

Sideshow?

A Spatio-Historical Analysis of the US Bombardment of Cambodia, 1965-1973

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Abstract

A recently declassified geo-referenced data set of all US bombing sites during the Indo-Chinese war transforms our understanding of the scale of what happened to Cambodia (between 1965-1973) and spatial and temporal analysis of the data reveals substantial errors in the historical record. Using the new data, as well as over a thousand interviews conducted by Ben Kiernan after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, I challenge elements of the accepted historical record on the Cambodia bombings and explore a link between the rise of the Khmer Rouge and American air strikes. In particular, I show that: the total tonnage dropped on Cambodia was five times greater than previously known; the bombing inside Cambodia began nearly 4 years prior to the supposed start of the Menu Campaign, under the Johnson Administration; that, in contradiction to Henry Kissinger's claims, and over the warning of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, Base Areas 704, 354 and 707 were all heavily bombed; the bombing intensity increased throughout the summer of 1973, after Congress barred any such increase; and, that despite claims by both Kissinger and Nixon to the contrary, there was substantial bombing within 1km of inhabited villages. It is also argued that the civilian casualties caused by the bombing significantly increased the recruiting capacity of the Khmer Rouge, whom over the course of the bombing campaign transformed from a small agrarian revolutionary group, to a large anti-imperial army capable of taking over the country.

Introduction

On December 9th, 1970, President Richard Nixon telephoned his National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, to discuss the ongoing bombing of Cambodia. After expressing to Kissinger his frustration that the US Air Force was being “unimaginative,” Nixon demanded more bombing, deeper into the country: “They have got to go in there and I mean really go in . . . I want everything that can fly to go in there and crack the hell out of them. There is no limitation on mileage and there is no limitation on budget. Is that clear?”

Nixon's order ignored his administration's prior assurances to Congress that U.S. planes would remain within 30 miles of the Vietnamese border, and would not bomb within a kilometre of any village, as well as military assessments that the air strikes were like "poking a beehive with a stick."¹ Kissinger responded hesitantly: "The problem is Mr President, the Air Force is designed to fight an air battle against the Soviet Union. They are not designed for this war . . . in fact, they are not designed for any war we are likely to have to fight."²

Five minutes after his phone conversation with Nixon, Kissinger called General Alexander Haig to relay the new orders. "He [Nixon] wants a massive bombing campaign in Cambodia. He doesn't want to hear anything. It's an order, it's to be done. Anything that flies on anything that moves. You got that?" The response from Haig was barely audible, but it sounded like laughing.³ What followed was both one of the largest and most misrepresented US air campaigns in history.

A recently declassified Pentagon spatial database of the bombing campaign details no fewer than 230,488 U.S. air war sorties over Cambodia from October 4th, 1965 to August 15th, 1973. Spatial analysis of this database challenges both the established historical narrative on the scale and scope of this campaign, as well as our understanding of the effects of large scale aerial bombardment.

I will do this by providing a historical overview of American involvement in Cambodia from the late 1950s up until the fall of the Lon Nol regime to the Khmer Rouge in March 1975. This analysis will make use of the bombing database to fact-check the historical record of dates, intensities and locations of the bombing. I will seek to clarify some of the principle disagreements regarding American actions, particularly those between William Shawcross, the author of *Sideshow*, and Henry Kissinger, National Security advisor and later Secretary of State to President Nixon, during the period of the US bombing of Cambodia. Also, by using a Geographic Information System (GIS), I am able to map specific days, or periods of days and view exactly where and what was bombed. This will shed light on many of the lingering questions surrounding the rise of the Khmer Rouge, their relationship with the North Vietnamese and their ability to recruit villagers to their cause in the push towards Phnom Penh.

In addition to the bombing database, I will draw on a series of interviews conducted by Ben Kiernan immediately following the fall of the Pol Pot. These interviews are of general historical importance as they represent the first contact between western observers and the Khmer population following 5 years of isolation and genocide. Specifically, however, they provide revealing testimony as to the effects and consequences of the US bombing and they provide stark contrast to the technocratic geopolitical rationales for the bombing provided in Nixon's and Kissinger's memoirs. While details of these interviews are used as the foundation of Kiernan's two works *How Pol Pot Came to Power*⁴ and *The Pol Pot Regime*⁵, when

¹ Hersh, Seymour, 1983. *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House*. Summit Books, p. 69.

² Insert transcript ref

³ Ibid

⁴ Kiernan, B. (1985). *How Pol Pot Came to Power : A History of Communism in Kampuchea, 1930-1975*. London, Verso.

⁵ Kiernan, B. (2002). *The Pol Pot Regime : Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79*. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press.

seen in tandem with the geo-referenced bombing points, new perspective is given to this tumultuous period in Indochinese history. These bombing maps, and detailed sortie information contained in the accompanying database will be able to confirm and contextualize the first-person descriptions of the bombing found in the Kiernan interviews.

The Bombing Database

In the fall of 2000, the U.S. Government released to the Governments of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam extensive classified Air Force data on all American bombings of those countries.⁶ This data assists them in the search for unexploded U.S. ordinance, still a major threat in much of the region, but it can also be analysed in map and time series formats, thereby revealing an astounding wealth of historical information on the region's former air war.

The new data transforms our understanding of the scale of what happened to Cambodia during the Indochinese war.⁷ First, it revises dramatically upwards the heretofore accepted bombing total of 539,129 tons dropped on the country. The Pentagon's records indicate that from 1965 to 1975 Cambodia was actually the target of 2,756,941 tons of U.S. bombs, dropped during no fewer than 230,516 sorties: a tonnage nearly 5 times greater than previously believed. It is now apparent that in 1969-73 alone, Cambodia suffered nearly half of all the U.S. bombing of Indochina (six million tons over nine years), making it even today the most heavily bombed country in history.

To put this bombardment into context, The U.S. dropped 160,000 tons of bombs on Japan during World War Two. The Pentagon data records the bombardment of Cambodia to have been at least three times heavier (around 500,000 tons), perhaps much more. To put this massive figure in global perspective, during all of WWII, the U.S. dropped 2 million tons of bombs, including 1.6 million tons in the European Theater and 500,000 tons in the Pacific Theater (including the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki: 15,000 and 20,000 tons respectively).⁸ In the Korean War, the total U.S. bombardment was 454,000 tons.⁹

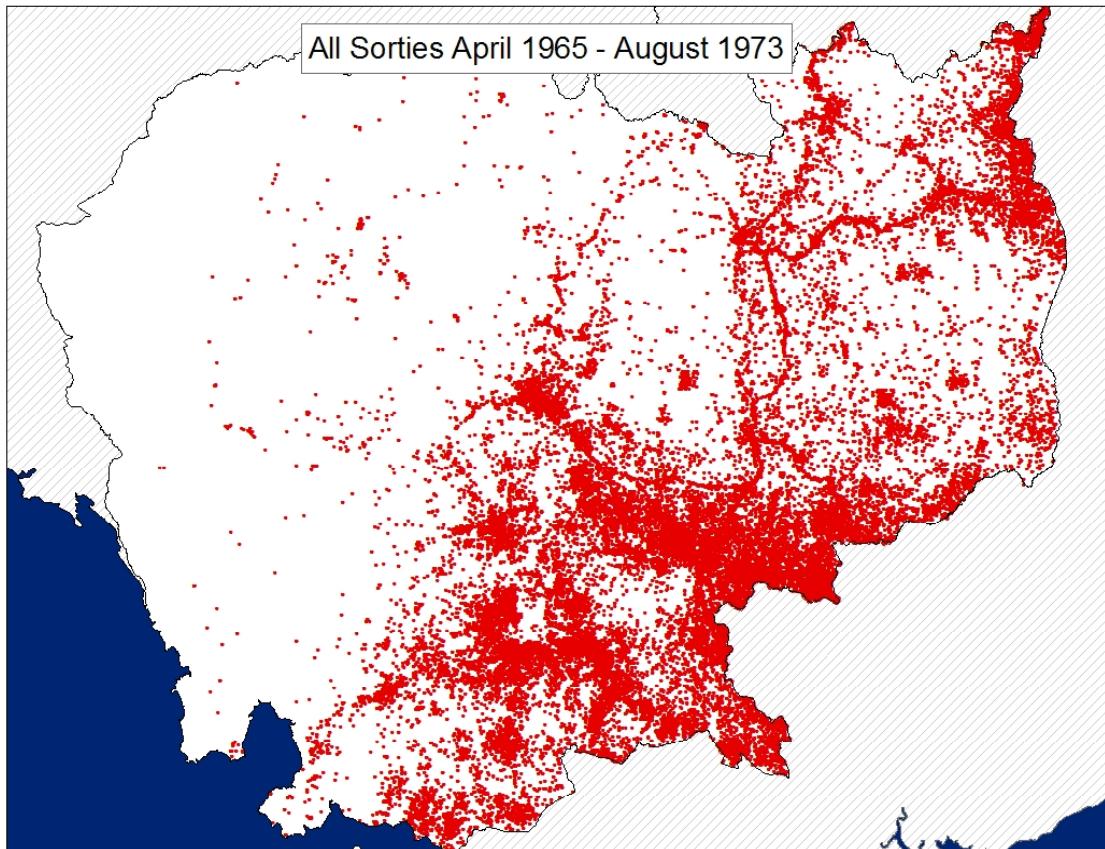
⁶ The GIS database comprised data originally recovered by the National Combat Command Information Processing System (NIPS) on missions conducted between 1965 and 1975. The data was classified top secret and maintained by the Joint Chiefs of Staff until declassified and delivered to the National Archives in 1976. It was originally compiled in four separate databases. These files are Combat Activities File (CACTA- October 1965 – December 1970); Southeast Asia Database (SEADAB - January 1970-June 1975); the Strategic Air Command's Combat Activities report (SACCOACT - June 1965 - August 1973); and herbicide data files (HERBS - July 1965 - February 1971). Miguel, E. and G. Roland (2005). *The Long Run Impact of Bombing Vietnam. Draft Manuscript*, p. 45, and Tom Smith, 'Southeast Asia Air Combat Data,' *The DISAM Journal*, Winter Issue, 2001.

⁷ For Henry Kissinger's views, see his *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America's Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 2003, and *Diplomacy*, New York, Touchstone, 1994; Kissinger, H. and C. B. Luce, *The White House Years*. Boston, Little, Brown, 1979.

⁸ Miguel and Roland, *Long Run Impact*, p. 2

⁹ Grolier, 1996, cited but not fully referenced in Miguel and Roland, *Long Run Impact*.

Figure 1 – Map of All US Sorties, April 1965 – August 1973



Not only was the total payload dropped on Cambodia much bigger than the U.S. Government or media have previously revealed, the bombardment also began much earlier. While the “secret” 1969-70 Menu campaign, when first uncovered, caused congressional uproar and provoked calls for Nixon’s impeachment, we now know that U.S. bombing actually started over four years earlier, in 1965, as Cambodian leaders had claimed at the time. These early tactical strikes may have supported secret CIA ground incursions from across the Vietnamese border, for during the mid-1960s, the Studies and Operations Group, U.S. Special Forces teams in tandem with the Khmer Serei (U.S.-trained ethnic Cambodian rebels operating from South Vietnam), were collecting intelligence inside Cambodia.¹⁰ Perhaps the U.S. tactical air strikes supported or followed up on these secret pre-1969 operations.

This revelation has several implications. First, U.S. bombing of neutral Cambodia significantly predates the Nixon administration. Earlier individual bombardments of Cambodia were known and protested by the Cambodian government. Prince Sihanouk’s Foreign Minister, for instance, claimed as early as January 1966 that “hundreds of our people

¹⁰ Over four years, this group conducted 1835 missions and captured 24 prisoners, but did not find the Viet Cong command centre. Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 64.

have already died in these attacks.”¹¹ The Pentagon database reveals escalating bombardments. From 1965 to 1968, the Johnson Administration conducted 2,565 sorties over Cambodia and dropped 214 tons of bombs there. Most of these strikes occurred under the Vietnam War policy of then Secretary of Defence Robert S. McNamara, which he has since publicly regretted.

Second, these early strikes were tactical, not carpet-bombings (typically dropped by B-52s). The Johnson Administration made a strategic decision not to use B-52s in Cambodia, whether out of concern for Cambodian lives, or for the country’s neutrality, or because of perceived strategic limits of carpet-bombing. Nixon however, decided differently, and from late 1969 the U.S. Air Force began to deploy B-52s over Cambodia.

Historical Narrative

Between March 18th 1969 and August 15th (1973) the U.S. conducted an air and ground campaign against Cambodia. The early ‘Menu’ air strikes, beginning on March 18th, 1969 lasted for 14 months and targeted VC/NVA sanctuaries along the Cambodian Vietnamese border. These same regions were then targeted in a joint US South Vietnamese ground offensive. Following this invasion, air strikes were carried out much deeper into Cambodia to protect the Lon Nol regime from the Cambodian communist forces. In the summer of 1973, when they learned of early bombing campaigns kept secret from them by the Nixon administration, congress limited funding to the war effort and mandated an end to the bombing on August 15th 1973.

The above is the commonly understood historical narrative of US involvement in Cambodia as documented first by William Shawcross in his 1979 book *Sideshow*, later corroborated by Henry Kissinger in numerous writings,¹² and since repeated in most accounts of Cambodia’s history.¹³ Using a spatial and temporal analysis of newly released data of US bombing points in Cambodia, however, this timeline along with many of the commonly held assumptions about the intensity, target areas and consequences of these strikes can be fundamentally challenged. Below, I reconstruct the historical narrative in light of this new data, bringing clarity to some events, and raising significant questions regarding others.

While the ‘sideshow’ of the secret and later public bombing campaigns has garnered the critical spotlight, and will here as well, these actions were historically fore-grounded by a geopolitical relationship between Cambodia and the US which was far more complex than generally perceived. Adding to the importance of this relationship, the bombing was also followed by a dramatic and chaotic series of events that culminated in the revolutionary victory of the CPK party led by Pol Pot, and the subsequent genocide. While there is much

¹¹ *The Australian*, Jan. 15, 1966, quoted in Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, p. 285.

¹² Such as: Kissinger, H. (2003). *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America’s Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War*. New York, Simon and Schuster; Kissinger, H. (1994). *Diplomacy*. New York, Touchstone and; Kissinger, H. and C. B. Luce (1979). *White House years*. Boston, Little, Brown.

¹³ For example: Becker, E. (1998). *When the War was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge*. New York, PublicAffairs; Deac, W. (1997). *The Road to the Killing Fields: The Cambodian War of 1970-1975*. College Station, Texas A&M University Press; Kiernan, B. (1985). *How Pol Pot came to power: a history of communism in Kampuchea, 1930-1975*. London, Verso; and, Power, S. (2003). *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide*. London, Flamingo.

debate as to what role this bombing may or may not have played in the rise of the CPK and its long term consequences, the historical and geopolitical climate of this period must first be understood. The period leading up to the Menu campaign and ending with the CPK victory will be reviewed in five time periods with a focus on US Cambodia geopolitical relations: from 1965 up to the start of the Menu campaign in April, 1968; from the start of Menu on March 18, 1969 until the US ground invasion on April 30, 1970; from the end of the invasion until the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement in *January 27, 1973*, from the Peace agreement until the cessation of US bombing on August 15th, 1973 and; from the bombing halt to the CPK victory on March 18th, 1975.

1. Pre Menu

For the period between the 1965 cessation of diplomatic relations until the documented 1969 start of the Menu air strikes, the bombing data base reveals that the US was bombing Cambodia. This bombing began 3 ½ years earlier than ever reported, predating the Nixon administration, and significantly alters the scope of US Indochinese operations under President Johnson, who was previously believed to not support air strikes in Cambodia. It also raises several important questions regarding commonly understood events during this time period. First, why did Sihanouk cease diplomatic relations with the United States, and was there a connection between this tension and the start of the bombing? Second, did Sihanouk and/or Chester Bowles know about this bombing when they met in a 1968 to discuss the possibility of future limited air strikes in Cambodia? And third, what was the strategic nature of these early air strikes and were they part of the Menu campaign?

First, Why did Cambodia kick out expel the US in 1965? In the late 1960's US Cambodian relations first began to sour. Sihanouk accused the CIA of supporting the Khmer Serei, whom he in turn accused of plotting to terrorize several provincial towns, while their ideologically right wing allies in Phnom Penh fermented dissatisfaction in the capital.¹⁴ This suspicion expanded to concern over US support of Lon Nol as well, and continued to escalate until 1963, when Sihanouk cut off US aid, and in 1965 when he broke off diplomatic relations altogether.¹⁵

The new bombing data shows us that the cessation of diplomatic relations between Cambodia and the US corresponds almost exactly with the start of US bombing. 1965 also marked the start of what would be an increasingly untenable balance between communist incursion and American pressure that would eventually lead to Sihanouk's loss of power. It is important to note that at this point the pressure against Sihanouk was largely coming from Washington and Hanoi and that Sihanouk had the support of China and Russia, who both supplied him with arms and denied aid to Solath Sar, the leader of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), and who would seem to have been their natural ideological ally.¹⁶ At the time, China and Russia both clearly preferred Sihanouk's moderate socialism to the potential instability of a radical communist revolution. As will be seen, this demonstrates the tremendous political impact of the coup on the rise of the CPK as it shifted international communist support from the benign neutrality of Sihanouk to the insurgency against the

¹⁴ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 54

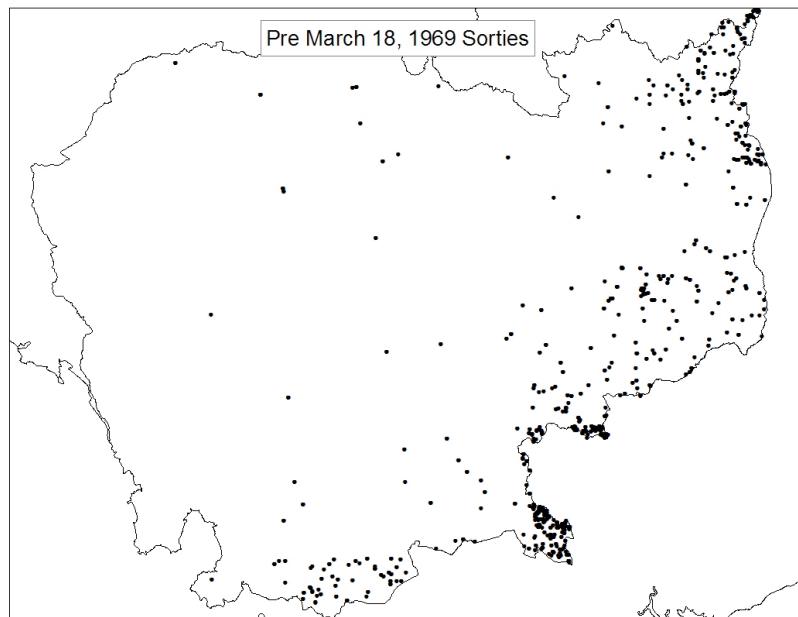
¹⁵ Ibid, 64

¹⁶ Becker, *When the War was Over*, 100

right wing and American supported, Lon Nol. In 1966, Sihanouk's power began to slip, the newly elected assembly made Lon Nol Prime Minister and Sihanouk's monarchist rival, Prince Sirik Matak, was made second in command.¹⁷

While domestic balances were shifting from Sihanouk's moderate socialism to a far more radical communism, the eastern provinces of Modolkiri and Ratanakiri were increasingly becoming the location of US - North Vietnamese Army (NVA) confrontation. Operating as the Studies and Operations Group, in tandem (as Sihanouk had feared) with the Khmer Serei, US special forces teams were collecting intelligence up to 30 kilometers into Cambodia. Over 4 years, this group conducted 1835 missions and captured 24 prisoners, but found no command center.¹⁸ It now appears as if these intelligence operations were being supported by air strikes. As the map below shows, during these 4 years before the known start of the Menu campaign, most operations were in the operational area of the Studies and Operations Group, generally within 30 kilometres of the Vietnamese border. The significance of this revelation should not be underestimated. For one, it means that a significant number of people must have known about this bombing, including all special-forces soldiers involved in these incursions. Second, it shows that the bombing significantly predates the Nixon administration. Third, as I will discuss below, it represents a peculiar position for the Nixon administration. While both Kissinger and Nixon have admitted the start date of the Menu campaign, they have never discussed pre 1969 bombing. Is this simply because they were never asked? If so, this is a remarkable sleight of hand. What is critical, however, is determining whether these early strikes were part of the same Menu campaign, or simply strikes in support of the special forces, a question I will explore below.

Figure 3



¹⁷ Ibid, 101

¹⁸ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 64

Increasing US incursions into Cambodia, coupled with greater numbers of NVA troops and camps inside the country, created a growing problem for Sihanouk's conception of neutrality. To counter each side, he began to give increasing concessions to the other, resulting in a de facto conflict escalation in the name of neutrality. This give and take came to a climax in 1968 when, in order to counter this new American pressure, he allowed Hanoi to create a supply route through the western port of Sihanoukville and across the country (ironically using the title of 'US friendship Highway') to the Vietnamese camps in the East. This gave the NVA a powerful life-line and in reciprocation led Sihanouk to give his most ominous concession yet: the support for US "hot pursuit" operations in Cambodia.

The unanswered question of the pre-menu period is did Sihanouk and or Chester Bowles know about this bombing when they met in a 1968 to discuss the possibility of future limited air strikes in Cambodia? There is no record of either mentioning it in, and it appears from the accounts of their meeting in 1968, that they were both sincerely discussing a potential *future* air campaign. There were however, on the day of Sihanouk's and Bowles' first meeting, 15 sorties into Cambodia.

On January 8th, 1968 Chester Bowles, then the American Ambassador in New Delhi, made the first of two trips to Phnom Penh. While the exact nature of his conversations with Sihanouk are unclear, there is little doubt that the Prince granted the US 'hot pursuit' status to operate in Cambodia territory.¹⁹ As Bowles reports, "If we (the US) pursued VC forces into remote areas where the population would be unaffected he would 'shut his eyes.'"²⁰ Kissinger would use this concession for the remainder of the war as justification for US presence in the country and particularly for the initial secret Menu campaign as he came under increasing US domestic critique. However, it seems quite clear, as Chandler has argued, that Sihanouk's concession was highly limited and would have been very unlikely to have included the massive B-52 bombardment that was to be levied in its name. As he argues, there should be little doubt regarding what the type of engagement Sihanouk was tacitly authorizing. His words were most certainly taken out of context in the subsequent and frequent reiterations by Kissinger and Nixon.²¹ Indeed, Charles Meyer, a long time aide to Sihanouk, is adamant that Sihanouk only meant to allow "isolated, small-scale attacks, not vast B-52 campaigns along the length of the border" and that there wasn't even any question of B-52s.²²

If either knew that 'hot pursuit' strikes had been ongoing for three and a half years, neither brought it up in these meetings nor has written about it since. It is certainly possible that Sihanouk did not know about these strikes, particularly if they were targeted strikes in generally VC/NVA controlled areas, and since he didn't authorise Hanoi's use of the cross country transport route until 1968. And it is possible that from the US administration's

¹⁹ However, as Chandler suggest, the authorization was most likely offhand and was in any event, highly limited, Chandler, *Tragedy of Cam History*, 172

²⁰ John W. Sherley (1968) "Bowles Mission to Cambodia", released in May 1968 under the FOIA. As cited in Chandler *Tragedy of Cam History*, 173.

²¹ Chandler, *Tragedy of Cam History*, 172-3.

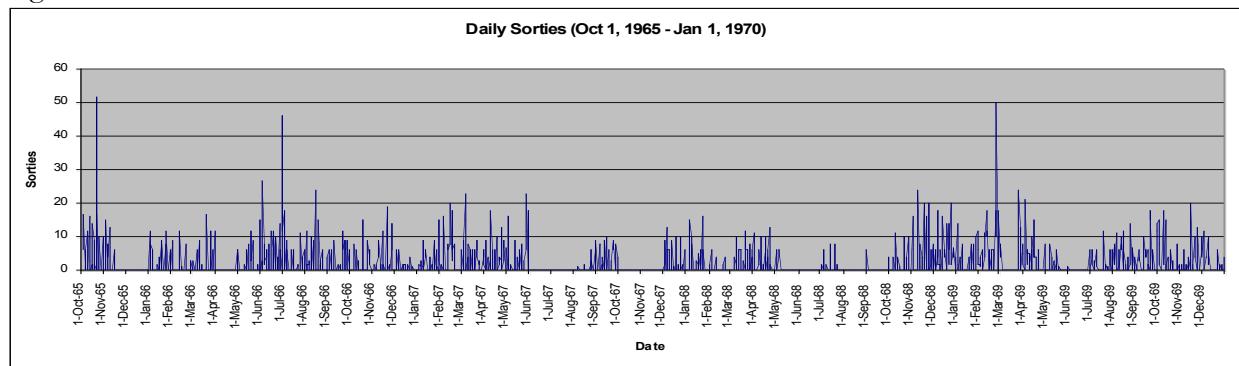
²² Shawcross interview with Charles Meyer on May 30, 1977. As cited in Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 70.

standpoint, Chester Bowls was to negotiate the start of ‘authorised’ air strikes and would have no need to know of earlier activity.

The third question is while it is clear from the new data that the bombings began almost four years earlier than previously known, an important historical question is whether or not these were actually part of the Menu campaign? If they were not, it may be that Kissinger and Nixon never in fact lied about them, only admitting to what was revealed by Shawcross and others regarding the post March 18, 1969 strikes. Also, during my research in Cambodia, it was suggested by numerous researchers that earlier strikes might have been the result of US planes returning to Thailand from southern Vietnam unloading excess bombs in order to land safely. To shed light on both of these questions, it is useful to look at both the intensity timeline chart and the location of these early strikes compared with the later Menu campaign.

First, quite simply, as Figure 5 clearly shows, there is little change in intensity after the apparent start of the Menu campaign on March 18, 1969. Interestingly, there is actually no bombing on this day at all. The intensity of pre-Menu strikes is certainly in line with the first half of the 14 month Menu campaign. However, as will be discussed in greater detail below, on January 1st, 1970, there was a dramatic rise in both sorties and load intensity. *It is possible that it was this rising intensity, not the start of Menu, that was at the core of the Nixon administration escalation strategy.* As Nixon said to Kissinger, “I think a very definite change of policy towards Cambodia probably would be one of the first orders of business we get in.”²³ If the bombing intensity is indicative of this policy change, then it came on January 1st, not on the supposed March 18th start of Menu.

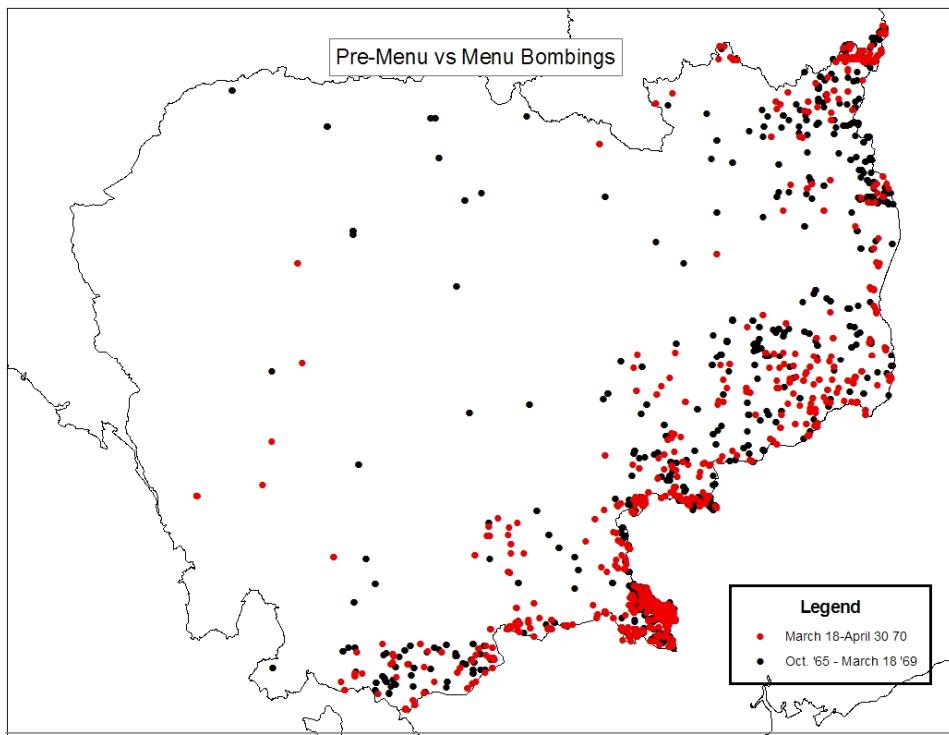
Figure 5



Second, it is useful to look at the location of the pre-Menu bombings versus those that fall within the 14 months of the Menu period. Figure 6 shows that while there were some outliers in the northwest that may fall into the excess payload category, the vast majority of pre-Menu bombings correspond quite closely with the VC/NVA base areas strikes that were to follow under the Menu label.

Figure 6

²³ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 59



It is worth noting the status of the CPK at this point. In a region of intense war up until 1969, Sihanouk had managed to keep Cambodia, at least explicitly, out of the conflict. When Kissinger and Nixon came to power in 1969, the CPK numbered 4000 and had little or no prospect of success. In a 1977 speech, Pol Pot described their small membership and almost complete lack of arms in 1968-1969, claiming that “fewer than 5000 poorly armed guerrillas were scattered across the Cambodian landscape, uncertain about their strategy, tactics, loyalty and leaders.”²⁴ In 1969, Lon Nol estimated the rebel forces at only 2400 nationally.²⁵ As Kiernan summarizes “the CPK rebellion was hardly a major military threat to Sihanouk’s army – although its existence had profoundly altered the character of his regime – and it had little hope of achieving power for the CPK in the medium term.”²⁶

This reality would of course rapidly change as both the North Vietnamese and the US intensified their presence in Cambodia, the former with increased troop levels and the latter with the inauspicious escalation of one of the largest air bombardments in history.

2. Menu, The Coup and the Ground Invasion

The Menu Campaign

²⁴ New York Times, December 8th, 1968 and Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, 283-85, as cited in Chandler, *Tragedy of Cam History*, 178.

²⁵ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, 284.

²⁶ Ibid, 284-85

On November 5, 1968 Nixon took office and named Henry Kissinger his national security advisor. Elected during an unpopular and increasingly un-winnable war, there was little doubt that his presidency would be in part defined by the success of his exit from Indochina. What was unknown at the time was that the US exit from Vietnam would have a huge impact on its neighbour, Cambodia. Two theories should be introduced which frame America's decision to expand the war and to keep the bombings secret and are used to explain Nixon's (and importantly Kissinger's) thinking: the mad man theory and Vietnamization. First, Nixon, like Eisenhower in Korea, believed that an overwhelming display of force was necessary to increase one's bargaining position in a conflict. However, Nixon felt power alone would be insufficient (which is why he ruled out a nuclear option in Indochina), but rather irrational power was seen as a way of increasing the likelihood of a 'peaceful' exit from Indochina. Second, Nixon believed that the only way the US could extricate itself from Vietnam was to shift combat responsibility to the Vietnamese. Vietnamization, and later Cambodianization, were central to the Nixon strategy leading up to the Paris Peace Agreement in 1973 and must be considered when looking at the ground invasion of Cambodia and the later shift to complete reliance on airpower.

The question was therefore how could the administration signal to Hanoi that they were willing to be much more ruthless than the Johnson administration (madmen), but do so secretly? The answer, proposes Hersh, was the US bombing of Cambodia,²⁷ or, as I argue here, the escalation of the bombing that was already ongoing. Hanoi, the administration thought, must believe that they were willing to sustain and widen the war "beyond anything Johnson had considered."²⁸ Shawcross points out the obvious flaw in their theory – that the "reputations of irrationality have to be established and that can be done only by irrational actions."²⁹

On the first day of office Nixon asked how Cambodia could be dealt with. In response he received the first suggestion by John Abrams that they use B-52s to attack COSVN headquarters in base area 353.³⁰ This exchange was the start of what would be a two-track strategy; they would both be friendly to Sihanouk, but test how far he would allow them to go against the sanctuaries. This exchange is also critical as it documents the request for the use of B-52s, for non-tactical air strikes, which would make sense if they had already been bombing for 4 years and would also substantiate the theory that the Menu campaign did not represent the start of the bombing, but rather the first use of B-52s in the Cambodian theatre.

Following the Tet offensive on February 22nd 1969 and while on route to a 10 day European trip, Kissinger and Nixon invited Haig and Sitton to meet with them in Brussels in order to brief them on B-52 bombing options.³¹ When they met on the 24th they put together the following guidelines recounted by Kissinger:

- 1) Bombing would be limited to within 5 miles of the Vietnamese border;

²⁷ Hersh, S. M. (1984). *Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House*. New York, Summit Books, 53

²⁸ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 79.

²⁹ Ibid, 91.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Hersh, *Price of Power*, 59

- 2) America would not announce the attack, but acknowledge them if Cambodia protested;
- 3) America would invite a UN inspection of the base areas and offer to pay compensation for any damage to civilians.³²

These rules, particularly the first were broken almost immediately and all underplay the degree to which the strikes were designed to be kept secret. In fact, there was a dual reporting system, developed by Sitton and supported by Kissinger, that was designed specifically to ensure that the knowledge of the strikes was known by a very limited number of people and kept specifically from the Saigon press corps, much of the military hierarchy and Congress. As Hersh documents, sixty B-52 pilots would be briefed on their mission in South Vietnam; 12 would drop in Vietnam as planned and then 48 would be given special radar signals directing them into Cambodia. They would then report back to the Pentagon's secret command.³³ "The state is to be notified only after the point of no return...the order is not appealable" Nixon he told Kissinger.³⁴ The bombing raid began on March 18th 1969. These early and secret strikes would not be discovered by the Senate Foreign Relations committee until 1973.

What is peculiar about the above account, which is now the accepted history, is that throughout this period, the US was already bombing Cambodia with the same intensity and in the same location as the later first half of the Menu campaign. This incongruity will be discussed further below. Leaving aside the earlier bombardment for a moment and focusing solely on the 14 month period of the Menu campaign, the bombing database reveals many inaccuracies in the current historical record. Of particular interest are the overall intensity of the bombings and their start dates; the January 1st 1970 jump bombing intensity; determining which base areas were targeted and the discrepancy between oft cited statistics and actual bombing.

First, Shawcross states that during the Menu campaign, there were 3,630 sorties dropping a total of 110,000 tons of bombs³⁵. In the bombing database, there are 26,590 sorties for a total of 161,566 tons dropped during this same period - a significant increase, particularly in sorties. It should be noted, however, that relative to the entire bombing period, where almost 3 million tons were dropped, the Menu campaign is only a small fraction.

Second, the database reveals some peculiarities regarding the apparent start date of Menu. There is a halt to the strikes beginning on the 3rd of March and they don't begin again until the 26th. The same early strikes are shown in Figure 8 below.

Figure 7

³² Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 62

³³ Hersh, *Price of Power*, 63.

³⁴ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 62-69.

³⁵ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 64.

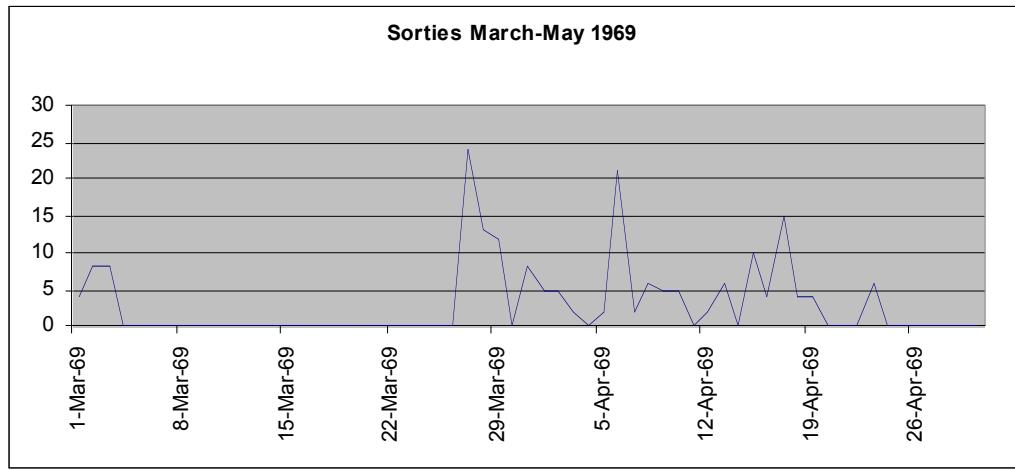
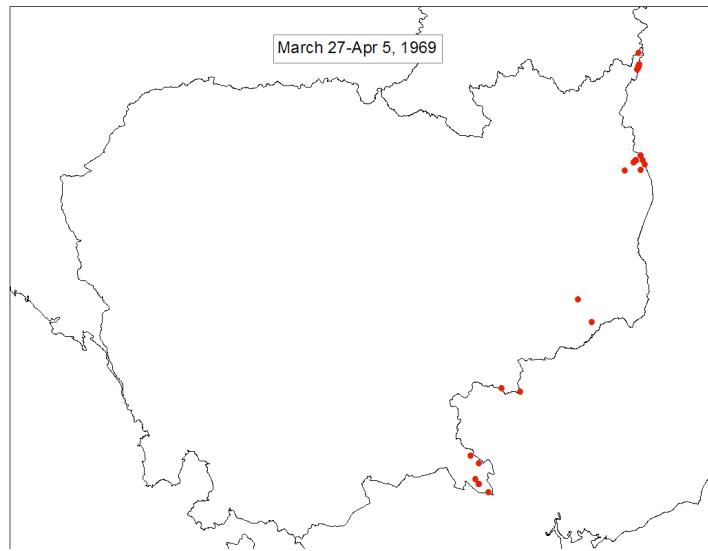


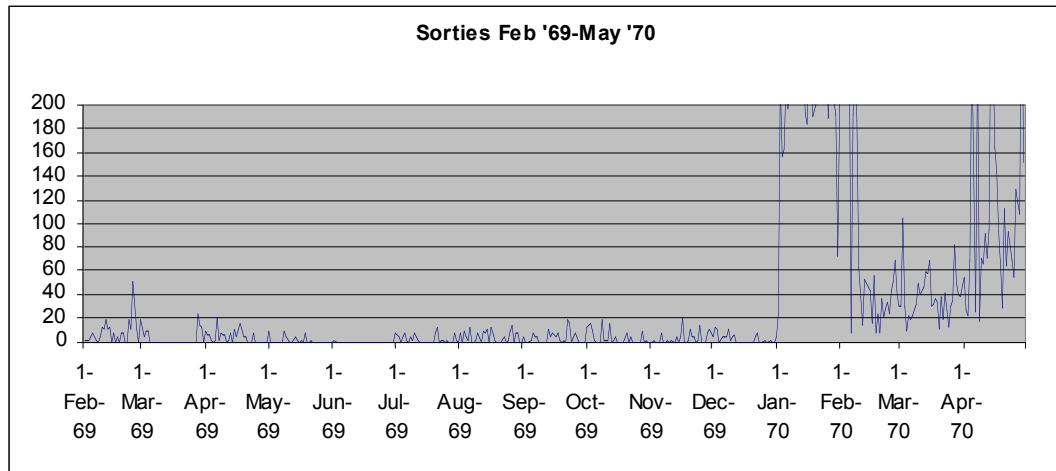
Figure 8



Third, the database shows that there was a remarkable jump in intensity of the bombing on January 1st 1970. This increase has never been mentioned before and represents a significant change in the magnitude of the campaign. Indeed, the entire bombing period, from 1965 to 1973, can be bifurcated on this day. There is no clear reason why this would be the case, although there are two potential theories. The first is that it was this increase that General Abrams had been asking for, rather than the start of Menu *per se*. The start of Menu simply received significant attention due to Shawcross's account. Nowhere does Shawcross mention this jump, presumably because time series sortie information was unavailable. If this is the case, then the new Cambodian policy that Nixon brought in was not to begin bombing Cambodia, but rather to increase the intensity with the use of B-52s. This increase did not occur at the perceived start of Menu, but rather several months later on January 1st.

1970. It appears as if this is the actual start date for the Menu campaign as all bombing from 1965 to 1970 follows a consistent pattern of location and intensity. The second possibility, which will be discussed below, is that the increase corresponds to a perceived vulnerability of Sihanouk's regime. Four months after the increase, Lon Nol took over control of the Cambodian Government in a non-violent coup. Whether this was the intent, the consequence or unrelated to the bombing is impossible to say. The increase though, as Figure 9 below shows, was dramatic. Bombings would continue at the new intensity level for the remainder of the campaign.

Figure 9



There are also discrepancies between the base areas that were targeted, according to both Shawcross and Kissinger, and those that were actually hit. According to both Shawcross and Kissinger, the Menu stages targeted the following base areas:

- Breakfast - Base area 353
- Lunch – Base area 609
- Snack – Base area 351
- Dinner – Base area 352
- Dessert – Base area 350

These base areas, supposedly the only targets of the Menu campaign, can be seen in Figure 10. Figure 11, however, reveals the Menu bombing to be far more extensive than this. And, in Figure 13, the proximity of this bombing to dozens of villages is demonstrated.

Figure 10

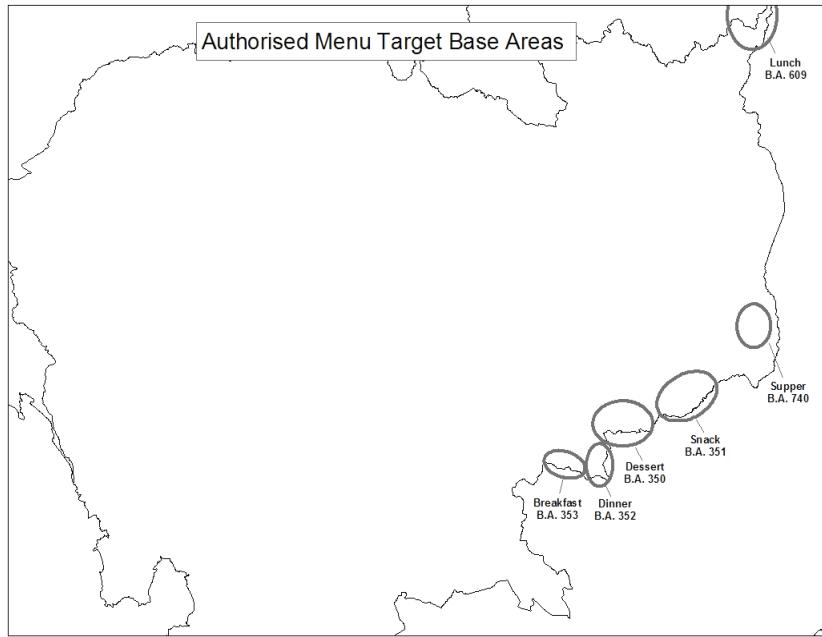


Figure 11

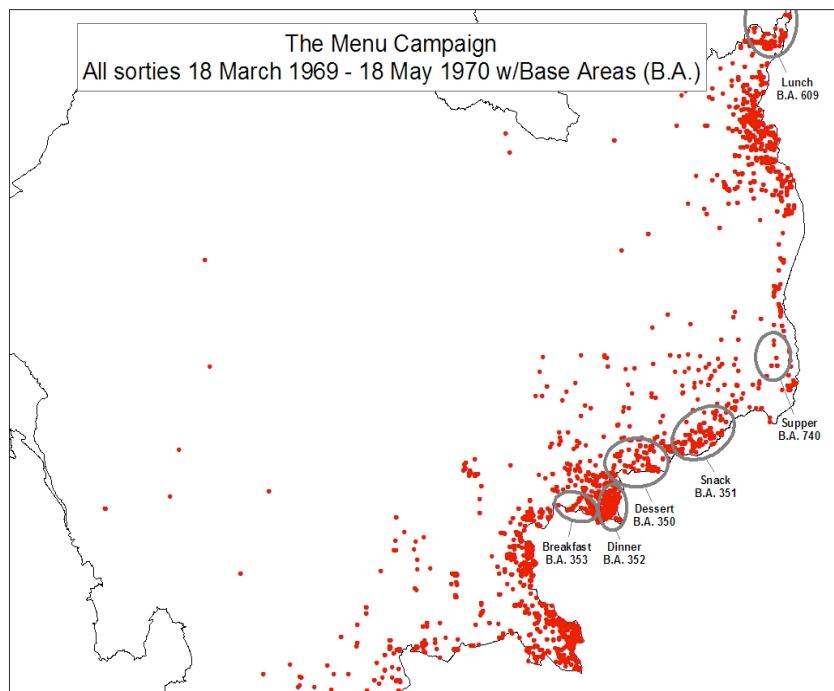
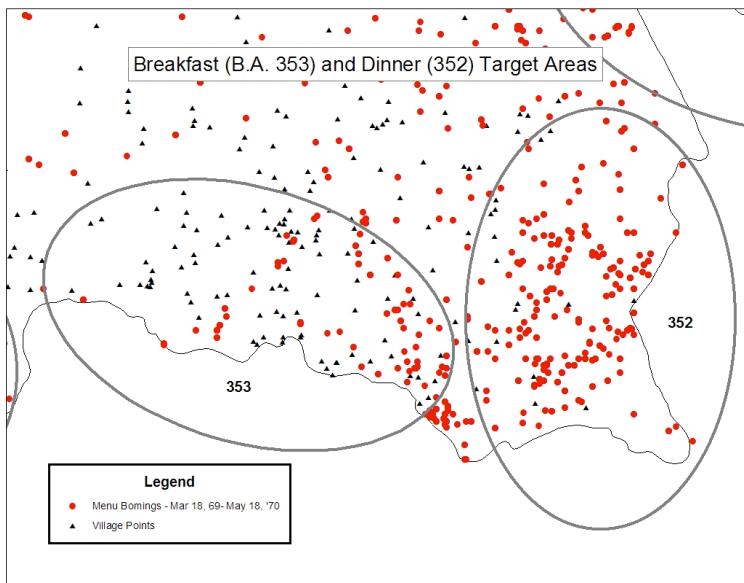
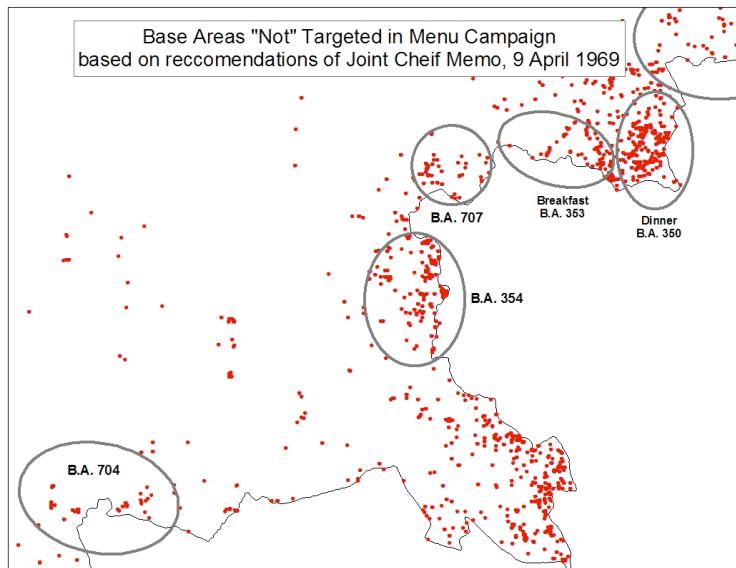


Figure 12



Further, in a memorandum written for the Secretary of Defense on April 9 1969, the Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed reservations about striking base areas 704, 354, and 707 due to high civilian concentrations. Kissinger denies that these areas were ever hit. In fact, in a response to *Sideshow* that was later published in the appendix of the revised edition, Kissinger and Rodman chastised Shawcross for his confusion between base areas 704 and 740 in the first version of *Sideshow* (which Shawcross subsequently corrected). Figure 13 below shows that both were in fact bombed.³⁶

Figure 13



³⁶ Kissinger's authorised response to *Sideshow*, written by his aide, Peter W. Rodman, for the *American Spectator*, March 1981, and published under the title: *Sideswipe: Kissinger, Shawcross and the Responsibility for Cambodia*. Republished in Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 2nd edition, 422-56.

While these strikes make up a very small fraction of what would in time be dropped on Cambodia, I will argue below that the damage that they caused set in motion a highly precarious series of events leading to the extension of the war deep into Cambodia, the coup, the rise of the then insignificant CPK and their eventual victory over Lon Nol. While Kissinger has rightly rejected the claim that the bombardment ‘caused’ the genocide,³⁷ throughout this period he recklessly ignored its local consequences. Indeed, while the exact causal chain is unknowable, there is ample local evidence, that if considered, would have substantially altered the strategic rationale for the bombing. Instead, it is with the start of the bombardment Chandler argues, that the US came to share the responsibility of “plugging Cambodia into a war that any anti-communist government in Phnom Penh was bound to loose.”³⁸

It is worth noting that the initial mandate of the bombing had expired and that there could have then been a reassessment of the strategic utility of the attacks. As Abrams described, “an appropriate form of assault would be a short duration, concentrated B-52 attack of up to 60 sorties compressing the time period between attacks to a minimum. This is more than we would usually use for this size but in this case it would be wise to ensure complete destruction.”³⁹ Having failed to achieve this limited objective of the campaign, and arguably having greatly inflamed the situation in Cambodia, the Nixon administration went on to bomb for four more years.

It is worth looking briefly at the early consequences of the Menu air strikes. The first of these consequences were evident almost immediately following the early Menu attacks and were almost uniformly negative, both for US strategic interests and for the wider Cambodian situation. The early bombardment had at least four negative outcomes: failure to hit the COSVN, the dispersal of NVA troops, the destabilizing of Sihanouk and significant civilian casualties.

First, the air strikes failed in their primary objective, to hit the COSVN operating in the Fish Hook area of Cambodia, or in the region of Base 353. This failure, and the actual impact the bombing on the NVA is best described by Harrison, leader of a team of special-forces sent to capture the remaining COSVN personnel. “If there was anybody still alive they would be so stunned that all you will have to do is walk over, lead him by the arm to the helicopters. This is was they told us...we had been told that the B-52s would annihilate everyone down there.” What he found was quite different: “The visible effect of the bombing on the North Vietnamese who were there was the same as taking a beehive the size of a basketball and poking it with a stick. They were mad... I’m sure there were instances wherein tremendous damage has been done by B-52s, but my original enthusiasm has been tempered somewhat.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Chandler, *Tragedy of Cam History*, 194.

³⁹ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 20.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 64.

Only four of their team members survived. There is no evidence that the Pentagon informed the White House of the slaughter of the intelligence team. Neither Kissinger nor Nixon mentions the deaths in their memoirs.⁴¹

Second, according to the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, the bombing almost immediately caused the dispersal of NVA troops.⁴² As Shawcross also argues: “By fall 1969, General Abrams and the Joint Chiefs had accepted that the Menu bombing had failed in its primary purpose; neither COSVN headquarters nor the sanctuaries themselves were destroyed. But it was having another effect. To escape bombardment the Vietnamese communists had begun to move deeper into Cambodia – “thus” as Abrams later acknowledged to the US Senate “bringing them into increasing conflict with the Cambodian authorities.”⁴³ This last point is disputed by Kissinger, who agrees that the NVA dispersed, but argues that rather than moving deeper into Cambodia, they ‘retreated’ back into South Vietnam. While plausible, it is unlikely that they would have moved into a *more* hostile region when faced with the massive bombardment that Harrison was told would so stun them that “all (we would) have to do (was) walk over and lead him by the arm to the helicopter.”⁴⁴ If they did indeed move further into Cambodia, this would have brought them into more heavily populated areas and thus in greater contact with the ‘neutral’ Cambodian people and the CPK.

Third, this dispersal, and movement westward, arguably exacerbated the fragile stability that Sihanouk had thus far managed to sustain. As more and more reports of NVA clashes with Cambodian villagers reached Phnom Penh, Lon Nol sharpened his anti-communist (and also anti-Vietnamese) rhetoric, publishing maps of their bases and supply lines.⁴⁵ “The effect was inevitable (especially when it coincided with a deepening economic crisis)” argues Shawcross, “Sihanouk’s balance of right against left became more precarious. The bombing was destabilizing him.”⁴⁶

The Coup

Exactly one year after the start of the Menu Bombings, on March 18th, 1970, while Sihanouk was at his residence in Peking, Lon Nol seized power in a non-violent coup. While Kissinger’s comment that “it was not a military coup in the classic sense, it was Sihanouk’s own Government without Sihanouk,”⁴⁷ underplays the significant political consequences of the shift, it is true that this was not a coup in the general militaristic sense. Nonetheless, Lon Nol took power, supported largely by the urban middle class, leaving the rural population, those experiencing the war first hand, to continue their support for Sihanouk and later shifting to the cause of the CPK.

⁴¹ Hersh, *Price of Power*, 69.

⁴² Chandler, XX

⁴³ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 114.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 25

⁴⁵ Ibid 114

⁴⁶ Ibid, 113. Importantly, Lon Nol argued that their spread westward into Cambodia was due to flooding and to “operational pressure of their adversary”, that is, to “clearing operations by American and South Vietnamese troops”. He must mean bombing.

⁴⁷ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 131.

The question of US involvement in the coup has been the focus of much debate, either being treated as established fact or as a myth of the anti-war movement. The reality is at least a degree more nuanced, however, and deserves some attention, particularly in the context of the growing US involvement in Cambodia.

When looking objectively at the US role in the Lon Nol coup we must ask four questions: Did the US support right wing opposition groups leading up to the coup?: was it in the perceived interest of the Nixon administration for it to occur?; did they explicitly plan it?; and did they even know about it? I believe the answers are Yes, Yes, No and Likely.

First, there is no doubt that the CIA had been operating in Cambodia for some time. They had been supporting and working with the Khmer Serei, as Sihanouk had indeed feared. Former CIA director, Colby, states it clearly: “Lon Nol may well have been encouraged by the fact that the US was working with Son Nhonic Thanh (the Khmer Serei leader)...the obvious conclusion for him...was that he would be given US support.”⁴⁸

According to Snepp, the CIA was running operations in Cambodia, based out of Saigon, with the belief that if Sihanouk were replaced by Lon Nol, “he would welcome the United States with open arms and we would accomplish everything”. At the beginning of 1970 he continues, the US were supporting both Son Ngoc Than and Lon Nol.⁴⁹

This being said, there is little evidence that the US actually planned, or was the principle force behind the coup. As Kiernan states, “there is in fact no evidence of CIA involvement in the 1970 events, but a good deal of evidence points to a role played by sections of the US military intelligence establishment and the Army Special Forces.”⁵⁰ Colby has gone further, admitting that the CIA was indeed in contact with the coup organizers, but that they were not plotting with them. Snepp, a senior CIA official operating in Southeast Asia adds that “we (the US) were in a position to rub our hands and take advantage of it.”⁵¹

The only direct accusation on compliancy going further than these admissions remains uncorroborated and is outlined by Kiernan. Samuel R Thornton, an intelligence specialist at the US navy command in Saigon, claims that when Lon Nol approached the US military intelligence for assistance, they were prepared to go one step further. Thornton told Hersh that the US suggested that they infiltrate special forces trained Khmer Makpuchea Krom (KKK) troops in the Kampuchean armed forces, ‘to insert a US trained assassination team disguised as Viet Cong insurgents into Phnom Penh to kill Prince Sihanouk as a pretext for revolution’⁵². This plan was apparently called ‘Sunshine Park’ and was approved at the ‘highest levels of government’⁵³.

While this offer was supposedly turned down by Lon Nol and the account remains uncorroborated, what is clear from the various sources is that Lon Nol ‘carried out the coup

⁴⁸ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 122.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 115.

⁵⁰ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, 300

⁵¹ Chanda, N. (1986). *Brother Enemy: The War After the War*. New York, Collier Books, 64.

⁵² Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, 301

⁵³ Ibid

with at least a legitimate expectation of significant US support⁵⁴. Indeed, it at least seems that there is enough evidence to contradict Kissinger's claim the "we (the administration) neither encouraged Sihanouk's overthrow, nor knew about it in advance", if from nothing other than the title of the CIA report of March 12th 1970: "Indications of a possible coup in Phnom Penh."⁵⁵

Finally, regardless of role, assistance or even knowledge, it is certainly important to ask whether the coup was in the perceived interest of the administration. While Kissinger claims that "from the point of view of the Nixon Administration, the precarious political balance in central Cambodia under Sihanouk's skilful, if unpredictable, tutelage, was the best attainable situation,"⁵⁶ there was widespread understanding in Moscow and Peking⁵⁷ as well as within the Sihanouk⁵⁸ and Lon Nol⁵⁹ factions of Cambodia, that a Lon Nol government would represent a significant shift to the right and would immediately result in a new US operational environment.

Just as importantly, the coup represented a fundamental shift in the Cambodian political landscape. The delicate balance that kept two warring powers at relative bay was built on the strength of Cambodian nationalism, with Sihanouk as its figurehead. The coup forced Sihanouk to choose between the US supported Lon Nol regime and the CPK, a group that however differing ideologically, at least he felt was fighting for Cambodian nationalism. The irony of course is that the coup was a windfall for the CPK and Pol Pot claimed as such in 1978.⁶⁰ It gave them the support of the NVA and Sihanouk and provided a clear link between the regime in Phnom Penh and the American 'imperialists'. With new strength and the perception of a singular enemy,⁶¹ the CPK was about to surge in support, power, and autonomy.

Following the coup, it is worth taking note of the increase in bombings during the summer of 1970. As Kiernan states, by the end of the summer "much of the country was a free fire zone for the US aircraft...Pilots had far more liberty than in Vietnam to bomb any target they wanted."⁶² This rise can be seen in the joint sortie and load timeline for the first half of 1970 of Figure 15, and the map of all bombing during the same period in Figure 16.

Figure 15

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Chandler, *Tragedy of Cam History*, 195.

⁵⁶ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 127.

⁵⁷ Chandler, *Tragedy of Cam History*, 197.

⁵⁸ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 130

⁵⁹ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 122.

⁶⁰ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, 286

⁶¹ see, Ibid 306.

⁶² Ibid, 307

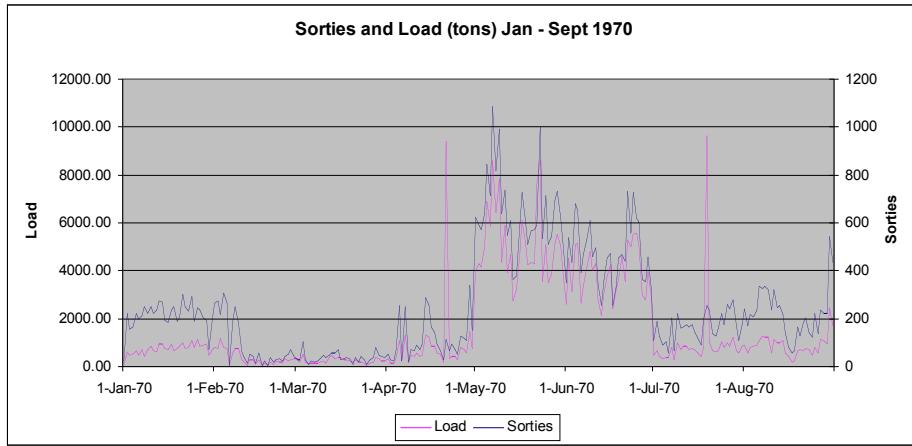
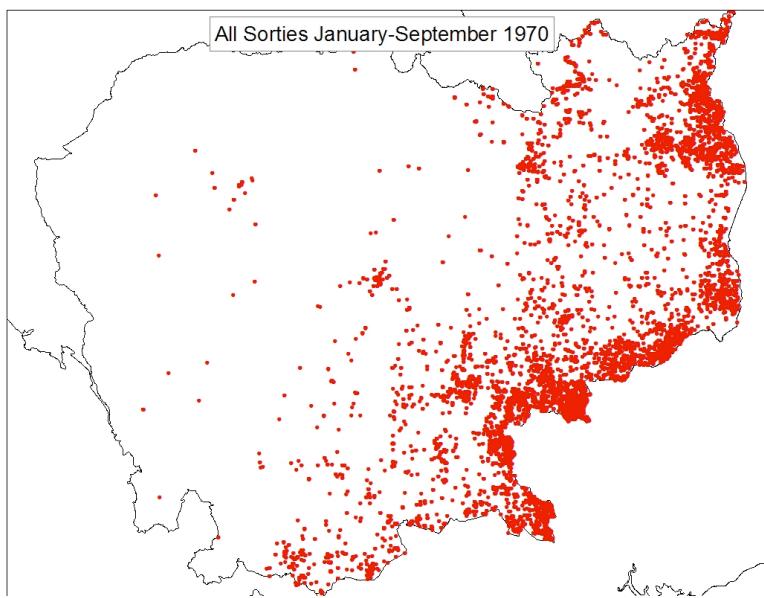


Figure 16



The Ground Invasion

As anticipated, there were significant changes in US operational ability in Cambodia following the coup. Lon Nol had long been in support of an American presence in Southeast Asia generally and in Cambodia in particular and considered fighting communism a “holy duty.”⁶³ Nixon for his part insisted, with much concern in State and Defence Departments, that the US build up and fully support Lon Nol.

The immediate and tangible result of this new Cambodian political support was the potential for a much more significant US presence in Cambodia. This meant that, for the first time, a possible ground invasion could be considered in addition to the still secret bombings.

⁶³ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 128

It was clear that Lon Nol could not enforce the removal of communist sanctuaries in Cambodia on his own.⁶⁴ As he was no longer limited by Sihanouk's notion of neutrality he was free to solicit substantial US and South Vietnamese ground troops and air support. For him, the sole utility of a ground invasion was to push the VC/NVA out of Cambodia and possibly to eliminate what was a small but growing national communist movement.

Kissinger and Nixon, however, had quite different interests at stake in a potential incursion. While Nixon told his White House staff that "We are not interested in Cambodia. We're only interested in it not being used as a base" a second geopolitical rationale was evident as he followed this with "we're trying to shock the Soviets into calling a Conference and we can't do this by appearing weak." This demonstrates two somewhat overlapping rationales. The first, to destroy the COSVN headquarters that the bombing had failed to eradicate (in part because, as Laird had repeatedly told them, they didn't exist, at least in the regions being bombed⁶⁵), and to force the NVA out of Cambodia. Second, much like the initial bombing campaign, the ground incursion would be used to signal to Hanoi how far the US was willing to go (madman theory). As Kissinger states, "If we were serious about reducing our involvement in Vietnam and not leaving those that had relied on us to their fate, we had to thwart Hanoi's designs on Cambodia."⁶⁶ Elaborating upon his fear of Hanoi's intentions in Cambodia, however, he adds, "What we faced was a painful, practical decision: whether to use American troops to neutralize the sanctuaries for a period of 8 weeks was the best way to maintain the established pace and security of our exit from Vietnam – prevent Hanoi from overtaking Indochina."⁶⁷

While there is a certain logic to the US claim that the Cambodian invasion was simply an extension of the Vietnam conflict,⁶⁸ their belief that the two countries could be understood in the same manner would prove disastrously false.

In early April, 1970, the US began preparations for a full scale invasion for 3200 US and 40,000 Vietnamese troops.⁶⁹ The invasion was to be in the site of the Breakfast and Dinner air campaigns, base areas 353 and 352, and would begin on April 30th. In a clear indictment of the effectiveness of the air strikes in routing out NVA sanctuaries, this area had already been hit with 29,000 tons of bombs.⁷⁰

"You have to electrify people with bold decisions. Bold decisions make history. Let's go blow the hell out of them" - Nixon⁷¹

April 30th, the invasion began with air and ground attacks in Ratanakiri, Mondolkiri, Kompong Cham and Svay Rieng. According to Shawcross, it was difficult for the

⁶⁴ Ibid, 138

⁶⁵ Ibid, 147

⁶⁶ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 163.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 171.

⁶⁸ See Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, 304.

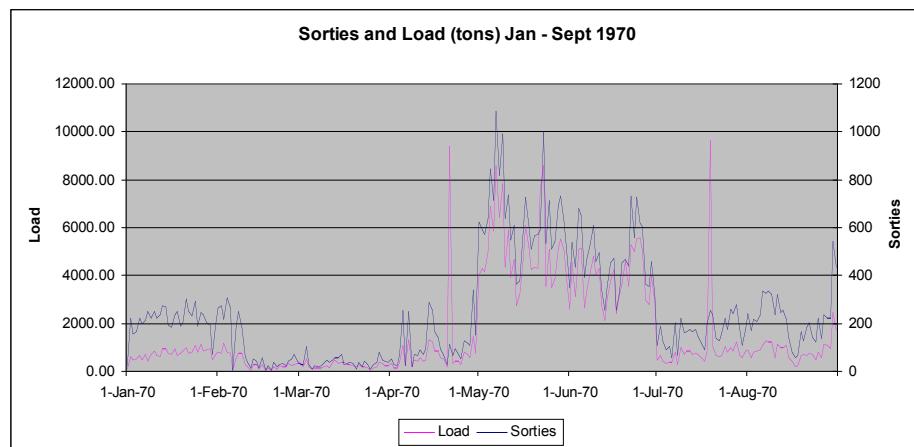
⁶⁹ Ibid, 306.

⁷⁰ Interestingly, on April 24-25th, China sponsored a conference which pledged that the four revolutionary movements would join in action against the imperialists. The four groups were Sihanouk, the leader of the Pathet Lao, the president of the National Liberation Front and the North Vietnamese Prime minister.

⁷¹ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 152.

Americans to tell the difference between friend and foe. This was complicated by the fact that South Vietnamese Soldiers attacked Cambodians for the murders of Cambodian Vietnamese in previous months. Again, the local complexities of this border area were not taken into account. It was also clear that the main objective of the invasion was not working as few enemies were being captured or found. As Shawcross recounts, Nixon assured his staff that that this was not important, that it was the sanctuaries that he was after: “It took ten months to build up this complex and we’re tearing the living bejesus out of it. Anything that walked is gone after that barrage and the B-52 raids.”⁷² This, however, makes little sense as the sanctuaries, and even the COSVN itself, were known to be highly mobile, and is astonishing not least because of the implications for villages that were directly bombed.

Looking again at Figure 15, it is clear that the invasion was coupled with a significant increase in bombing.



On June 30th, Nixon withdrew American troops and called it a brilliant success, making no mention of the failure to capture the COSVN headquarters nor the movement of the fighting further into Cambodia. The US role in Cambodia would now be one of air interdiction and financial support for the Lon Nol regime.

The invasion and ongoing air strikes had at least five consequences for Cambodia. First, the invasion sparked widespread protest in the US, which would in the end have very significant political repercussions for Nixon. Second, the Lon Nol government was unable to defend itself against the growing conflict in the east and began to depend increasingly on US military aid.

Third, the invasion pushed the battlefield further westward into the heavily populated villages and rice fields around and beyond the Mekong River.⁷³ While there has been considerable debate as to whether the initial air strikes pushed the NVA west into Cambodia or east into Vietnam, it is hard to imagine that an invasion originating from the east would drive them east into both the oncoming invasion and the wider conflict in South Vietnam. In Chandler’s words: “the principle effect of the operation – beyond casualties incurred and the

⁷² Ibid, 153

⁷³ Ibid, 151

intensified US alliance with Lon Nol – was to push main force Vietnamese Communist units deeper into Cambodia where they soon began to take apart Lon Nol's poorly trained forces.”⁷⁴

Fourth, As Dudman notes: “The bombing and the shooting was radicalizing the people of rural Cambodia and was turning the countryside into a massive, dedicated and effective rural base (for CPK recruitment). American shells and bombs are proving to the Cambodians beyond doubt that the US is waging unprovoked colonialist war against the Cambodian people.”⁷⁵ Kiernan adds, however, that “it was the South Vietnamese armed forces, who remained in Kampuchea for another two years, that did most of the damage, both to the population and to the anti-communist cause.”⁷⁶ The nationalist tensions between the Cambodians and the Vietnamese were largely ignored by the US strategic planning, although there were voices of warning. Mike Rives noted on March 24th that “one of greatest dangers present situation (sic) exists in possible clashes between Cambodian and NVN/NC troops, whether initiated by the former or the latter.”⁷⁷

Finally and perhaps most importantly, Sihanouk, who remained in Peking during the invasion, was encouraged by the Chinese to join in alliance with his old enemies, the CPK. This dynamic forms the basis for a complex relationship that was largely, and perilously, ignored by the Nixon administration. The principle question, which will be explored further below, is to what degree the CPK and the North Vietnamese could be treated as a common “communist enemy”. At this point, Kissinger claims that “Le Doc, removed any doubt that Hanoi had formally linked to Cambodia in its war in Vietnam and his intentions to overthrow PP and to use Cambodia for a base for its operations against Vietnam.”⁷⁸ However, it is clear that this relationship was not as straightforward as the Nixon administration believed. Indeed, the CPK was already planning how they would use and then separate themselves from North Vietnamese support.

While these four consequences are relatively clear, some ambiguities remain over the administration’s strategic rationale at this point. Why, for example, did Kissinger insist on building up Lon Nol’s army? Was this a Cambodianization of the conflict? Nixon said that the aid provided was only to help Cambodia enforce its neutrality. But there were clearly other implications. First, as Kissinger has said: “the president is determined to keep an anti-communist government in Phnom Penh”,⁷⁹ but also to defend against what was becoming a national struggle for Phnom Penh, rather than a simple fight for the border region. The conflict had quite clearly spilled into Cambodia and taken on a very different character. The reasons for this are of critical importance.

Lon Nol said that he wished the Americans had included him in the planning before the invasion and that he would have insisted that they block the communists’ westward escape

⁷⁴ Chandler, *Tragedy of Cam History*, 204

⁷⁵ This message was taken to Melvin Laird, but he was assured by the military that they (Dudman and Pond) were pro-Viet Cong. Dudman, R. (1971). *Forty Days with the Enemy*. New York, Liveright. As cited in Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 175

⁷⁶ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot came to Power*, 307.

⁷⁷ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 129.

⁷⁸ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 134.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 161

route before attacking, knowing the potential dangers of allowing South Vietnamese troops to have contact with highly populated areas of Cambodia. Shawcross points out, however, and this is critical, that if the US intention of the invasion was solely to reduce American casualties in southern Vietnam through a process of Vietnamization, then it was in their interests to push the communists west. This is further supported by their treatment of Sihanouk. As Shawcross suggests, instead of the invasion, they could have tried to bring Sihanouk back into power, but that would have meant allowing a continued supply route to the VC from Sihanoukville and the continued presence of VC sanctuaries. This would then go against the US strategic mission of removing the sanctuaries and reducing American casualties.⁸⁰ This was essentially Vietnamization, or now, Cambodianization, and it seems that at this point the further the fighting moved away from the Vietnamese border, the better for the primary US strategic goal.

3. Post-Invasion to the Paris Peace Agreement

Shawcross concludes that “within months of the 1970 invasion the communists had isolated Phnom Penh, gained half of the country and over 20% of the population.”⁸¹ Following the invasion, two not unrelated phenomena were at work. The first was an effort to build up the Lon Nol regime capabilities in order to allow them to hold off the advance of the CPK and VC/NVA. As will be discussed below, this was done through military and financial aid as well as air strike support. Second, the relationship between the CPK and the North Vietnamese was continuing to evolve, creating greater unrest in the rural countryside and resulting in a powerful and autonomous Cambodian nationalist movement.

The Nixon Doctrine: Cambodianization?

After the invasion and the subsequent spread of fighting with Cambodia, the principle question for the Nixon administration was what to do with the growing “communist” (there was still no nuance between the two communist entities) threat against Phnom Penh itself. Shawcross describes three options:

1. Principal reliance on Cambodian troops to defend Phnom Penh, the South Vietnamese would be allowed to intervene in a crisis (advocated by the defence dept.)
2. Aid to Lon Nol but no support from S. Vietnam. A threatened Phnom Penh would mean they could do little. (Advocated by the State Dept.)
3. Defence of Phnom Penh, which was considered essential to US policy, but largely a matter of deterrence. The communists were unlikely to attack Phnom Penh as long as they were convinced the South Vietnamese and US air power would come to the city’s defence. This strategy was only possible if the ARVN and US Air force were active in Cambodia before a communist assault on Cambodia. This option had three possible intensities:
 - a) defence of a small triangle around Phnom Penh
 - b) this triangle and a corridor northwest from Phnom Penh to Thailand

⁸⁰ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 165.

⁸¹ Ibid, 200

c) a much wider corridor (advocated by Kissinger)⁸²

In advocating 3c, Kissinger was supporting the largest US involvement with the largest Cambodian force requirement and South Vietnamese and US air involvement. The decision was made on October 26th, 1970 in National Security Decision Memorandum 89 entitled “Cambodian Strategy”.⁸³

This option also fit in with what was becoming known as the Nixon Doctrine: The United States could provide material and counsel for an Asian country to withstand internal or external attack while remaining politically detached.⁸⁴ In Vietnam, this doctrine became known as Vietnamization and represented the shift from on-the-ground fighting capability to the Vietnamese while US forces withdrew. In Cambodia, the US gave military support to Lon Nol, tolerated his corruption and asserted that it was not intervening in Cambodian politics. According to one American official it was like the arrival of a 25 foot shark in a backyard swimming pool filled with children who cannot escape. Even if the shark assumes a low profile, and lies motionless, he displaces a lot of water and interest over his intentions begins to affect everyone’s behaviour.⁸⁵ Interpreting this shift in capacity in a different light Becker suggests that the plan was to have the Cambodians tie down the Vietnamese communists while the American soldiers were withdrawn from Vietnam.⁸⁶ If true, this tells us two important things. One, that the US was still conflating the CPK and the VC/NVA. And, two, that their plan had no real intention of success, but rather was a diversion tactic to get troops out of Vietnam. This latter point is substantiated by General Mataxis who described the US strategy in Cambodia as “a holding action. You know, one of those things like a rear guard you drop off. The troika’s going down the road and the wolves are closing in, and so you throw them something off and let them chew it.”⁸⁷

Becker points out the obvious that “as a result, the American war effort in Cambodia regularly worked to the opponents advantage...First bombing was meant to get the sanctuaries, and relieve pressure from American and Vietnamese troops. Instead they, pushed troops into Cambodia. The next set of strikes, in 1970, were then intended to help Lon Nol’s troops against the growing incursion.”⁸⁸

This plan, option 3c, made other egregious errors, as Shawcross points out. The plan ignored the fact that only 15,000 communists had easily tied down 150,000 government soldiers, that it ignored both the spirit of the Cooper-Church Agreement and the massive economic impact on Cambodia of such an increase. The State Department and USAID calculated that it would cause a 34% increase in inflation (the Joint Chiefs of Staff also wanted economic aid shifted to military hardware, which would make this economic impact worse).⁸⁹

⁸² Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 179

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Ibid, 217; and, Becker, *When the War was Over*, 128.

⁸⁵ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 234.

⁸⁶ Becker, *When the War was Over*, 129.

⁸⁷ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 191.

⁸⁸ Becker, *When the War was Over*, 129.

⁸⁹ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 194.

On the ground, the implications of the strategy were just as disturbing: they were bombing the border areas to clear the sanctuaries so that VC/NVA would not be able to hit Americans in South Vietnam, and in so doing, force the VC/NVA into Cambodia where they would be met by US armed Lon Nol troops.

In early 1971, US military assistance grew from less than 20 million to a congressionally funded package of over \$180 million. And as Chandler notes, “when the US started paying Cambodian military bills, many officers discovered ways of getting rich.” This was done by paying nonexistent soldiers, not reporting deaths and desertions, and selling arms, gas, medicine, ammunition and equipment to the enemy.⁹⁰

On June 10th 1971, they massively increased the Cambodian army to 220,000 men, a paramilitary force of 143,000 which was supported by US and South Vietnamese training. This force, they argued, would help them move east against the CPK.⁹¹ They were also at this time almost completely dependant on US aid, as Chandler states “years of isolation patronage, fatalism, and a hermetic point of view led the fighting...led to a pattern of behaviour “almost ritualistic in its predictability.”⁹²

As the war got more and more bloody and complex in Cambodia, in Washington, the rhetoric reflected a very different perception of the war: one that was going exactly as planned. In November 1971, Nixon announced that “Cambodia is the Nixon doctrine in its purest form”. As Chandler points out, this meant that Cambodians, rather than Americans, were the ones being killed.⁹³

By the end of 1972, the CPK had an army of around 50,000 and were acting largely independently of Hanoi and could hold their own against Lon Nol: Kissinger, however, “apparently persisted in the belief that Hanoi could and would deliver the Khmer Rouge.”⁹⁴

The CPK and the VC/NVA

A complicating factor in both the rationale and effects of US involvement in Cambodia was the nature of CPK - VC/NVA relations. As has been said, the erroneous position of the Nixon administration was that they operated as a singular entity and could therefore be treated as a common enemy, with a uniform strategy. However, in different regions and at different times, the relationship varied considerably. In addition to highlighting Sihanouk’s tacit support for ‘hot pursuit’ air strikes, Chester Bowles’ report to Nixon contained a remarkable additional note which said that he “came away deeply convinced...that Sihanouk’s decisions and attitudes, however bizarre, are shaped by intense and deeply rooted nationalism in which ideology has little or no part.”⁹⁵ This statement allows us to see the relationship between the CPK, Hanoi and Sihanouk in a very different light, one not driven by ideological bounds, but rather first by nationalist ties and hatreds. Indeed, as we will

⁹⁰ Chandler, *Tragedy of Cam History*, 205

⁹¹ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 194.

⁹² Based on Chandler interview with William Harben, November 1987. As cited in Chandler, *Tragedy of Cam History*, 223.

⁹³ Ibid, 215.

⁹⁴ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 261.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 71

discuss below, this nationalist force goes a long way in explaining the rise of the CPK, the incredibly damaging impact of the bombing, the antipathy towards the Lon Nol regime and the dangerously ignorant notion that the CPK and the NVA could be grouped and planned against as one common US strategic enemy. Using the bombing data as well as the Kiernan interviews, some preliminary light can be shed on this complicated relationship.

In mid 1970, the Vietnamese were trying to negotiate with Son Sen and Sieng Sary for a joint military command; for Cambodian help in protecting the COSVN (now transferred to Kratie); and for logistical support along the trails running through the region in South Vietnam in return for military aid. The CPK, however, with growing rural support and increasing autonomy, rejected the deal.⁹⁶ As Becker puts it, the CPK was running a hall of mirrors. One strategy was to hold up Sihanouk as their moderate, internationalist leader and the other was to keep some Vietnamese support without any operational cooperation.⁹⁷

This increasing separation is further substantiated by a strategic CPK document captured in rural Kratie in October 1970. In it, there is little mention of Vietnam, only that “We have to co-ordinate with Vietnam in order to struggle against the American imperialists. However, we must protect our independence, our individual characteristics, shape the future of our people, preserve solidarity in our anti-American efforts and be free from intervention in international affairs.”⁹⁸ Similarly, in a 1971 Eastern Zone pamphlet entitled the “Morality of Revolutionary Fighters” with a “twelve-points morality” list, stressed various codes of conduct, including in 1972: “do not depend on others or foreigners. You must clearly understand that this revolution is the revolution of Kampuchea and the people must make it themselves and seize the destiny of the nation themselves, do not sleep and wait for foreigners to do it.”⁹⁹

This separation is in part due to rising CPK strength. As a villager told Kiernan, “in 1973 Vietnamese troops left Kampuchea, some last (sic?) left in 1974. They left because ‘the Pol Pot troops’ were able to defend themselves and were strong enough to fight the US and Lon Nol on their own, no need for Vietnamese troops any more.”¹⁰⁰

Another under-explored element of this relationship is the role of the US bombing in either bringing together or driving apart the CPK and the VC/NVA. For example, there seems to have been a different reaction to the Vietnamese presence in CPK Regions that were heavily bombed versus one that were relatively free of bombardment. In CPK Regions 21 (Figure 18) and 32 (Figure 19), according to Kiernan, the Vietnamese were forced out by a radicalised CPK Center overpowering the more moderate Khmer Rundos. In Region 21, Kiernan explains, “It was a zone decision. In one protest in this regions ‘villagers marched around, brandishing machetes and shouting ‘we do not fear to die from bombs dropped from airplanes’ and, ‘we all agree to die together in order to get the VC/NVA out of

⁹⁶ Chandler, *Tragedy of Cam History*, 208.

⁹⁷ Becker, *When the War was Over*, 220.

⁹⁸ Chandler, *Tragedy of Cam History*, 208

⁹⁹ Ibid, 109.

¹⁰⁰ Kiernan Interviews, 1980-81, Numbers 126a and 126b.

Kampuchea.”¹⁰¹ A similar incident occurred in Region 32, also heavily bombed during this time period.

Figure 18

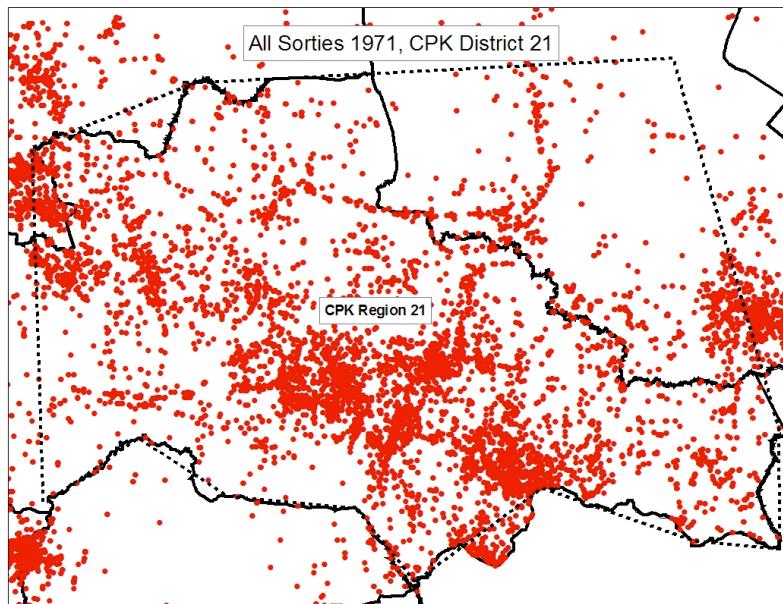
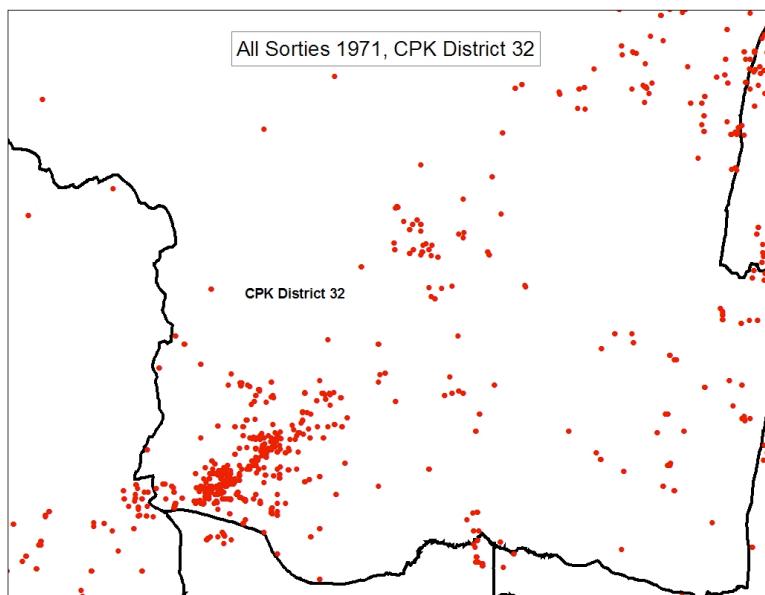


Figure 19

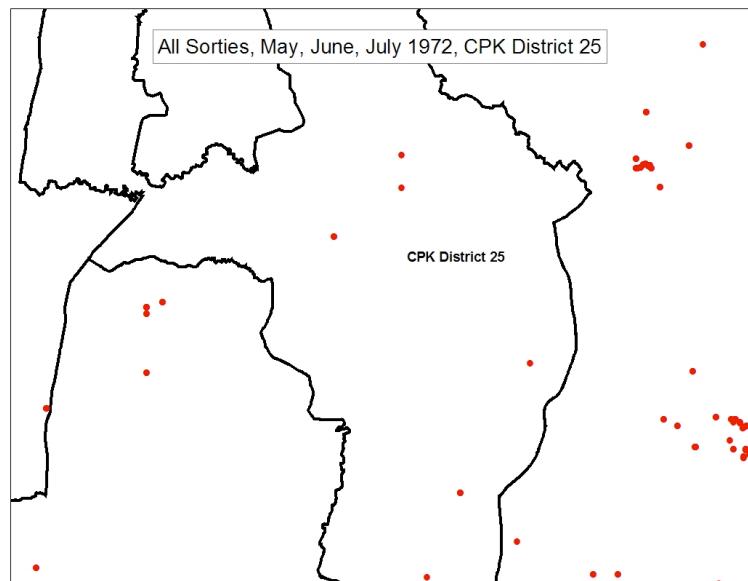


In other CPK Regions, the collaboration was much closer. In July 1972, for example, Khmer and Vietnamese communist forces together completed their campaign to drive Lon Nol and the Southern Vietnamese out of Region 25 (Figure 20). The Vietnamese, about

¹⁰¹ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 251. As cited in Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, 341.

1300 in number, then began to use this area for rest and recuperation from fighting and also from their own eastern offensive in Vietnam.¹⁰² This area experienced very little bombing.

Figure 20



Related to this argument is the debate as to where the bombing forced the VC/NVCA to move and the interplay between this movement and the interaction between them and the CPK. Kissinger argues that they moved into Southern Vietnam whereas almost everyone else argues that it pushed them further into Cambodia and into greater contact with the CPK. Chandler argues that in mid 1970, the Vietnamese were trying to negotiate with Son Sen and Ieng Sary for a joint military command, for Cambodian help in protecting the COSVN and for logistical support along the trails running through the region in South Vietnam in return for military aid. While Pol Pot claimed in 1978 that they rejected the deal, Chandler challenges this, citing the movement of the CPK headquarters southwest into the Phnom Snthuk region of Kompong Thom at the same time that the COSVN headquarters had moved to Kratie. Therefore, they had moved closer to the Vietnamese, which, as Chandler suggests means a joint military command was already in operation. The other option of course is that this was safe from the bombing as Figure 21 and 22 show quite clearly.

Figure 21

¹⁰² Stephen Heder's interview with Non Suon's former courier, Sa Keo, March 7th, 1980. As cited in Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, 343.

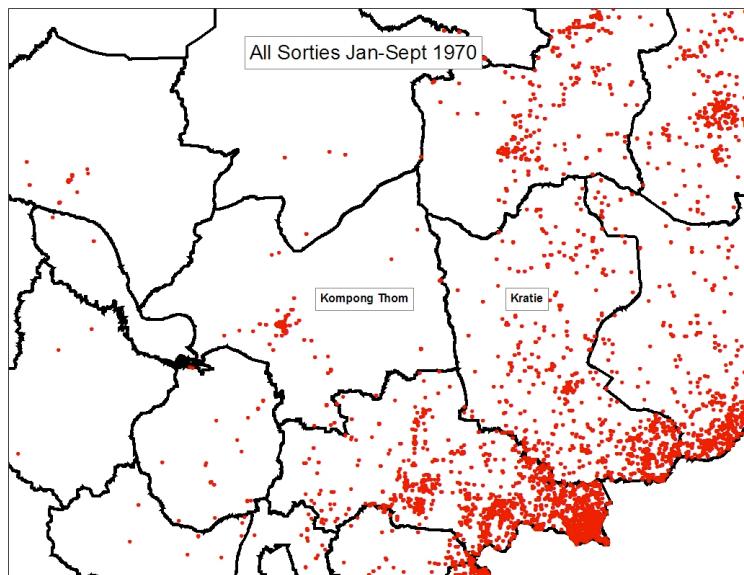
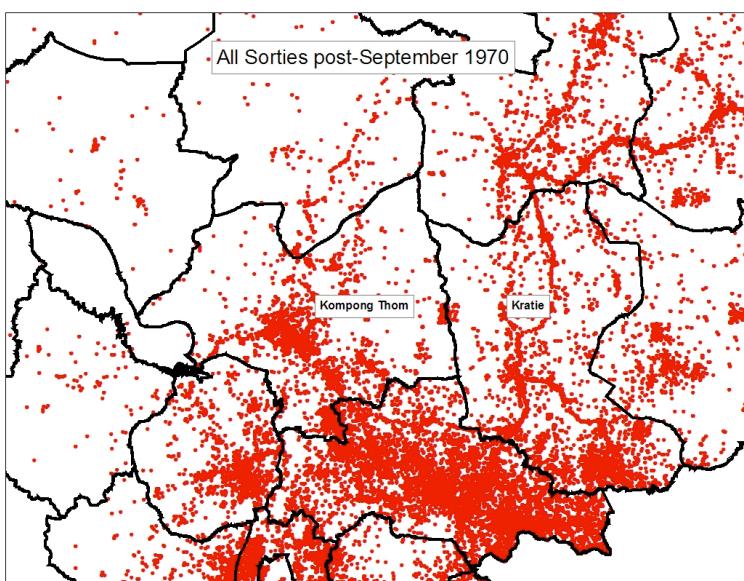


Figure 22



As Figures 21 and 22 show they may have both moved to this region simply to escape the bombings. Figure 21 shows the sorties leading up to the September 1970 move. Clearly they were moving into an area not being bombed. The bombing then followed them as Map 22 demonstrates. This follows the general pattern of increasing bombings further into Cambodia. There are several relevant implications of this finding regarding both the forced movement caused by the bombing and the level of collaboration between the VC/NVA and the CPK.

There are three possible explanations for the relocations described by Chandler above. One, that they both moved to this region independently, not due to the bombing and that there was no collaboration. Two, that they moved to this location because they were collaborating

(Chandler's reading). And three, that they moved because of the bombing and ended up collaborating. The latter seems the most likely to be true, particularly in light of Chanda's general statement about this time period that "the very success of the resistance meant the beginning of the end of the CPK-Hanoi alliance. Despite the dramatic improvement in their relations after March 1970 the Pol Pot group continued to be wary of the Vietnamese."¹⁰³

If it is true that they ended up collaborating as a result of the bombings, then there is an argument to be made that the bombing pushed the VC/NVA east into Cambodia and into greater collaboration with the CPK. Regardless of the level of collaboration, the progression of bombing from Figures 21 to 22, shows quite clearly that the bombing was indeed pushing the VC/NVA into Cambodia, as opposed to back into Vietnam as Kissinger claims.

While much of this evolution between the VC/NVA and CPK was surely unknowable to the Nixon administration, there was considerable evidence demonstrating that the two should, at the least, not be treated as a common enemy. If this was grasped, two events at the end of 1972 and the beginning of 1973 should have made this undeniably clear. The first occurred during the negotiation process between Hanoi and the US, when Kissinger again tried to get Hanoi to include a CPK agreement. As Kiernan states "it should have been clear to him (Kissinger) that this would be impossible despite his stated preparedness to concentrate airpower on Kampuchea".¹⁰⁴ Yet, As Shawcross points out, "Kissinger however, apparently persisted in the belief that Hanoi could and would deliver the Khmer Rouge".¹⁰⁵

Whatever the aim of US operations during the time period leading up to the Paris Peace Agreement, the political effect on the CPK was twofold: it was, as Keirnan writes, "to prevent a complete revolutionary victory at a time when the CPK Center's grasp over the revolution was still relatively weak; and to strengthen that grasp, which held the country on a course of continued violence and warfare that lasted for the next decade."¹⁰⁶ The consequences, internal radicalization and external legitimization, would only be exacerbated when the bombing increased dramatically in early 1973.

4. Paris Peace Agreement to the Bombing Halt

On January 27th 1973, the US and Vietnam signed the Paris Peace Agreement, resulting in an immediate ceasefire and the removal of US forces from the country. As for Cambodia, Kissinger had quite predictably failed to tie a CPK agreement in with Hanoi's. His apparent surprise at Le Doc's inability to reign in the Khmer communists, speaks to the naivety in his treatment of both groups as one bloc. Once it was clear that the CPK would not negotiate with the NVA/VC, he resorted to the threat of overwhelming force "if after Paris the Cambodians continue to spurn compromise and negotiations, B-52s will be sent to destroy

¹⁰³ Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 66.

¹⁰⁴ See *Livre Noir: Faits et preuves des acts d'agression et annexion du Vietnam contre le Kampuchea*, Democratic Kampuchea, Phnom Penh, 1978, 90. As cited in Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, 349.

¹⁰⁵ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 261.

¹⁰⁶ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, 349.

them in seventy two hours.”¹⁰⁷ Despite this threat, at Lon Nol’s insistence, the Nixon administration agreed to a temporary ceasefire beginning on the 28th.

The CPK ignored the ceasefire and continued their. Later, according to Shawcross, they said that they never would have negotiated because of their fear that Cambodia would be incorporated into an Indochina Federation run by Hanoi.¹⁰⁸ This above all demonstrates the clear separation between the Khmer and the Vietnamese communists and reveals the role of nationalism in this divide. On February 9th, 1973, the bombing began again with significant and increasing intensity.

The call for partition also demonstrates the US misreading of the nationalist forces at play. After the war, Pol Pot commented that “if we had agreed to a ceasefire in 1973...first of all, we would have lost to US imperialism and its lackeys; and secondly, we would have become slaves of the Vietnamese, and the Cambodian race would have entirely lost its identity.”¹⁰⁹

Paradoxically, at this point the war was increasingly being fought against the US themselves, primarily due to the growing bombing load and, as we will show in section two, the growing civilian toll. Anti-imperial rhetoric was being used alongside Anti-Vietnamese and Lon Nol language. As a CPK official put it: “during the US imperialist’s air war in 1973, during which Cambodia was the only country to hold high the offensive banner of attacking the US imperialists, the US imperialists mobilized all types of aircraft from Southeast Asia and the Pacific to bomb Cambodia in a most barbaric and cruel manner.”¹¹⁰ True or not, this belief, and the failure of the US to recognize it, had significant repercussions.

Bombing Escalation: Rationale to Reality

Up until the Paris Peace Agreement there had been several justifications for the bombing of Cambodia – legal, geopolitical and strategic. Legally, the sole purpose of the bombing was to protect American lives in Vietnam. Since 1970, the Congress, under the Cooper-Church Agreement had only authorized bombing in Cambodia for this purpose. With American forces now out of both Cambodia and exiting Vietnam this legal justification was loosing strength. Second, as Tom Enders argues, the purpose of the bombing was essentially diplomatic, based on Kissinger’s belief that Hanoi controlled the CPK. This belief was proven demonstrably false. A third rationale up to this point was simply to buy time for the Vietnamese exit strategy and peace agreement to be worked out. As Swank states “time was bought for the success of the program in Vietnam...to this extent I think some measure of gratitude is owed to the Khmers.”¹¹¹ With the agreement signed and the American troops exiting the region, all three of these arguments were losing, or had lost force.

Legally, the legitimization for the continued bombing at this point shifted to Article 20 of the Paris Agreement saying that the bombing was legal “until such time as a ceasefire could

¹⁰⁷ Becker, *When the War was Over*, 27.

¹⁰⁸ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 265.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 296.

¹¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹¹ Ibid, 331.

be brought into effect.”¹¹² Two other reasons for the bombing are important however. First, of course, the bombing was intended to support the Lon Nol regime in Phnom Penh. Whether this was effective will be debated below, but at least publicly, this was the rationale being given. Kissinger made the case for escalation clearly stating that “our analysis was that the Khmer Rouge would agree to a negotiated settlement only if denied of hope of military victory”.¹¹³ Second, as Colby puts it, “Cambodia was not the only game in town.”¹¹⁴ In other words, the bombing campaign was being rationalized by the wider US geopolitical strategy, in particular regarding the Chinese support for the CPK.

On February 8th, with the ceasefire over, Swank was notified by Kissinger that his Phnom Penh embassy was to become the command post for a new aerial war in Cambodia. Control over the bombing was being shifted from military command in Saigon, to civilian command in Phnom Penh, run by Ambassador Enders. Amazingly, it wasn’t discovered that the embassy was actually directing the bombings until a Newsweek correspondent overheard embassy personnel giving direct instructions to warplanes on a transistor radio.

Given the increasing intensity and civilian impact of these bombings (see section 2), the site selection and authorization procedure is worth noting. While many were chosen directly through the embassy or by the pilots themselves, the sanitized official procedure as described by a Cambodian official was: “If a village was suspected of harboring Viet Cong then the government first appealed for the villagers to leave. The Cambodian air force planes then tried to scare them away. Once they have left the village they asked the Americans to bomb it. They (the villagers) ask us to destroy everything because they hate the Viet Cong. Of course the villagers are very sad about their belongings, their houses, their lands, but they want us to destroy everything to drive out the Viet Cong. We do all we can to avoid civilian casualties, but one cannot always be certain that all civilians have fled.”¹¹⁵ As I will show below, the on-the-ground reality was in fact quite different. While the villagers may well have hated the Viet Cong, in many cases once their villages had been bombed, they would become more sympathetic to the Khmer Rouge against the Lon Nol regime and their “imperialists” allies.

It is also worth noting that technocratic descriptions of site selection do not match the realities of B-52 bombing. For example, pilots complained that the 1:50,000 maps, the basis for all sorties, “lacked sufficient detail and currency to pinpoint suspected enemy locations with some degree of confidence.”¹¹⁶ This brings into question Kissinger’s assurances of new bombing conditions as “not closer than 1 km from villages, hamlets, houses, monuments, temples, pagodas or holy places.”¹¹⁷

Indeed, as Figures 24, 25 show, there was little regard for this much-trumpeted regulation. Figures 24 and 25 show the city of Trapeang Veng, which received a massive bombardment for such a populated area. Figure 24 shows the city, with the black squares being homes,

¹¹² Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 277.

¹¹³ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 476.

¹¹⁴ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 265

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 271.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 272.

¹¹⁷ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 479.

and 25 shows it with the bombardment. The rings in this map are areas hit by cluster bombs.

Figure 24

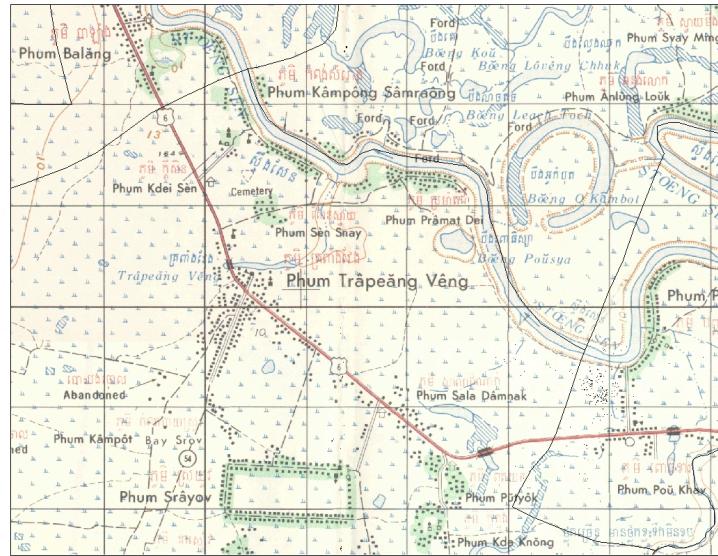
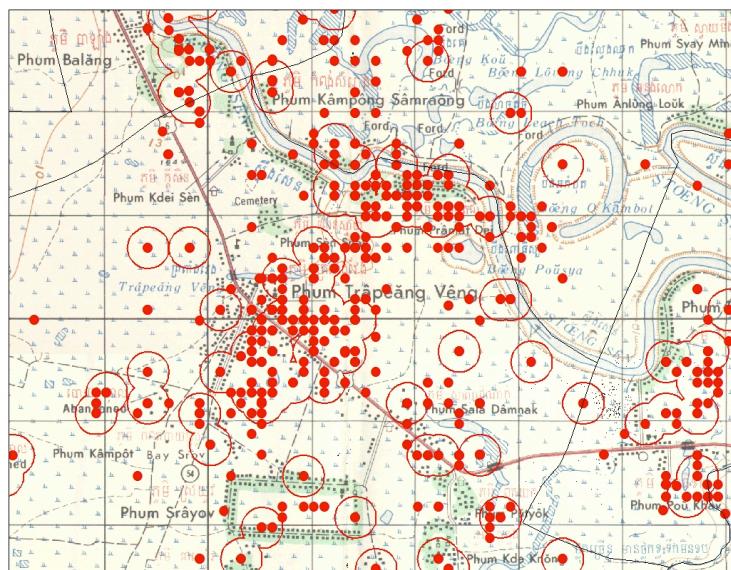
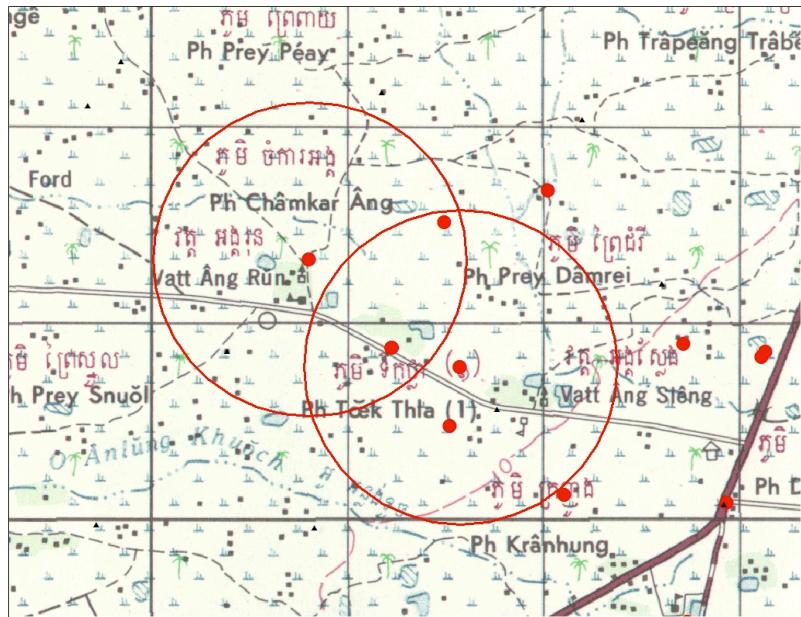


Figure 25



Similarly, In Chamcar Ang village. Tram Kak district of Region 13 (Takeo province), locals say more than eighty people died when B-52s hit the village and its pagoda.⁵³ In the same Region, a CPK cadre recalled that Wat Angrun village was annihilated; a single family survived, and 120 houses were destroyed in the air raid. Chamkar Ang and Watt Ang Run villages are seen in Figure 26 below, with two B-52 rings directly hitting the village. The two rings represent 5 B-52 sorties with a payload of 207,000lbs (93 tons).

Figure 26



Finally, in Figures 27, 28, and 29, the absurdity of Kissinger's claim is clearly demonstrated. There were literally hundreds of incidents where entire villages were bombed. In Figure 27 the triangles represent village centers and the red points represent bombing targets, often hit with multiple sorties.

Figure 27

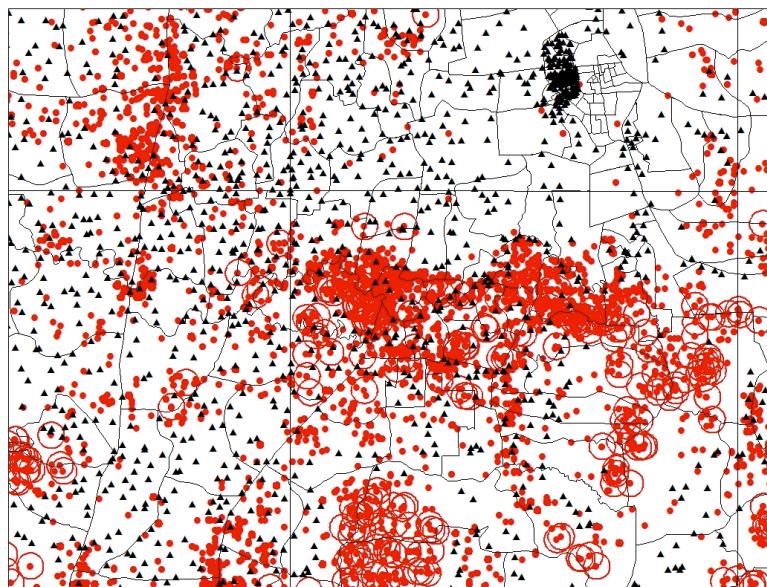


Figure 28

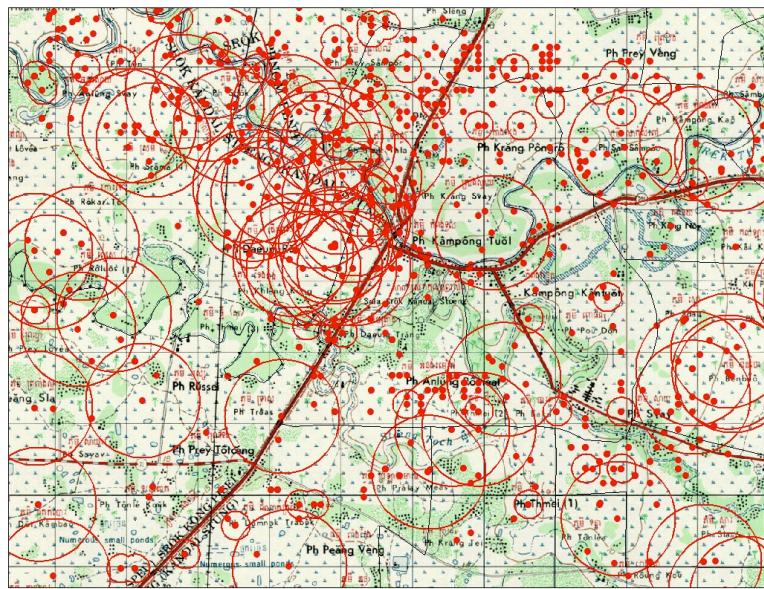
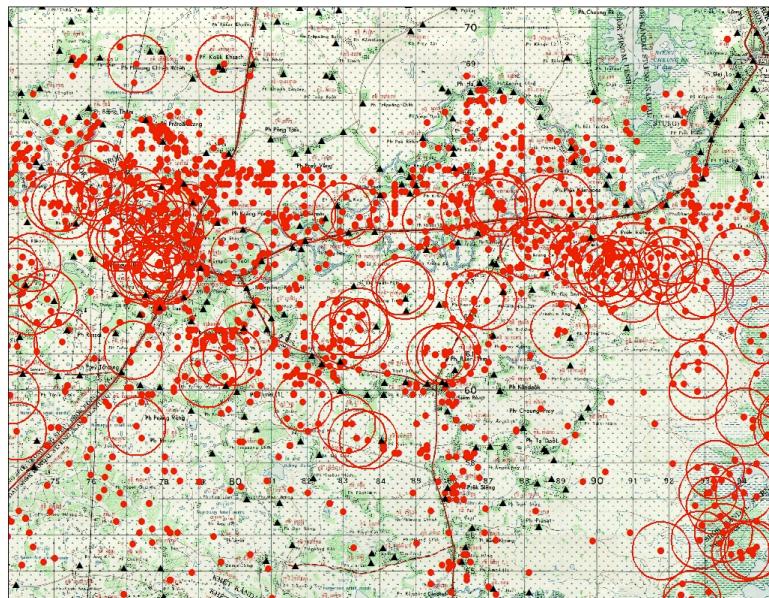


Figure 29



As for the bombing itself, in January and February, 1973, according to Kiernan, the bombing was heaviest in Region 21 in the north east. In March, however, it began to spread across the country to the heavily populated Southwestern and Northern zones, where it was most concentrated from April to June. In July and August, the Southwest experienced the most intensive B-52 campaign yet and tactical raids increased by 21%.¹¹⁸

Demonstrating the increasing intensity of these strikes from earlier Menu bombings, Shawcross states that in all of 1972, 37000 tons were dropped by B-52s. However, in March

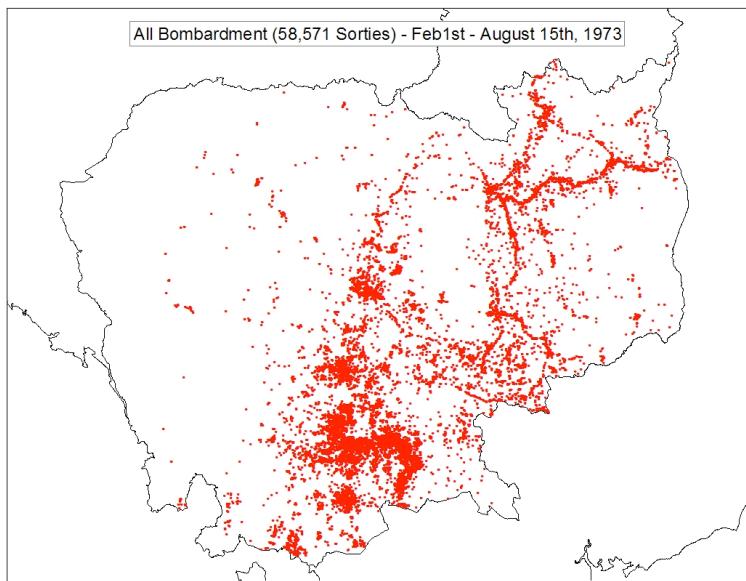
¹¹⁸ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot came to Power*, 354.

1973 alone there were 24,000 tons dropped, in April there were 35,000 and in May 36,000. In the last days of the bombing, despite being ordered by Congress not to increase the sorties, Shawcross claims that they grew from 5,064 tactical sorties in June, to 5,818 in July, to 3,072 in the first half of August. In fact, while the trend that Shawcross cites is correct, the actual Figures were much higher. In June 1973 there were 10,647 sorties with a total of 259,031 tons. In July there were 10,647 Sorties with 272,997 tons and in the first half of August 1973 there were 6,429 sorties for 144,148 tons.

There are, as I have discussed above, two ways of looking at this time period - as part of the broader 1973 campaign and as simply the last three month push.

First, Kiernan states that in the six months from February to August 15, 1973 (when the US Congress imposed a halt), the Figure was 257,000 tons, and they fell on all populated rural areas of the country.¹¹⁹ The Figures for this six months are again much higher at 58,571 sorties with a total load of 1,373,342 tons. This bombing is shown in Figures 30 to 32.

Figure 30 - Location: Country, Date: February to August 15, 1973



¹¹⁹ Ibid

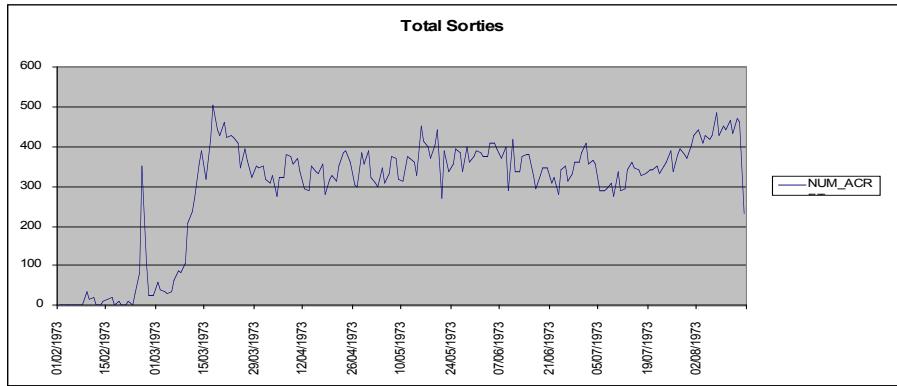
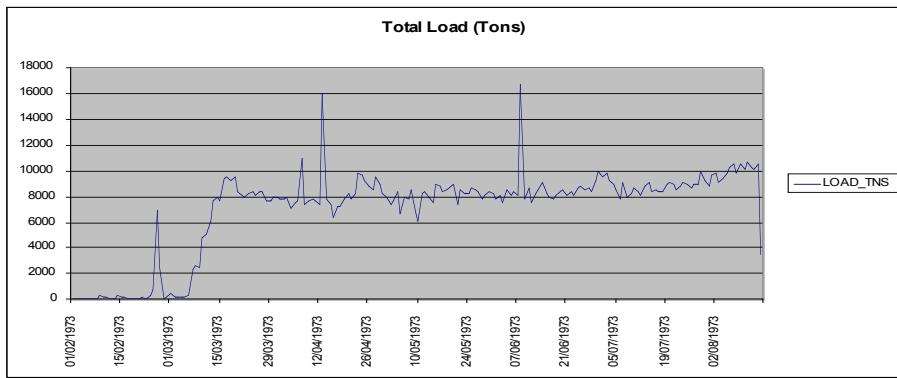


Figure 32



If we take only the last two months of the campaign, we can see that the sorties encircle Phnom Penh, hitting the heavily populated areas to the south of the city. We also see that in terms of load and sorties, the daily rate increases in the last two-month period, in direct contradiction to Congressional orders. Figures 33-35 show the 17,067 sorties with a total payload of 93,4407,258 lbs (417,146tons) during these last two months.

July 1, 1973
 July 1, 1973
 Figure 33

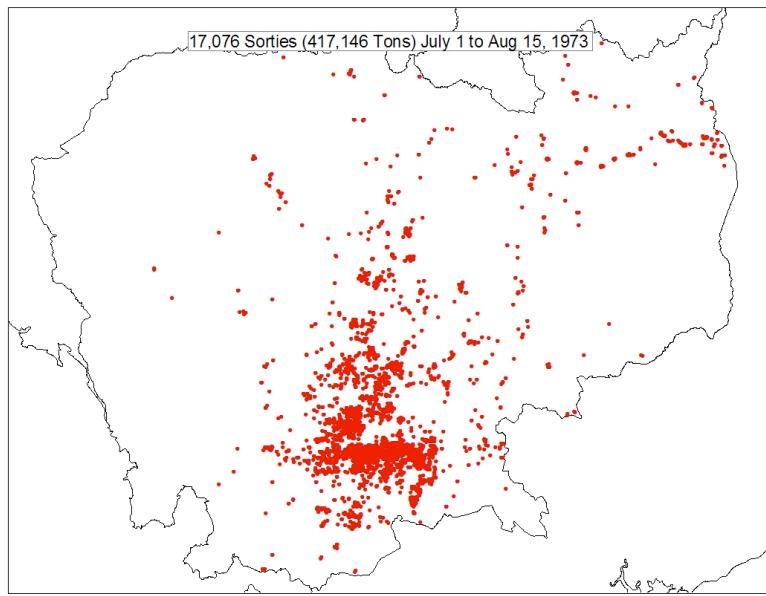
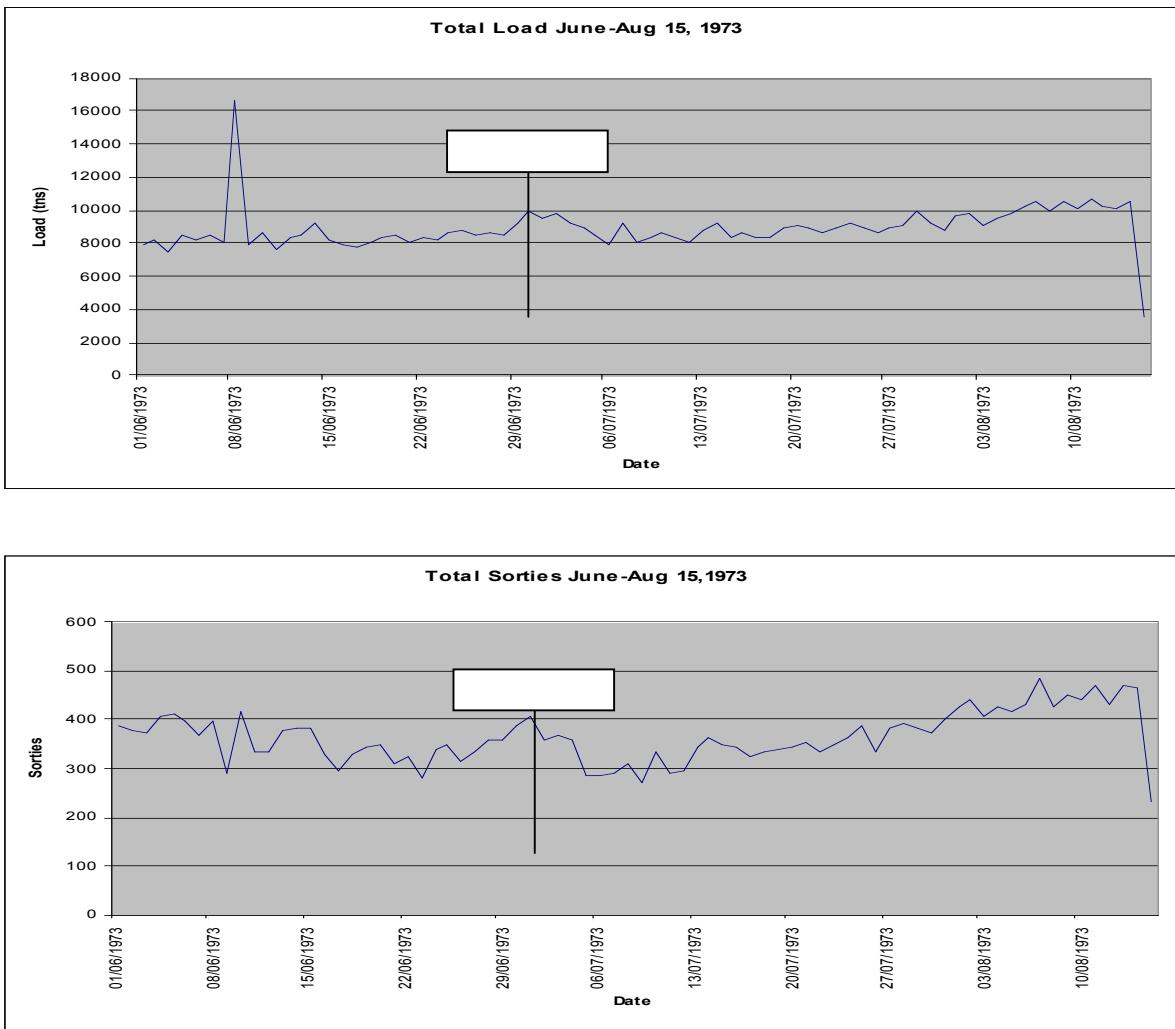


Figure 34



Politically, while Lon Nol had by now lost the support of the majority of the people, the Nixon administration continued to ignore that there were any problems within his regime or with the US support of it. “We were torn apart by the press”, said William Harben, a political officer working in the Phnom Penh embassy, “because our line was so ridiculous.”¹²⁰

Throughout the spring and early summer, as the bombing intensified, so too did the political climate in Washington. While pressure was growing in Congress to limit the funds available for the bombing campaign (which many congressmen argued was illegal), on July 12th the testimony of Gordon Brown significantly changed the dynamic. His was the first statement to clearly admit that there had been bombings before the ground invasion in 1970. Following this revelation, a flood of testimony began to disclose the nature of the dual reporting mechanism and the extent of the Menu campaign. Congress’ initial response was to try to halt the bombing, effective in the middle of August. The charge, as Rep. Conyers stated, was simple: “The president unilaterally undertook major military operations against another sovereign nation and then consistently denied that he had done so to both Congress and the American people.”¹²¹

Kissinger, however, was worried that a bombing halt would give up the only bargaining chip that the US had to put pressure on the Chinese to cease their support of the Khmer Rouge and allow for a negotiated settlement involving a return to power of Sihanouk. The agreement in principle, Kissinger claims, was to allow Sihanouk to return to Phnom Penh to take over a new government most likely with strong, although not dominant, Communist elements. Kissinger further argues that “Zhou (the Chinese Foreign Minister) needed American military actions in Cambodia for the effectiveness of his policy almost as much as they did. “The bombing was a bargaining chip for two parties, even though one formally condemned it.”¹²²

While this may have been true, it represents realpolitik at its most crass, and the logic that more bombing of the country was needed to save it, was difficult for many in Congress to stomach, particularly when they had already been deceived by the administration once. While the head of the House’s Appropriations committee agreed that the bombing could continue until September 1st at the latest and that this could remain secret to allow for further negotiations with the Chinese, the date became public, making any agreement irrelevant to its strategic rationale.

Kissinger argues that:

“American diplomacy had for six months, painstakingly put the pieces into place for a neutral Cambodia ruled by Sihanouk. But military pressure was one such piece, and the legislated end of military activity destroyed all possibility of a neutral, free Cambodia. With a total communist victory now guaranteed, Sihanouk became nearly

¹²⁰ Willam Harben, Interview with Shawcross, February 8th, 1977. As cited in Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 275.

¹²¹ Ibid, 332.

¹²² Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 489.

as irrelevant as Lon Nol...congressional action had doomed America to become a passenger in a vehicle out of control down a steep mountainside.”¹²³

There is a major problem with the administration’s logic in that it assumes a level of rationality within the Khmer Rouge leadership that was arguably not there. Kissinger believed that an overwhelming show of airpower would force the Khmer Rouge to negotiate a joint government with Sihanouk and Lon Nol. However, for the Khmer Rouge, the war was a zero sum game, a fact that should have been gleaned from their nationalist rhetoric, and by the fact that they turned on the Vietnamese. What’s more, knowing the bombing would end in a month, in July, the Khmer Rouge attempted an almost suicidal attack on Phnom Penh. Clearly they could not be understood through Kissinger’s rationalist geopolitical lens.

On August 15th, when the last bombs were dropped, the US had unloaded a total of 2,756,941 tons of munitions on Cambodia. Almost half (1,373,342 tons), dropped in the last 6 months. This is five times greater than the reported amount of 537,000 tons, significantly altering the absolute magnitude of the bombardment as well as the relative amount dropped on Cambodia as compared with Vietnam and Laos.

On the ground, the bombing, as well as the ground war, were causing chaos manifested primarily though large numbers of internally displaced people. The huge influx of people to the major population centers crippled the infrastructure as the population began to vastly exceed the food and housing infrastructure capacity. Kissinger argues that these IDPs were the result of Khmer Rouge brutality: “the guerrilla war was conducted with unparalleled cruelty by the Khmer Rouge, assisted by the North Vietnamese forcing refugees from the countryside to the cities, especially Phnom Penh.”¹²⁴ Kiernan, on the other hand, cites a report of refugees released on April 1st 1973 which states that: ‘refugees swarming into the capital from target areas report dozens of villages, both east and southwest of Phnom Penh, have been destroyed and as much as half their population killed or maimed in the current bombing’.¹²⁵

The bombing was also having an increased impact on the CPK. As will be discussed below, the recruitment capability and ideological radicalization of the CPK were both affected by the bombardment.

The bombing and the rise of the CPK

A central question regarding the effects of the bombing is whether they led to the rise of the Khmer Rouge. While Kissinger rightly admonishes such causal claims, his complete disregard for the historical context of the rise of this once insignificant and isolated rebel group was at the time negligent, and now appears outright dishonest. The simple fact that this remarkable growth overlapped almost exactly with the bombing should at least raises suspicion. The nature of this relationship has received considerable anecdotal attention. I have already discussed the suggestion that the bombing forced the western movement of the

¹²³ Ibid, 486.

¹²⁴ (Kissinger: 476)

¹²⁵ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot came to Power*, 350.

VC/NVA, putting them into contact with the CPK and fostering their mutually beneficial relationship. Another theory, suggested by Kiernan, is that by stopping an early victory by an ideologically moderate CPK, the bombing allowed the more radical elements of the party to grasp power before taking over the country.

Perhaps the most powerful and direct impact of the bombing, however, was considerably more elemental. As Lon Nol was supporting the air campaigns, the bombing of villages, and the significant civilian casualties they caused, provided ideal recruitment rhetoric for the Khmer Rouge. Quite simply, no matter the context, or the strategic rationale as Kissinger would argue, if bombs destroy your village and kill your friends and family, you are going to blame the people, or country, who dropped them. This direct relationship between village bombings and Khmer Rouge recruitment can be demonstrated by matching testimony from the Kiernan interviews with an analysis of the bombing data.

The following exchange between Kiernan and Song Rus in Prey Veng clearly shows the nature of this dynamic:

K: Why did people believe in the KR in 1970-75 war?

SR: Because of their propaganda, talking about fighting the imperialists.

K: Did People know what an imperialist was?

SR: The people were angry because the bombs dropped on the village, 4 houses were burnt down by napalm in 1973. 3-4 deaths. 2 T28s dropped the napalm, and T28s dropped the bombs as well... F111's dropped bombs on phum Trey Chap, 2 km from here. 20+ deaths. 1973 4 planes. Bombs right on village, houses all destroyed, village abandoned. Over 10 people from this village joined the KR army after the bombing, out of anger.”¹²⁶

Similarly, as interviews conducted by Bruce Paling with a CPK Subdistrict Chief, Chhit Do makes the rhetorical utility of the bombing to the CPK quite clear and is worth quoting at length:

Q. Did the Khmer Rouge make use of the bombing to do propaganda against the US?

A. Oh yes, they did make use of it. They did use it to stigmatize the US. They said that all this bombing was an attempt to make us an American satellite, a manifestation of simple American barbarism, because, after all, as they pointed out, we had never done anything at all to America. The Khmers didn't even have airplanes and here the Americans had brought theirs to bomb us, causing great pain to us, with their war. Their country was way over there somewhere and here they have come to interfere with us....(the) propaganda was that this guy Lon Nol had already sold the country to the Americans because Lon Nol wanted power, wanted to be President...

Q. Could you be more specific about the content of their propaganda?

A: They shouted and they cursed and called for opposition to the Americans. Moreover, they took the people to see the effects of the bombing as a kind of additional political education. Every time after there had been bombing, they would take the people to see the craters, to see how big and deep the craters were, to see how the earth had been gouged out and scorched. And the political education cadres would pick up pieces of shrapnel and these slabs of metal that had been part of the bomb casings to show them to the people and point out that the bombs were the size of a man. the size of 100 kilogram rice sacks. They would say that the purpose of the bombing was to completely destroy the country, not simply just to win the war while leaving the people alive to rebuild it after the war

¹²⁶ Kiernan Interviews, 1980-81, number 163.

was over, but to annihilate the population, and that it was only because we were taking cover, moving around to avoid the bombing, that some of us were surviving. So they used the bombing, the bomb craters and the bomb shrapnel to educate the people politically, to make the people hate and be enraged at the Americans. They said that in Japan, the Americans had dropped an atom bomb during World War II. They said that we must point our anger at the Americans and never forget, that even if every last one of us were killed, we still must not give up. As long as anybody was left alive, we must just keep on struggling and struggling.

Q: That's what the cadres said, but how did the people themselves feel?

A: The ordinary people were terrified by the bombing and the shelling, never having experienced war, and sometimes they literally shit in their pants when the big bombs and shells came. Artillery bombardments usually involved 200-400 shells per attack, and some people became shell-shocked, just like their brains were completely disoriented. Even though the shelling had stopped, they couldn't hold down a meal. Their minds just froze up and would wander around mute and not talk for three or four days. Terrified and half-crazy, the people were ready to believe what they were told. What (the Khmer Rouge) said was credible because there were just so many huge bombs dropped. That was what made it so easy for the Khmer Rouge to win the people over. It was because of their dissatisfaction with the bombing that they kept on cooperating with the Khmer Rouge, joining up with the Khmer Rouge, sending their children off to go with them, to join the Khmer Rouge....

Q: So the American bombing was a kind of help to the Khmer Rouge?

A: Yes, that's right. It was a kind of help. It helped to get them to come over to the Khmer Rouge and help, because the people saw, well, sometimes the bombs fell and hit little children, and their fathers would be all for the Khmer Rouge.¹²⁷

The relationship between bombing and Khmer Rouge recruitment becomes significantly more poignant when the actual sorties described in the interviews are overlaid onto village maps. Below are a series of examples of such cases:

Nguon Ao in Kandal Chum told Kiernan:

"Americans dropped lots of bombs in Kandal Chrum, lots of destruction. 5 houses destroyed, belonging to Tang, Ton, Thnam, Chuon, Ieng, and Kim. A bomb hit Ta Hean's house and it caught fire, 7 deaths. This was 1970. 1972 not much bombing, nor 1973...I left the village as a result of the bombing. Others joined the revolution."¹²⁸

As Figure 36 demonstrates, Kandal Chrum (the blue point in the map), is in a heavily bombed area. Zooming into the village itself, we can see the strikes. Most bombings shown occurred between 1971 and 1973.

Figure 36

¹²⁷ Chit Do, interview with Francois Ponchaud and Bruce Palling, Paris, January 1982. As cited in Kiernan, B. (1989). "The American Bombardment of Kampuchea, 1969-1973." *Vietnam Generation* 1(1): 5-41.

¹²⁸ Kiernan Interviews, 1980-81, number 125.

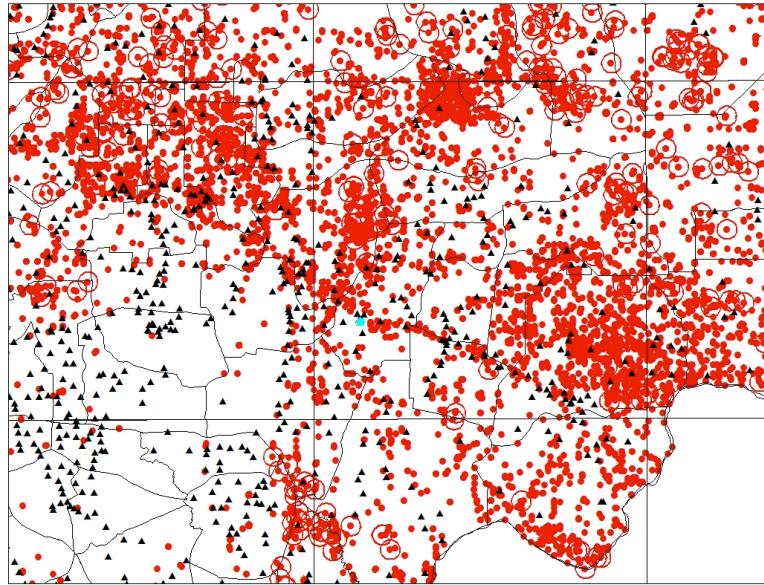
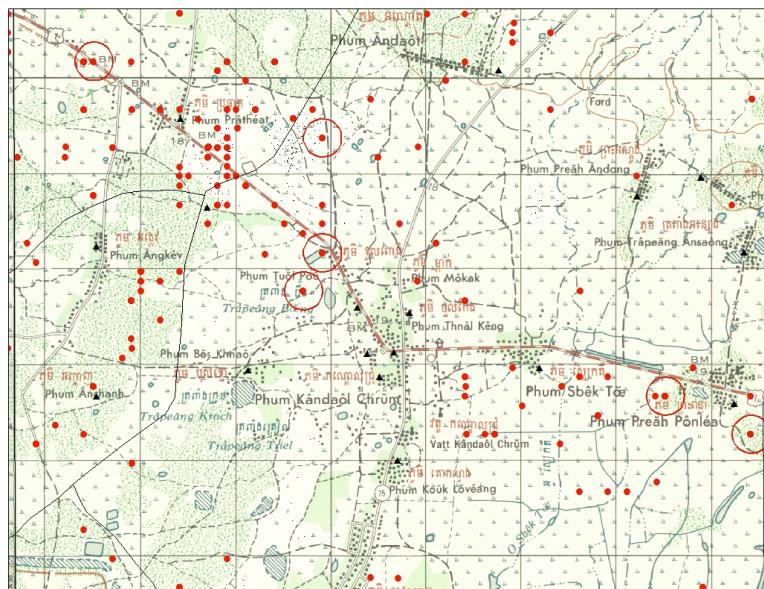


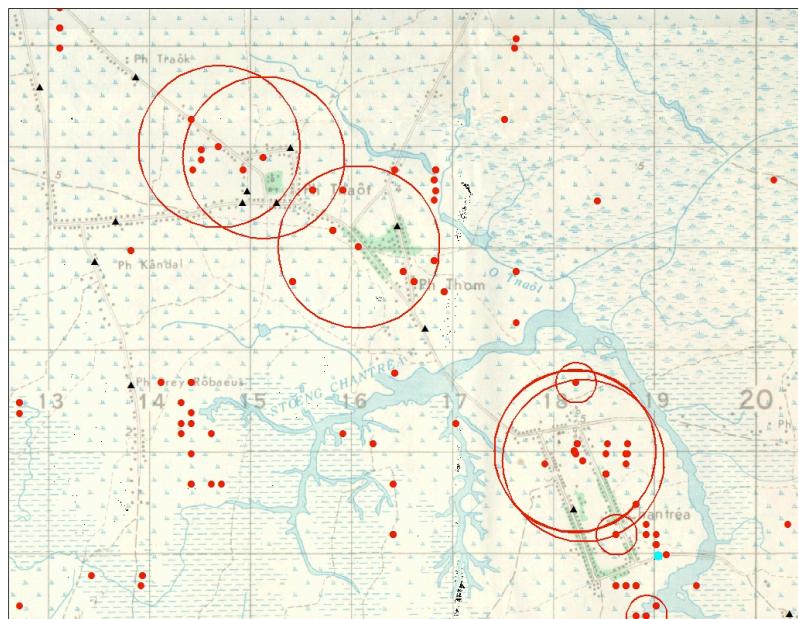
Figure 37



In another interview, Kiernan was told, “the town of Chantrea was destroyed by US bombs... The people were angry with the US, and that is why so many of them joined the Khmer communists.”¹²⁹ Figure 38 shows the town of Chantrea and two nearby villages:

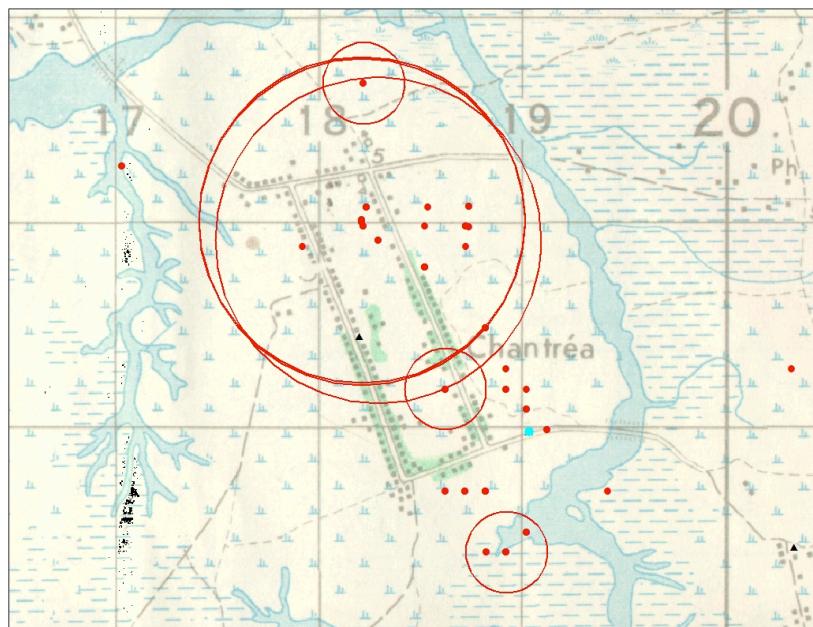
Figure 38

¹²⁹ Kiernan, *Vietnam Generation*, 9



In Figure 39, Chantrea is isolated. The bombing in this map represent 2245 tons, 221 sorties and 89 targets hit with A-37, B-52, F100, F5, A1 aircraft.

Figure 39

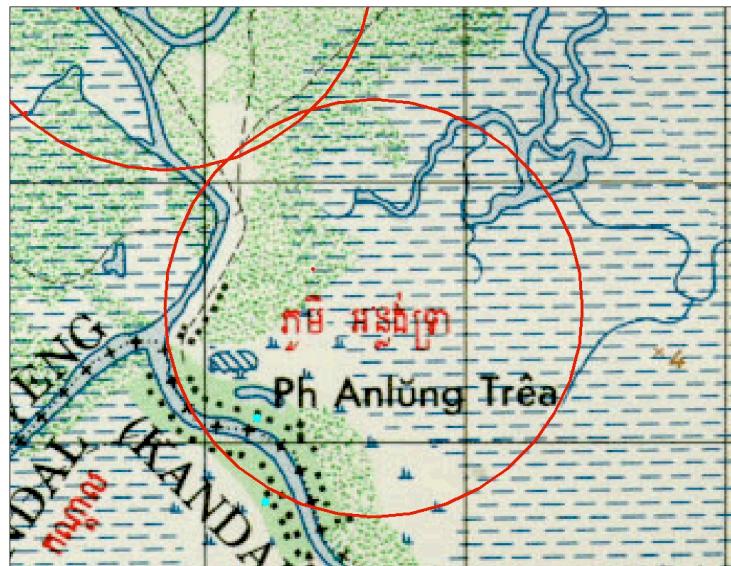


Another recounted, "in a direct hit on Trey Chap village in Prey Veng, a raid by four F-111s killed over twenty people. The village was destroyed and subsequently abandoned. Meanwhile, Lon Nol's T-28s kept up their campaigns. Two kilometres away, Anlong Trea village was napalmed and bombed, killing three people and destroying four houses. "Over

sixty people from this village then joined the Khmer Communist army out of anger at the bombing', locals recall."¹³⁰

In Figure 38 below, the village is Anlong Trea is shown. The one ring represents 3 B-52s attacks carrying a 334,520lbs payload on May 21 1973.

Figure 40



Similarly, Sang, in Chalong village, Khum Damrel, O Reang Au district, tells Kiernan:

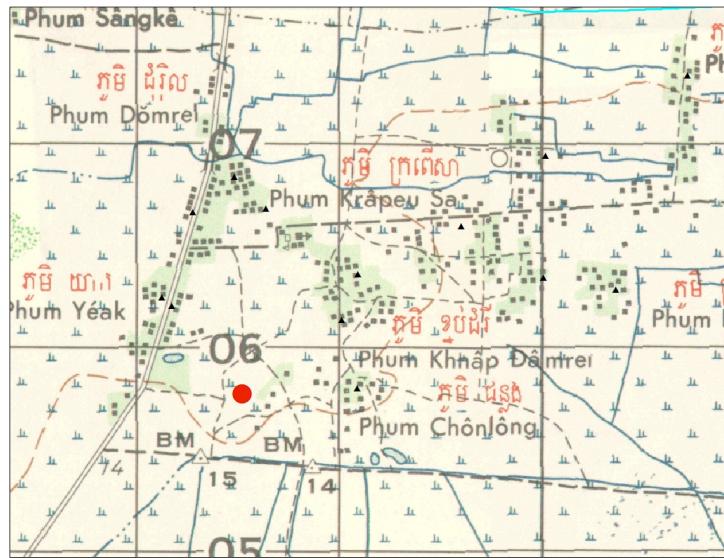
"1973 bombs hit my village and the monastery. 20-30 deaths, all monks escaped. Bombs fell only once, during a battle (Chalong village). On the river bombs destroyed many monasteries. People in our village furious at the US (although) they didn't know why the US bombed them. From our village 70 people joined the anti-Lon Nol forces after the bombing. These 70 soldiers were all killed by Pol Pot in 1978."¹³¹

Figure 41 shows a 2 plane 20 ton bombing incident in the village mentioned, Chalong.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 9.

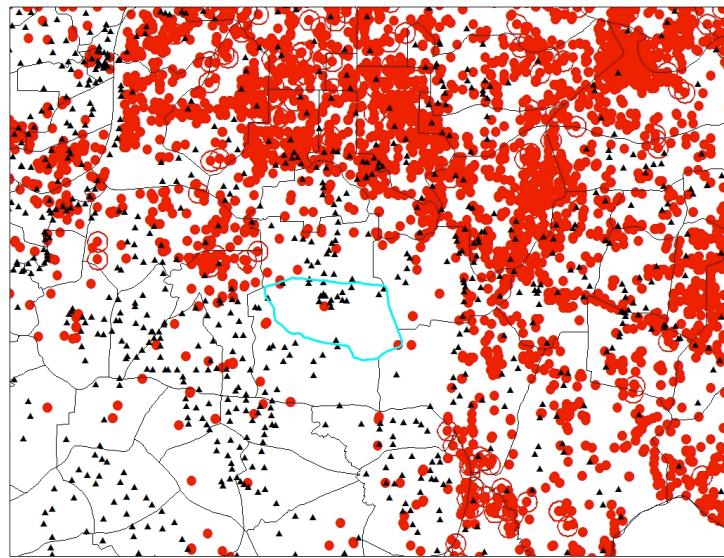
¹³¹ Kiernan Interviews, 1980-81, number 161.

Figure 41



While this may seem like a minor incident as Figure 42 shows, there was massive bombardment in the surrounding areas.

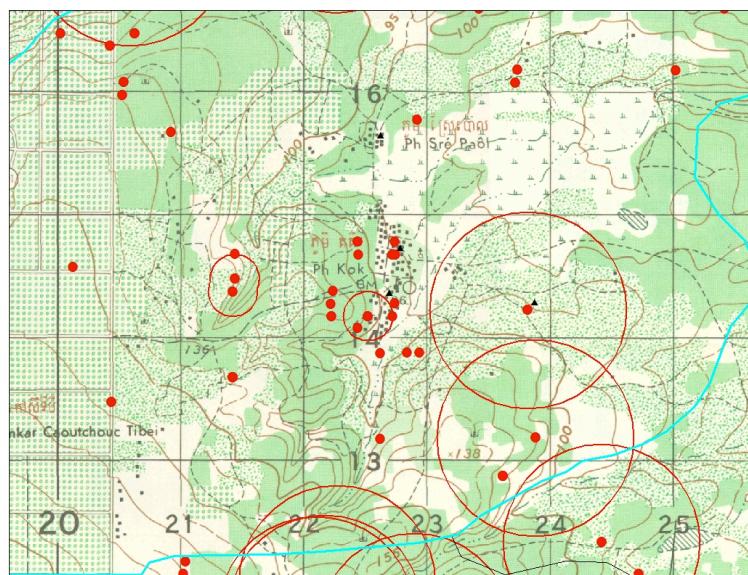
Figure 42



Also of both human and strategic importance is the lasting impact if such bombing. As has been discussed, people whose lives have been destroyed will not look to the deeper geopolitical rationale of the attacks, but rather quite explicitly blame the attackers. This deep and understandable anti-Americanism manifested itself in the short term as support for the CPK and hatred for both the US and the US supported Lon Nol Regime. This hatred can also have long-term implications, however. The following statement made by Preap Pichay to Kiernan highlights this lasting impact quite clearly. The bombings that directly hit the village in the center of the map represent 50 sorties, 239 tons of bombs.

"US dropped bombs a lot in Minnot, starting in 1972 and especially in 1973. Lots of people died, sometimes the bombs fell right on villages, for example in Phum O Klok in Khum Ta Moung, many dead and wounded. Also in Phum Kokir, 30 dead 100 wounded, 100+ houses destroyed. The bombs fell right across the village. The people are still angry with the US about that."¹³²

Figure 43



As Kiernan describes¹³³, even where civilian casualties were not known to be high, the CPK were able to recruit large numbers of peasants by highlighting the damage done by US air strikes. An Intelligence Information Cable, dated 2 May 1973, from the CIA's Directorate of Operations made this point after investigations in Region 25 of the Southwest Zone:

Khmer Insurgent (KI) cadre have begun an Intensified proselytizing (sic) campaign among ethnic Cambodian residents In the area of Chroury Snao, Kaoh Thorn district, Kandal province, Cambodia, in an effort to recruit young men and women for KI military organizations. They are using damage caused by B-52 strikes as the main theme of their propaganda. The cadre tell the people that the Government of Lon Nol has requested the air strikes and is responsible for the damage and the 'suffering of Innocent villagers' in order to keep himself in power. The only way to stop 'the massive destruction of the country' is to remove Lon Nol and return Prince Sihanouk to power. The proselytizing (sic) cadres tell the people that the quickest way to accomplish this is to strengthen KI forces so they will be able to defeat Lon Nol and stop the bombing.¹³⁴

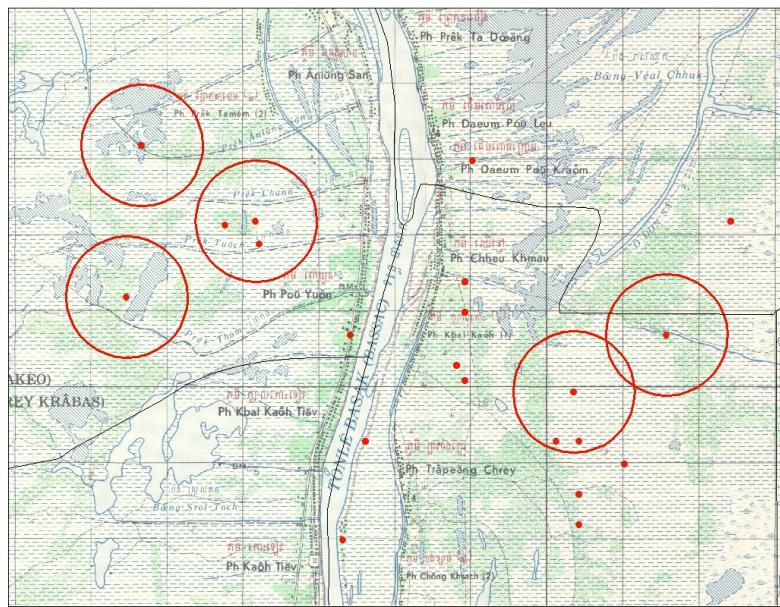
Figure 44 below shows the area described above, Chheu Khmau commune in Kaoh Thum District of Kanda Province pre-May 2 1973. The red dots represent 99 sorties, with total payload of 3,578,900 (1598 tons). The planes included F111s, A37s, B5s, F5s T28s and F100s. They took place between May 1970 and May 1973. The rings are B-52 areas.

¹³² Kiernan Interviews, 1980-81, number 161. 126a and 126b

¹³³ Kiernan, *Vietnam Generation*, 13

¹³⁴ Ibid

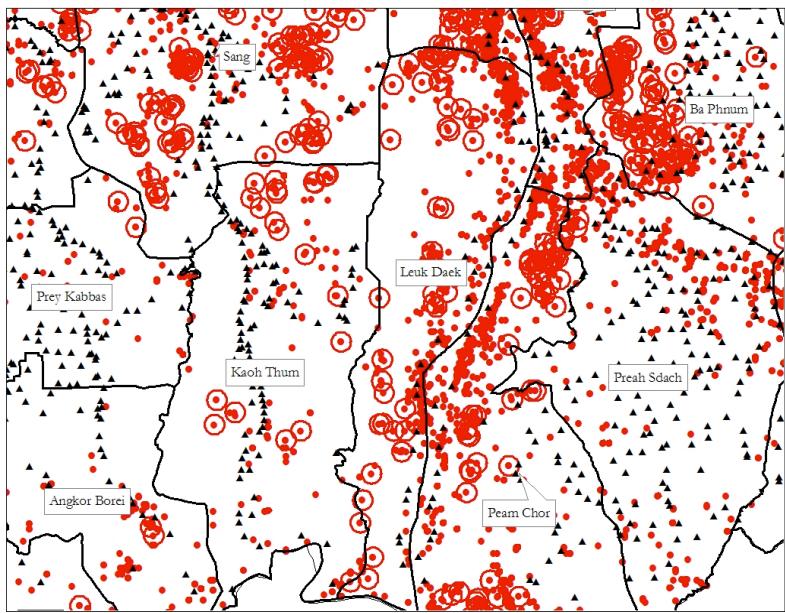
Figure 44



There is no doubt that use of anti-imperialist rhetoric resulted in the successful recruitment of a significant number of young men for Khmer Rouge forces. Residents around Chroury Snao say that *the propaganda campaign has been effective* with refugees and in areas of Kaoh Thorn and Leuk Dek districts which have been subject to B-52 strikes.¹³⁵ Figure 45 shows these regions which were indeed heavily bombed. The rings in the map are B-52 areas.

¹³⁵ Kiernan, *Vietnam Generation*, 14

Figure 45



Just to the north of this area, however, is the region with some of the heaviest B-52 bombardment. Figures 43 and 44 show this area with and without the bombing data. The 6 triangles represent village centers, the black square, homes.

Figure 46

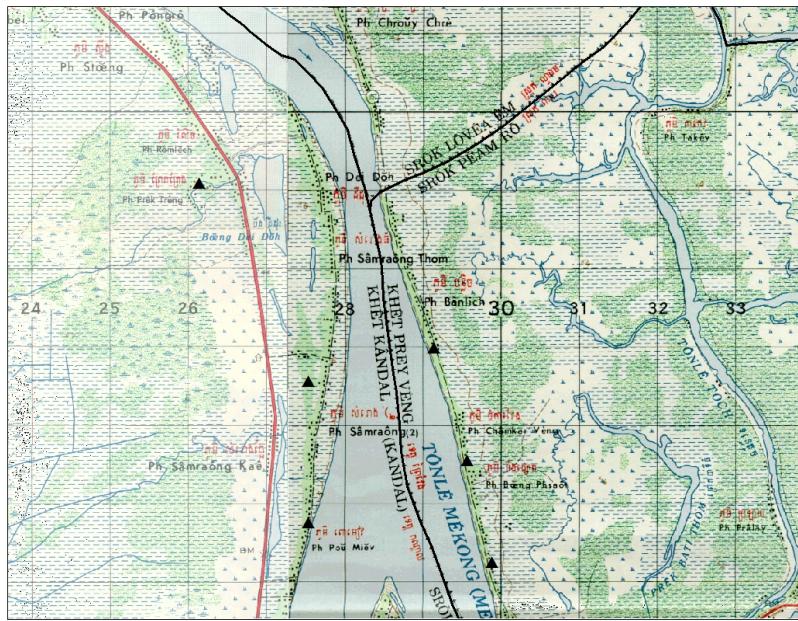
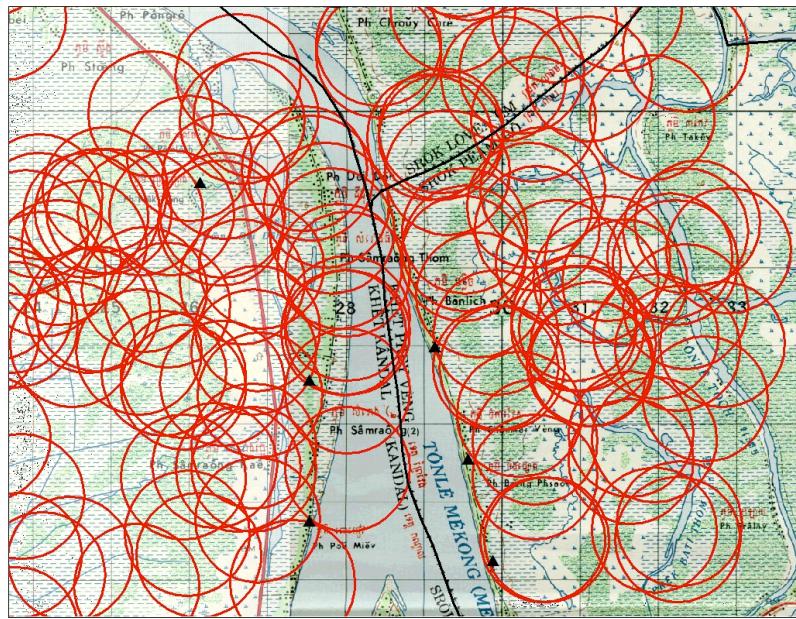
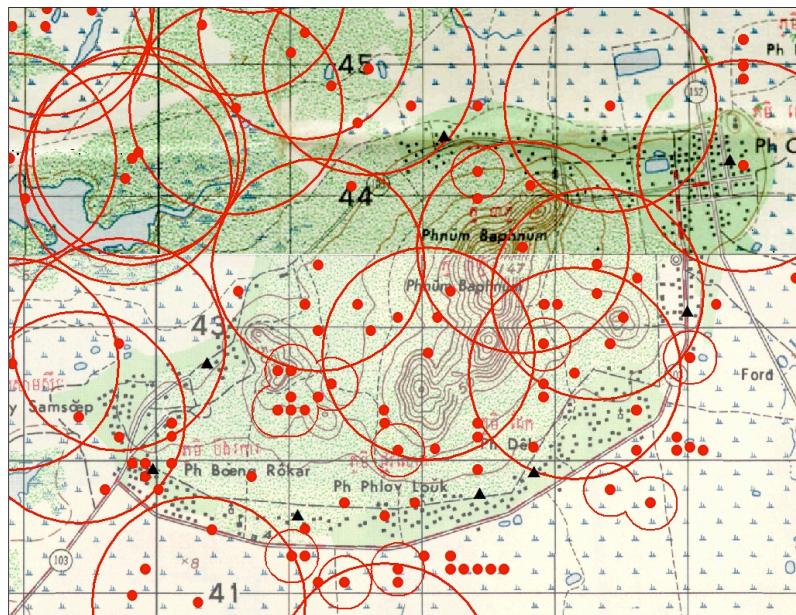


Figure 47



Dozens of villages in the area are completely under B-52 areas. Below, in Figure 48 is just one of these examples, with 7 villages under B-52 areas. The large rings are B-52s and the small ones are cluster bombings. The 549 sorties represented in this map have a total payload of 16,320,360lbs (7286 tons)

Figure 48



5. After the Bombing

The US domestic debate

“You think you guys know everything, but I’ve got orders to fight until the last Cambodian”¹³⁶ US Ambassador Dean

In early 1974 a new US Ambassador was put in place in Phnom Penh. John Gunther Dean’s primary responsibility was to strengthen Cambodia’s military sufficiently enough for the CPK to negotiate an end to the war.¹³⁷ The Cambodian Army did manage to resist the Khmer Rouge dry season offensive in 1973 with the help of American airpower, and did so again in early 1974 without bombing support.¹³⁸ It seems clear that at this point the US strategy was now to buy time and force negotiation. In meeting with Lon Nol “the ambassador urged him and his countrymen to ‘hang on’ for a few more months”.¹³⁹ However, Kissinger remained unwilling to negotiate with the Khmer Rouge, because without bombing capability he thought they would be negotiating from a point of weakness and he continued to believe that the Khmer Rouge were under the control of Hanoi. Nixon repeats this latter belief in a letter to Lon Nol “...the continuing warfare in Cambodia results solely, I believe, from the unreasoning intransigence of the North Vietnamese and their Khmer communist supporters”.¹⁴⁰ While there is little doubt that the US had a very weak hand in any possible negotiations with the Khmer Rouge, it is equally true that Hanoi, as has been previously demonstrated, could simply not negotiate on behalf of the Khmer Rouge. This was a major strategic mistake of the Nixon administration.

The political consequences of the bombing are still active today. With 95% of Cambodian income coming from US aid, in 1994, Congress limited funding to \$377 million USD. This limit in aid, and the congressional and public debate surrounding it, represents an ironic turn in US involvement in Cambodia. As the US strategic interest shifted from Vietnamese disengagement to aiding the Cambodia government to win a civil war, the administration had to protect the government from a conflict it ostensibly helped spread. This meant that even those who opposed the earlier Cambodian engagement, now supported assistance to help reconcile the damage they believed the US had themselves helped cause. As Shawcross puts it: “one problem, however, was that by insisting on linking American “credibility” to a cause that was already lost, Kissinger actually helped to manufacture the very crisis of confidence that he ostensibly sought to avoid.”¹⁴¹ Armstrong, a US Major in Phnom Penh, puts it in more strategic terms: “Is the US government here as a result of using Cambodia to disengage from Vietnam or is it here to help Cambodia? If the former, the mission is terminated. If the latter, the US Government has been 90 percent unsuccessful.”¹⁴²

While there is much blame to be cast for the US bombing campaign, the debate of how and whether to support the country in the height of civil war was fiercely contested and blurred many of the staunch ideological lines driving US Indochinese policy. Much of Congress

¹³⁶ US Ambassador Dean responding to Stewart Dalby of the *Financial Times*. As cited in Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 359.

¹³⁷ Chandler, *Tragedy of Cambodian History*, 230.

¹³⁸ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 515.

¹³⁹ Chandler interview with S. Suon Kaset, May 1987. As cited in Chandler, *Tragedy of Cambodian History*, 231.

¹⁴⁰ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 325.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 351

¹⁴² Ibid, 357

remained profoundly upset for having been deceived about the Menu bombings, but many now supported aid on humanitarian grounds. In a letter to the House speaker, President Ford appeals to this position: "And to deliberately abandon a small country in the midst of its life and death struggle? Is this the US, which so far has consistently stood by its friends through the most difficult of times, now to condemn in effect a small Asian nation totally dependant on us?"¹⁴³ Others, such Representative McCloskey, a California Republican, remained sceptical: "If I could have found the military, or State Department leader who has been the architect of our policy, my instinct would be to string him up. Why they are there and what they have done to the country is greater evil than we have done to any country in the world, and wholly without reason, except for our own benefit to fight against the Vietnamese."¹⁴⁴

Kissinger, for his part, argued that it was the Cambodian interests that were being defended from the start and any opposition to aid now, both helped the Khmer Rouge, as the bombing halt had, and diminished any chance of a peaceful settlement. "Restrictions such as these" he states, "had enabled the KR to survive when they were still embryonic and gradually turned the tide in their favour once they gained strength."¹⁴⁵ And he doesn't hide his contempt for Congress when he continues: "mercifully Congress adjourned for the Easter recess at this point, sparing the country for at least a few more weeks the humiliation of public debate on the best way to abandon a helpless ally totally dependant on America."¹⁴⁶

While Kissinger's position was highly problematic, so too were the arguments of many on the left of the political spectrum. Sympathy for aspects of the Asian communist cause, opposition to the Vietnam war in general and antipathy toward the 'domino theory', led many on the left to turn a blind eye to the emerging nature of the Khmer Rouge. The New York Times called them 'enigmatic insurgents'¹⁴⁷ and Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, questioning what they perceived as anti-communist propaganda, stated: "We do not pretend to know where the truth lies amidst these sharply conflicting assessments; rather, we again want to emphasize some crucial points. What filters through to the American public is a seriously distorted version of the evidence available, emphasizing alleged Khmer Rouge atrocities and downplaying or ignoring the crucial U.S. role, direct and indirect, in the torment that Cambodia has suffered."¹⁴⁸ George Hildebrand and Gareth Porter went further, "The evacuation of Phnom Penh undoubtedly saved the lives of many thousands of Cambodians... what was portrayed as a destructive, backward-looking policy motivated by doctrinaire hatred was actually a rationally conceived strategy for dealing with the urgent problems that faced post-war Cambodia."¹⁴⁹

While the entire nature of this debate cannot be covered here, what is important to note is that all positions, for or against aid to the Lon Nol regime were firmly rooted in the recent history of the Vietnamese war. Where as the administration felt that they were being

¹⁴³ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 515.

¹⁴⁴ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 352.

¹⁴⁵ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 515.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 518.

¹⁴⁷ As cited in Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 516.

¹⁴⁸ Chomsky, Noam, and Herman, Edward: "Distortions at Fourth Hand," *The Nation*, June 25, 1977.

¹⁴⁹ Hildebrand, George, and Porter, Gareth: *Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution*, Monthly Review Press, 1976, p. 97.

hindered in their attempt to end the war, the left blamed their ideological rationales for prolonging the war and spreading it into Cambodia.

Towards the Controlled Solution

To the extent that a negotiated settlement was even feasible at this late stage, hopes revolved around what Ambassador Dean called a negotiated solution. What limited discussion there was, was between Manac'h in Peking, Sihanouk and the US. The central aspect of this plan would have seen Sihanouk returning to Phnom Penh to put together a shared government before the Khmer Rouge took the city and claimed complete control. As Dean stated in a cable to Kissinger dated February 6, 1975, the need to negotiate was becoming increasingly urgent: "To be blunt, we are wasting time. In my major assessment last June I made clear that time was working against us. In September I thought I had convinced everyone concerned that we would never again be in a stronger position than we were then, and it would be downhill thereafter. Now it is February and these predictions have been borne out by events ... I wish to urge in the strongest possible terms that the time has come for the US to undertake immediate direct contact with Sihanouk."¹⁵⁰

Indeed, Dean's concerns were well founded. In April 1974 Kieu Saphan, Vice president of Sihanouk's Government of National Union, was greeted in Peking, to Sihanouk's concern, with strong support for military victory. This should have been seen, as Shawcross notes, as a significant shift in Chinese policy towards a military, rather than political solution.¹⁵¹ While contact had been limited, it seemed that Sihanouk also realized that the time for a negotiated settlement was running out. On November 25th, in a meeting with Manach, Sihanouk agreed to the plan if the US removed Lon Nol and his "clique".¹⁵²

Manac'h, however, continued to be central in trying to organize an agreement whereby Sihanouk would return to Phnom Penh. While there was still some Chinese support for a Sihanouk option, in the end, they would support the Khmer Rouge over Hanoi and the Soviets - proof that until the end, geopolitics remained at the center of the war. Such considerations were also stated by Dean that while "a new communist-oriented Cambodia was bound to emerge...we would prefer that the successor regime in Cambodia be oriented towards Peking than towards Hanoi."¹⁵³

In the end, however, the problem with the "controlled solution", was that it did not fit in with Kissinger's view of the conflict. A controlled solution meant both acknowledging that the Khmer Rouge were not being directed by Hanoi and that there could be acceptable compromise with communist forces, neither of which Kissinger seemed willing to accept. It is also clear that (from the American point of view) there was much more at stake than the lives of the Cambodian people, despite the humanitarian focus of the US congressional debate - on all sides, geopolitics was paramount.

¹⁵⁰ Cambodia - State Department Telegrams: To Sec State - NODIS (2)", Box 4, National Security Adviser. Presidential Country Files for East Asia and the Pacific, Gerald R. Ford Library

¹⁵¹ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 335.

¹⁵² Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 339.

¹⁵³ Chandler, *Tragedy of Cambodian History*, 234

On Jan 1st 1975 the Khmer Rouge launched a countrywide offensive cutting off the Mekong supply line to Phnom Penh. At the beginning of April, Kek Loong, the government's last foothold on the Mekong was captured and the Khmer Rouge advanced on the capital. On April 17th 1975, they took Phnom Penh. As the Khmer Rouge forced the population out of Phnom Penh, they warned that the "US was about to bomb Cambodia again, this time the cities, not the countryside."¹⁵⁴ This was not the case, but the fear of such attacks contributed to the ability of the Khmer Rouge to evacuate the entire city, almost 2 million people in a matter of days. In light of the massive bombardment encircling the city, it is not difficult to understand how residents would take this warning seriously.

In the US, a blame game over administration or congressional culpability in the failure of the Nixon Doctrine began almost immediately. Kissinger blamed the left for "seeking to obscure their fallibility in a cocoon of righteousness" and a New York Times headline read, "Indochina without America: For most, a better life."¹⁵⁵

For the Khmer Rouge, it was seen as a clean and pure victory against US imperialism. As Becker argues, Pol Pot believed that the victory placed Cambodia "as the superior communist nation in the world, above China and Vietnam, which had been its allies. The Cambodians could not have won without Chinese and Vietnamese help, but Pol Pot had to say otherwise."¹⁵⁶

As for Sihanouk, he continued to invoke nationalism, claiming that the Khmer Rouge "sprang from popular resistance to the United States and Lon Nol. If (he) fought against it, (he) would be a traitor." He continues, "There are only two people responsible for the tragedy in Cambodia today, Nixon and Kissinger. Lon Nol was nothing without them and the Khmer Rouge were nothing without Lon Nol."¹⁵⁷

While there is certainly much blame to go around, Shawcross argues that that Nixon and Kissinger must be judged by the consequences of their actions. "Whatever Nixon and Kissinger intended for Cambodia" he states, "their efforts created catastrophe..."¹⁵⁸ Much of this catastrophe undoubtedly stems from the massive and seemingly indiscriminate use of aerial bombardment.

Conclusion - New Interpretations and Lingering Questions

Between October 2nd 1965 and August 15th 1973 the US flew 230,516 missions in Cambodia, dropping a total of over 2.7 millions tons of munitions. This represents nearly half of all munitions dropped during the entire Indochinese War, the largest aerial bombardment in history. The reasoning for the bombardment and its consequences are multifaceted and evolved over the course of the campaign. What is consistent throughout, however, is an utter lack of local and historical context in rationalising the strategic outcomes

¹⁵⁴ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 372

¹⁵⁵ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 530.

¹⁵⁶ Becker, *When the War was Over*, 27.

¹⁵⁷ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 391

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 396.

of the campaign coupled with almost no consideration for the local reactions to the extensive human toll.

The introduction of the bombardment data base allows us to view this time period with a new layer of information. Doing so reveals the following alternations to the established historical narrative of this time period:

- The US had been bombing in Cambodia for nearly 4 years prior to the supposed start of the Menu Campaign. The bombing began under the Johnson Administration.
- The bombing began 5 months after Sihanouk broke diplomatic ties with the US.
- When Chester Bowls and Sihanouk met on January 8, 1968, the US were already bombing in Cambodia.
- Despite Kissinger's claims, and over the warning of the Joints Chiefs of Staff April 9th, 1969 Memorandum, Base Areas 704, 354 and 707 were all heavily bombed.
- On January 1st 1970 there was a massive increase in the intensity of the bombardment, in part due to the introduction of B-52s into the Cambodia theatre, as requested by General Abrams.
- The bombing intensity increased throughout the summer of 1973, after Congress barred any such increase.
- It is clear from bombing patterns that the bombardment forced the VC/NVA westward into Cambodia

In light of the new information brought about from the bombardment database, many questions need investigation:

- Why did Sihanouk cease diplomatic relations with the US in 1965? Was the bombing either a cause or consequence of this?
- Did either Chester Bowls or Sihanouk know that the bombing had already begun when they met in 1968?
- What was Johnson's knowledge of the bombing? Has a Freedom of Information Act inquiry ever been made into US involvement in Cambodia during the Johnson Administration?
- Were the pre Nixon administration bombings in support of the 1,835 'Studies and Operations Group US' special forces team incursions into Cambodia
- Why are their no records of the bombing in the days surrounding the supposed start of Menu?
- Was the massive increase in bombing in January 1970, what Nixon referred to as the new strategy for Cambodia? Was this the actual start of the Menu campaign? If so, how did Shawcross get it so wrong and why did Kissinger corroborate his version of events?
- Was the bombing increase of 1970 in any way linked with the coup three months after?
- At what points did Kissinger's and Nixon's rationale for the bombing evolve from first targeting the COSNV, to second, securing the troops withdrawal in South Vietnam, to third, stopping in the Khmer Rouge from taking control of Cambodia? To what degree is this a causal progression?

This article represent a first attempt at rethinking the US experience in Cambodia during the Indochinese war, in light of this new abundance of data. It shows that accounts from all sides of the debate at the time, have significant flaws, and that many key points in the historical record are simply factually incorrect. Perhaps more importantly, the ability to match first hand testimony, with images of the bombardment being depicted, provides a visualization and confirmation of events that for too long, have gone unrecognized, and misunderstood.