass that ideally would provide direct support to the armed struggle, and at least deny support to any enemy. However, the leadership also designed its policies to strengthen its internal security and to eliminate all challenges to its authority.

The Pol Pot leadership used several policies to implement its strategy. First, in order to ensure its integrity and political survival, the Pol Pot faction kept the organization surrounding it small and impervious to external scrutiny. The faction operated under a draconian code of discipline while pursuing autonomous policies based on a separate, confidential agenda that often contradicted publicly stated positions. Pol Pot's obsessive pursuit of absolute secrecy not only shielded the faction from repression by non-Communist enemies, but also prevented infiltration by any other ideologically suspect elements within the CPK. The level of secrecy practiced by the Pol Pot faction was so intense that until 1977, two years after the fall of the Lon Nol regime, the existence of the CPK was kept hidden from the general population and the Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes never knew the identities of the party leadership.³⁷ In sum, the Pol Pot faction operated as an autonomous organization within the CPK, constantly adjusting its policies to maintain its organizational integrity and to attain control of the party surreptitiously.

Second, the Pol Pot leadership dispersed active elements of the CPK to the most remote rural areas in Cambodia. Following this policy, the CPK developed separate and autonomous subdivisions to placate ideologically conflicting factions within the party. Each group exercised nearly complete control over its region of Cambodia.³⁸ Pol Pot discouraged direct communication between these regionally based factions. This minimized the risk of annihilation by opposing regimes and allowed the Pol Pot faction to strengthen itself in preparation for eliminating all remaining factions within the CPK. Thus, the Pol Pot faction placed greater emphasis on maintaining the security of its inner core than on increasing the membership of the Cambodian Communist movement. This reflected Pol Pot's belief that a small group of well-organized and committed revolutionaries had a better chance of success than a mass-based movement. This, however, did not imply disinterest in mass mobili-

37. For a further discussion of Pol Pot's use of secrecy see *The Black Paper*. For example, Pol Pot attended the 1976 meeting of the newly-formed People's Representative Assembly disguised as a representative of rubber plantation workers. None of the high-ranking members of the CPK in attendance recognized him. Ben Kiernan, "Conflict in the Kampuchean Communist Movement," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* Vol. 10 (1980): 54.

38. The three main geographical factions were the Northeast faction (under the control of Pol Pot and the CPK Centre), the Southwest faction (witnessing an internal struggle between independent veteran military commander Ta Mok and the pro-Vietnamese veteran cadres), and the Eastern faction (dominated by pro-Vietnamese CPK veterans and younger cadres trained by Vietnamese advisers).

zation, but rather an emphasis on developing highly committed cadres whose loyalty lay solely with Pol Pot.

Third, Pol Pot's strategy relied upon both calculated and arbitrary violence. All sides perpetuated the state of war and encouraged high levels of violence. This helped structure the conflict as a life and death struggle between irreconcilable cultures.³⁹ Violence, rather than positive inducements, sustained both the high level of commitment to the total victory sought by the CPK and the support of the Khmer rural population. Thus, by institutionalizing an atmosphere of violence, the CPK could pursue a strategy of uncompromising revolutionary armed struggle that justified greater control over the rural population.⁴⁰

Implementation of Pol Pot's Strategy

The CPK's strategy went through two phases between 1967 and 1976. During the first phase (1967-1970), the Pol Pot leadership—due to both a lack of outside support and a determination to protect its purity—attempted to conduct its revolution using only CPK forces. The failure of this uncompromising approach led to a more flexible stance during the second phase, between 1970 and 1976, when the CPK adopted a united front strategy to accelerate the defeat of the conservative Lon Nol government in Phnom Penh. At the same time, the Pol Pot faction gradually expanded its revolutionary forces until the CPK was able to pursue the armed struggle independently; this was a direct application of the axiom of adopting a two-tiered approach in strategy implementation. The downfall of the Lon Nol regime in 1975 and Pol Pot's consolidation of power over the regional CPK forces in 1976 testified to the success of his unique brand of revolutionary armed struggle.

Solitary Armed Struggle: 1967-1970

Visible cracks began to appear in the foundation of Sihanouk's regime in the period from 1967—when the CPK officially sanctioned Pol Pot's call for armed struggle—until the creation of the National United Front for Kampuchea in 1970. During this time, two series of large-scale peasant rebellions temporarily challenged the viability of the Sihanouk regime.

The first peasant rebellion erupted in April 1967 in the Samlaut district of Battambang province (the Samlaut Rebellion) and later provoked outbursts in surrounding provinces. The uprising continued for several months until Lon Nol's security forces crushed it. The Samlaut Rebellion was the first open military conflict between the Sihanouk regime and the CPK under Pol Pot's leadership. Most evidence seems to indicate that although the CPK coordi-

39. The perception of the civil war in Cambodia as a life and death struggle became much more pronounced following Lon Nol's coup in 1970. This coup brought into sharp focus three dichotomies that were tearing the Cambodian social fabric at the seams: the split between urban and rural culture, between the Western educated individual and the "original Khmer," and between the upper and lower classes.

40. Etcheson, *Democratic Kampuchea*, 149-62.

nated the Samlaut Rebellion only after it erupted, the rebellion was sparked by peasant grievances against oppressive government actions.⁴¹

Sihanouk had been increasingly beleaguered by demands from Lon Nol and the right wing to reverse his policy of benign neutrality toward the Vietnamese Communist forces. Attempting to distance himself from the NVA/NLF, Sihanouk yielded to this pressure and began an extensive rice collection policy (*ramassage du paddy*), especially in areas along the border with Vietnam. This policy was designed both to increase government revenue and to reduce the flow of rice to the NLF. The program was extremely unpopular with the peasantry because it forced them to sell their rice crop to the government at one-third of the black market rate offered by the NLF.⁴² The military often enforced this policy by holding peasants at gunpoint until they complied.⁴³ The military and the civil bureaucracy further alienated the peasants through an ambitious road construction program that was marked by severe corruption.

Despite Sihanouk's acquiescence to the methods his administration used to implement these programs, the general peasantry did not blame him completely for their suffering. Instead, they continued to draw a distinction between the monarchy and the administration. In short, although these measures aggravated traditional resentment of urban intrusion into the rural sector, they did not undermine Sihanouk's popular support in the countryside.⁴⁴

Nonetheless, resentment against the administration coupled with related incidents of localized peasant unrest led to outright peasant rebellion. The CPK co-opted this situation—using it to inaugurate a strategy of openly-conducted warfare—by calling for more intensive armed resistance.⁴⁵ The CPK failed, however, to maintain full control of the course of the rebellion. Sihanouk's military, led by Lon Nol, quickly suppressed this first round of peasant rebellions. Embarrassed by its failure, the CPK disavowed any involvement in the event.⁴⁶

Recognizing the need for greater control of peasant rebellions from their inception, the CPK formed the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea (RAK) in mid-1967 to lead the next wave of revolts.⁴⁷ The revolts came quickly. The

41. This is but one interpretation. Ben Kiernan suggests that the CPK planned extensively for the rebellion; see Kiernan, *Pol Pot*, 249-250. Stephen Heder argues that the rebellion was almost entirely the work of local peasant leaders with only minimal participation by the local CPK cadres; see Stephen Heder, "Kampuchea's Armed Struggle: the Origins of an Independent Revolution," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* Vol. 11 (1979), 8.

42. Ben Kiernan, "The Samlaut Rebellion," in *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea: 1942-1981*, ed. Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua (London: Zed Press, 1982), 168-69.

43. Becker, 117.

44. Kiernan, "The Samlaut Rebellion," 177.

45. Although it is unknown when the CPK leadership actually decided to undertake armed struggle against the Sihanouk regime, circumstantial evidence indicates that the decision was made prior to the Samlaut Rebellion. Carney, *Communist Party Power*, 21.

46. Kiernan, *Pol Pot*, 249-50.

47. In order to maintain the inner core's ideological purity, Pol Pot preferred to recruit only the lowest and most poorly educated peasants. At the same time, he was willing to participate in large-scale peasant movements to destabilize the ruling government—as long as the new recruits did not have access to the inner core of the party. Pol Pot also disliked large-scale movements because they had the potential to shift

rebellion of 1968 was larger and eventually spread throughout much of Cambodia. Approximately ten thousand villagers (including newly recruited members of RAK) participated in the rebellion. Broader peasant grievances, such as economic discontent resulting from fixed rice prices and usury, maintained the momentum of the rebellion.⁴⁸ The attempt to transform a peasant movement into a truly revolutionary movement demonstrated the growing sophistication of the CPK. Despite its greater scope, however, the rebellion failed to sustain momentum, and Lon Nol's security forces crushed it.

The CPK's efforts between 1967 and 1970 failed for several reasons. Continued factionalism within the CPK severely hampered the Pol Pot leadership. Pol Pot's policy of sending CPK cadres to regional commands in the rural areas was accentuating the divisions within the party. External forces further aggravated the problem. North Vietnam rejected armed struggle against the Sihanouk regime, and the CPK leaders in eastern Cambodia partially accepted

. . . The Pol Pot faction placed greater emphasis on maintaining the security of its inner core than on increasing the membership of the Cambodian Communist movement. . . . Pol Pot believed that a small group of well-organized and committed revolutionaries had a better chance of success than a mass-based movement.

North Vietnam's position—despite the fact that doing so placed them in conflict with the CPK central leadership. Their efforts to decide whether they would follow the DRV's position or Pol Pot's caused them to delay their response to Pol Pot's call for a nationwide rebellion in 1968.⁴⁹ This delay was an important factor in the rebellion's failure.

The 1968 rebellions also failed because of the lack of complete cohesion between the general peasant masses and the RAK. The RAK's members, drawn primarily from ethnic minorities and the poorest segments of the peasantry, shouldered a disproportionately large part of the fighting. RAK forces made up 20 percent of the rebellion participants. Throughout the rebellion, other factions within the CPK showed great impatience with Pol

the balance of power within the CPK. If new recruits chose to ally with Pol Pot's adversaries, Pol Pot might lose the ability to impose his agenda on the party as a whole. There were also risks that such movements would lack revolutionary fervor and be susceptible to manipulation by non-CPK forces. To minimize these risks, Pol Pot gave the RAK responsibility for controlling the peasant movement and protecting the predominance of his faction.

48. Kiernan, "The Samlaut Rebellion," 188-90.

49. Kiernan, *Pol Pot*, 275.

Pot's heavy reliance on the RAK. These groups advocated gradual development of a large-scale, peasant-based revolutionary movement. The RAK only expanded from two thousand to four thousand members between 1968 and 1970, with most new recruits continuing to come from the poorest segments of the peasantry and ethnic minorities. This demonstrates that the majority of the Khmer peasantry did not accept the CPK ideology; in fact, most participants in the rebellion exhibited little commitment to prolonged revolutionary armed struggle.⁵⁰

Ironically, Pol Pot's concerns about internal security may have been a major cause of the rebellion's failure. Although the party recognized that it needed greater peasant support to carry out a rebellion, because of Pol Pot's fears that his faction would be infiltrated, the party never engaged in a truly widespread recruitment campaign. Instead, the CPK concentrated its recruitment efforts on the poorest strata of the peasantry. Without widespread support, the rebellion never obtained the critical mass necessary to destabilize the ruling government.

Sihanouk's popularity and the CPK's inability to convince the vast majority of the Khmer population that Sihanouk was their enemy were the two most important factors in explaining the failure of both rebellions. The middle- and high-income segments of Cambodian peasantry provided Sihanouk with his strongest base of support. Furthermore, the peasants who did participate in the rebellions directed their frustrations toward Lon Nol's military rather than Sihanouk. Although Sihanouk relied upon support from the People's Republic of China (PRC) and North Vietnam, because of his impeccable nationalist credentials the peasants did not consider him a lackey of the imperialists. Therefore, Sihanouk's presence in the ruling government made it difficult for the general peasantry to identify the enemy. The strength of Sihanouk's following among the peasantry forced the CPK Central Committee to change its position. It redefined the enemy as the right wing elements within the Sangkum and began to regard Sihanouk as a temporary ally.⁵¹

The United Front: 1970-1976

The Lon Nol coup of March 18, 1970, deposed Sihanouk and fundamentally changed the strategic picture in Cambodia and the entire region. First, the elimination of Sihanouk's regime and its replacement by a reactionary right-wing administration made the CPK's task of gaining popular support dramatically easier: the conflict became a clear-cut struggle based upon the traditional urban-rural schism. By initially rallying to the side of the Lon Nol regime, the urban population merely heightened the perception that the conflict was a clash of cultures.⁵²

50. Etcheson, *Democratic Kampuchea*, 89.

51. Kiernan, *Pol Pot*, 285.

52. The upper echelons of Cambodian society were enthusiastic about the replacement of the monarchy by a republican administration. During 1970 the republic's armed forces grew from 35,000 to 150,000 within months, mostly due to voluntary enlistment. Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 184.

Second, Lon Nol's pro-American stance over the war in South Vietnam brought about a realignment in regional politics that proved vital to the success of the CPK's armed struggle. At the end of 1970, following a short period of delay as North Vietnam and the PRC assessed the Lon Nol regime's foreign policy, the two nations finally decided to endorse the CPK's strategy of armed struggle against Phnom Penh and to provide the necessary logistical support. The internal and regional realignment of forces set the stage for an exercise of violence on a massive scale, increasing the momentum of revolutionary warfare and making the CPK's heavy handed-military tactics more acceptable to the rural population. The changes in the geopolitical situation made it imperative that the CPK adopt a united front strategy—not only to avoid annihilation by the militarily strengthened Lon Nol regime, but also to take advantage of the opportunity to broaden the CPK's base of support to include the general peasantry and other social classes.

However, the Pol Pot leadership was still obsessed with maintaining the integrity of its small but ideologically pure military forces. Therefore, even while appealing to a wider cross-section of society, it was unwilling to integrate the general peasantry completely into the CPK's political and military structure. Pol Pot considered the united front strategy to be the quickest way to enlist the support of the general peasantry without making it indispensable to the revolution.

On March 23, 1970, Sihanouk joined forces with the CPK and announced the formation of the Khmer National United Front (FUNK), the Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea, and the Khmers People's National Liberation Armed Forces of Kampuchea (PFLANK). Three members of the CPK who had served in Sihanouk's government became the Minister of National Defense, Minister of Information and Propaganda, and Minister of Interior, Communal Reforms, and Cooperatives in the coalition's new government.⁵³

Following Sihanouk's appeal for joint struggle, army units defected from Lon Nol while peasant unrest exploded in the eastern, southeastern, and southwestern regions of Cambodia.⁵⁴ The massive growth of the united front's military branch (PFLANK) from 4,000 in 1970 to 125,000 by the end of 1971 provides evidence that the CPK benefited from the swelling of peasant support that followed Sihanouk's appeal.⁵⁵ The majority of the new recruits aligned themselves with the Khmer Rumdoah—Sihanouk's faction within the united front. In addition, Sihanouk's participation gave the united front legitimacy in the eyes of the international community, thereby undermining the legitimacy of Lon Nol's government.⁵⁶

53. The three appointees were Khieu Samphan, Hu Nim, and Hou Youn, respectively. Etcheson, *Democratic Kampuchea*, 131.

54. Kiernan argues, however, that traditional peasant discontent with urban culture and the related legacy of revolutionary activity also remained extremely influential; see Ben Kiernan, "The 1970 Peasant Uprising in Kampuchea," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* Vol. 9 (1979): 310-22.

55. Kiernan, *Pol Pot*, 322.

56. The united front government came very close to replacing Lon Nol's regime as the representative of

The united front strategy also involved increased cooperation with the exiled members of the CPK in Hanoi, who returned to Cambodia in 1970 at Pol Pot's request.⁵⁷ By developing grass roots democracy in the villages, CPK veterans and the Vietnamese advisors helped generate popular peasant support for the party. In doing so, these veteran Communist cadres successfully politicized and integrated the general peasantry into the CPK.⁵⁸ They also developed secure networks of logistics support for the CPK with base areas in North Vietnam.

. . . The Pol Pot leadership introduced new cultural norms such as the banning of colorful clothing, and used sanctioned violence and a strict disciplinary code to gain peasant support

Despite this facade of cooperation, however, the Pol Pot faction continued to distrust its united front partners and regarded the general peasantry as only an auxiliary element of the armed struggle. As the CPK units within the PFLANK gained strength, the strategic weaknesses of Lon Nol's regime became increasingly apparent; the Pol Pot leadership prepared to remove any threats remaining within the united front to the achievement of its political objectives. The failure of Lon Nol's CHENLA II operation in November 1971 and the consequent demoralization of his army strengthened the CPK's confidence in its ability to win the war by itself.⁵⁹

In 1971 the CPK began reducing the power of its united front partners. In order to realign the balance of forces within the PFLANK, the Pol Pot leadership sent the Khmer Rumdoah and Hanoi-based CPK veterans (Hanoi Khmers) to high casualty areas.⁶⁰ The Pol Pot leadership also forced Vietnamese troops and cadres to leave Cambodia. Internal party propaganda commenced attacks on Sihanouk while curtailing references to the monarchy. In addition, the CPK created new channels to recruit peasant support, bypassing FUNK structures. Most importantly, the CPK Centre, as the Pol Pot lead-

Cambodia at the United Nations. Timothy Carney, "Unexpected Victory," in *Cambodia 1975-1982: Rendezvous with Death*, ed. Karl D. Jackson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 32.

57. Pol Pot accepted the return of the exiled CPK veterans in exchange for Vietnamese support in the struggle against Lon Nol. He also benefited from their return, for their physical presence in Cambodia isolated them from Vietnamese protection and facilitated their elimination as a threat to the CPK Centre.

58. Kenneth M. Quinn, "Political Change in Wartime: The Khmer Krahom Revolution in Southern Cambodia, 1970-1974," *Naval War College Review* Vol. 28 (Spring 1976): 6-8.

59. The failure of CHENLA II, Lon Nol's last major offensive, forced him to withdraw his strategic defense line to Phnom Penh and a small section of southern Cambodia. Sak Sutsakhan, *Khmer Republic at War* (Washington D.C.: US Army Center for Military History, 1980), 68.

60. Etcheson, *Democratic Kampuchea*, 131-34.

ership was known during this period, inaugurated the National Democratic Revolution in the southwestern region. This campaign involved dismantling the democratic structures and processes previously established by the Hanoi Khmers as well as installing CPK cadres as leaders of village committees. The Pol Pot leadership introduced new cultural norms such as the banning of colorful clothing, and used sanctioned violence and a strict disciplinary code to gain peasant support.⁶¹

By 1973 the CPK Centre felt sufficiently confident to move publicly against its united front partners and to intensify its purges. After this, the FUNK existed only in name; it was retained solely for its diplomatic value. The CPK openly denounced Sihanouk and perpetrated widespread atrocities against Lon Nol's military as well as civilians living in territory under Lon Nol's control. Thus, signs of the future horrors of Pol Pot's rule began to appear as early as 1973.⁶²

From 1973 to 1975 the CPK Centre pursued a strategy that relied solely on terror and sanctioned violence against the rural population in order to augment its military forces for the final assault against Lon Nol. The CPK Centre reserved intense political mobilization through positive inducements for developing cadres drawn from ethnic minorities and the poorest strata of the peasantry. Many peasants were initially forced to join the CPK guerilla army. However, once conscripted, the new soldiers were continually exposed to Pol Pot's ideology stressing the superiority of the rural Khmer and were radicalized by intense US bombing. This soon convinced many forced recruits that continuing the war against Lon Nol was the only answer. In time, many of these recruits, especially the younger ones, became ardent and committed CPK supporters.

With the rapid expansion of the PFLANK between 1973 and 1975 and the equally rapid disintegration of Lon Nol's forces, the CPK began to emphasize the use of conventional warfare and large-scale military maneuvers. The cessation of US bombing by 1973 and the tightening of the CPK's stranglehold on the Mekong River (the only remaining lifeline of Lon Nol's regime) in 1974 accelerated the defeat of Lon Nol. With its entry into Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, the CPK achieved victory in its armed struggle. However, in many ways the war had just begun. The CPK's initial victory marked the beginning of fifteen more years of civil war as Pol Pot sought to eliminate competing factions within the CPK in order to achieve absolute power—his only guarantee of total security.

Conclusions

The most striking and fearful aspect of Pol Pot's strategy has been his unyielding commitment to absolute political control. This commitment is a

61. Quinn, "The Khmer Krahom Revolution," 8-9, 11-18; Kiernan, *Pol Pot*, 322-341, 345.

62. Quinn, "The Khmer Krahom Revolution," 9-10, 18-23; Etcheson, *Democratic Kampuchea*, 134; Kiernan, *Pol Pot*, 368-90; Carney, "Unexpected Victory," 21-32.

by-product of his distrust of all elements that were not part of the CPK's inner core. Although Pol Pot has tolerated dissent in the past, this tolerance has been tactical and, therefore, temporary. In the final analysis, the Pol Pot faction does not believe in sharing power and, given time, will move to eliminate all potential challenges to its authority. The mass graves created during Pol Pot's rule between 1976 and 1978 bear testament to this.

Equally distressing is the fact that the Pol Pot faction was successful despite remaining a small minority. Using a strategy of systematic terror, the CPK Centre overcame its minority status and defeated both the Lon Nol regime and competing factions within the CPK. Most political groups would have been forced to rely on popular support generated by a political mobilization program. The CPK, however, succeeded in mobilizing the committed few and cowing the majority into silence by exploiting the violence, pain, and suffering of sixty years of incessant war.

Recent developments lend credence to the cliché that history repeats itself. Following the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978, the Pol Pot leadership returned to a united front strategy; once again it has aligned itself with Sihanouk and other non-Communist factions in order to defeat a common enemy.⁶³ At the same time, the Pol Pot faction has continued to use systematic violence to maintain cohesion within its own forces and to establish itself as arguably the strongest military component in the coalition. The record of human rights abuses in refugee camps under the Pol Pot leadership's control reflects a continued willingness to use terror to protect and strengthen itself in preparation for future attempts to seize absolute power.

Pol Pot's ideology developed and flourished in times of chaos, and the instability of the current situation in Cambodia could lend itself to exploitation by the Pol Pot leadership. The Pol Pot faction has the strength and patience necessary to wait until another opportunity arises for it to seize control of the nation. If the coalition government weakens or the international community turns its attention elsewhere, the Pol Pot leadership could once again use violence and terror to gain *de facto*, if not *de jure*, control of the lives of millions of Cambodians.

63. This alliance is known as the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). It operates as a loose coalition of the Pol Pot faction of the CPK, Prince Sihanouk's FUNCINPEC, and Son Sann's KPNLF, and was formed in 1982 to resist the Vietnamese occupation (which allegedly ended following the withdrawal of Vietnamese military forces in September 1989). FUNCINPEC is Sihanouk's politico-military resistance group. The Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), headed by Son Sann, is the other non-communist resistance group in the CGDK.



