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CAMBODIAN RELIEF

A REPORT

TO THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE



OCTOBER 1980

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(II)

PREFACE

The desperate plight of Cambodian people has evoked an extraordinarily generous response from the American people. American citizens through private donations have given over \$52 million to Cambodian relief. The United States Government has to date contributed over \$120 million to the international relief effort.

Since the inauguration of the relief effort, responsible observers have expressed concern that relief supplies are not reaching needy Cambodians. To assist the Committee on Foreign Relations in assessing the effectiveness of the relief operation and in evaluating food prospects in the region, the Committee asked staff member Peter Galbraith in April to travel to Southeast Asia and to prepare a report.

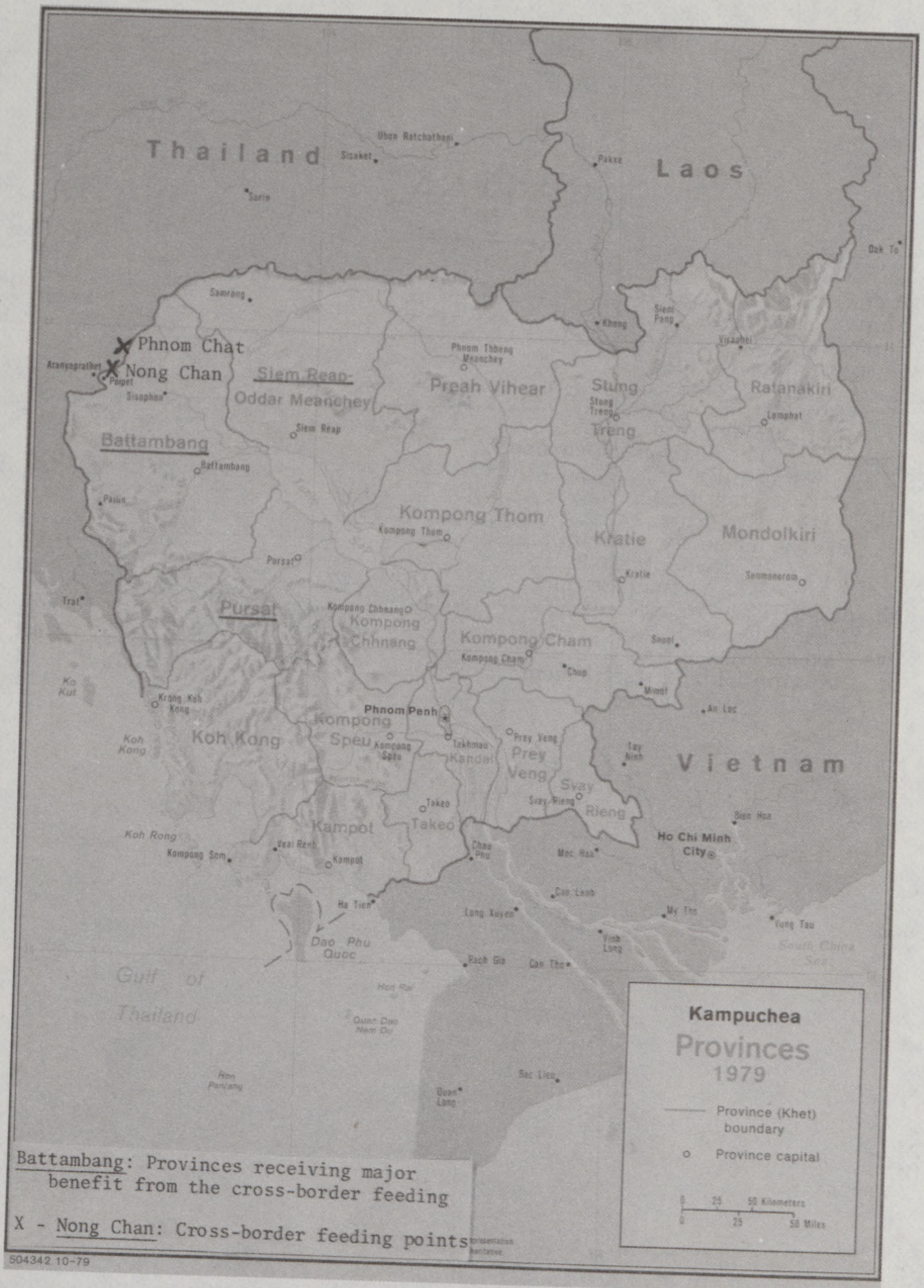
On June 23, 1980, Vietnamese forces began a two-day attack on Thai border positions and refugee concentrations at Nong Chan and Nong Samet. This report, which was originally issued in early June to the Members of the Foreign Relations Committee, has been updated to incorporate changes brought about by the attack.

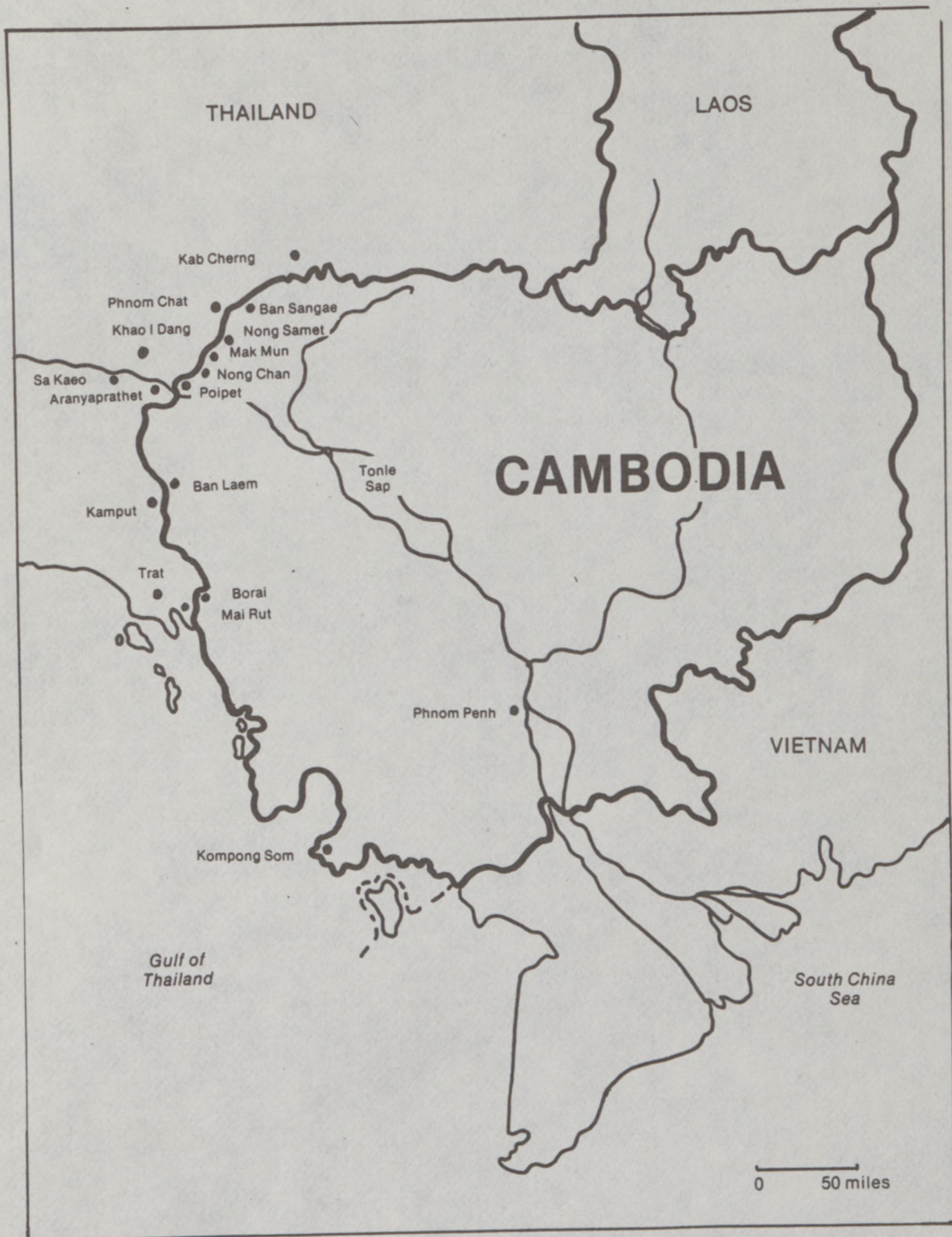
The views expressed in the report are those of Mr. Galbraith and do not necessarily reflect the views of any Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

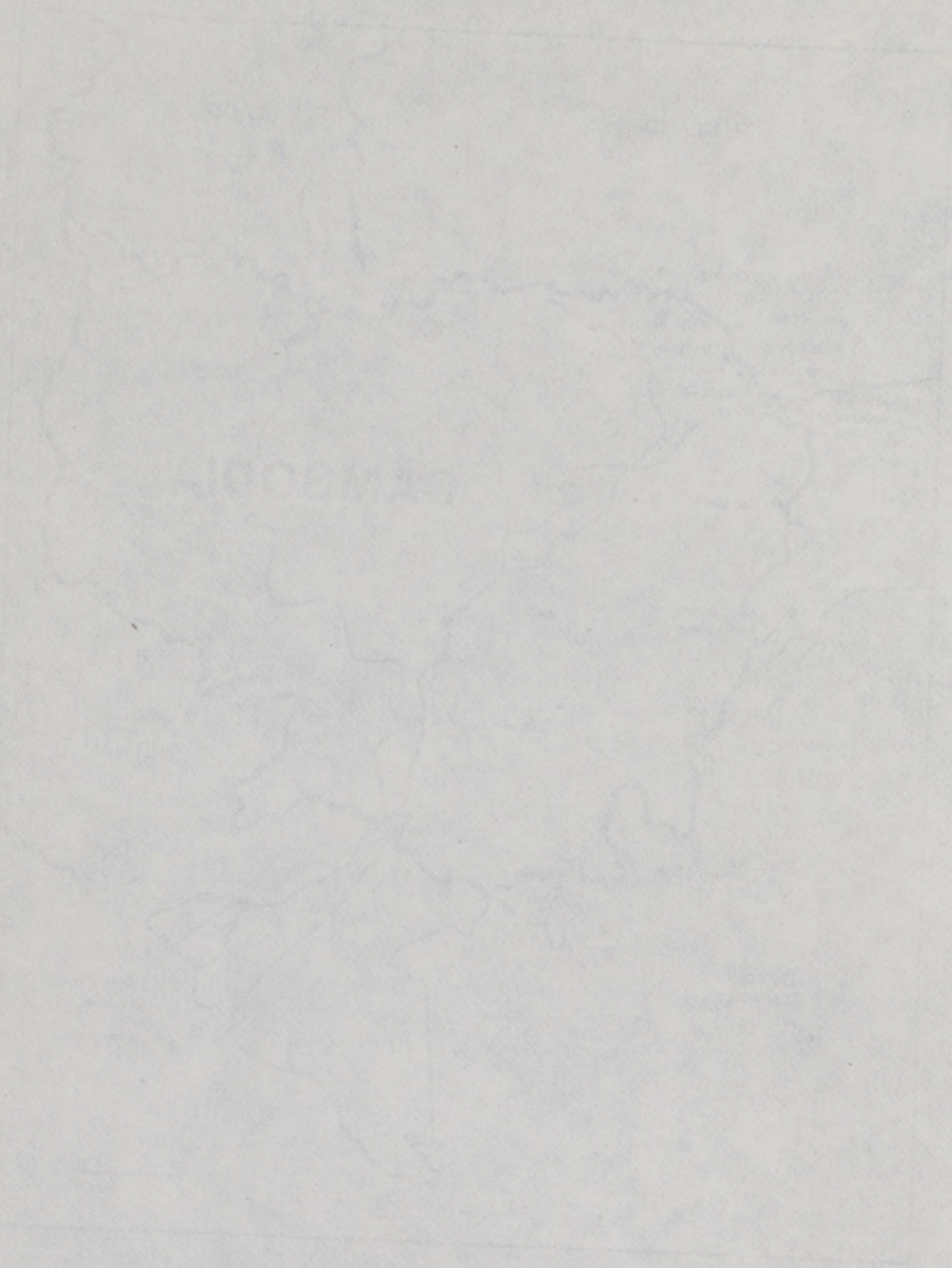
FRANK CHURCH.

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SUMMARY

For the balance of 1980, and in 1981, the survival of a large part of the Khmer people, inside Cambodia and on the Thai-Cambodian border, will depend on the provision and adequate distribution of internationally provided food supplies. Food, seed and medical supplies provided to individuals at the Thai-Cambodian border and to the Cambodian authorities in Phnom Penh¹ have benefited large numbers of Cambodians. The present level of food deliveries to Cambodia is minimally adequate to feed the population. However, because of uneven and inadequate distribution of international relief supplies, particularly by the Cambodian authorities, famine is likely to affect large numbers of Cambodians later this year. This is likely to lead to population movements toward the Phnom Penh and border distribution points which, in turn, will further disrupt efforts to restore Cambodia's shattered agricultural economy.

Cambodia's 1981 food prospects will depend on the December 1980 harvest. Because incountry seed stocks were either nonexistent or eaten, the provision of rice seed to Cambodian farmers before the June planting season has been a major objective of the international organizations concerned with Cambodian relief. Since March, over 22,000 metric tons of seed have been distributed to individual Cambodians at the border. This seed has gone principally to farmers from the adjacent Battambang, Pursat and Siem Reap provinces and appears to meet or exceed estimates of need in the area. The international community has provided 30,000 metric tons of seed to the Cambodian authorities in Phnom Penh. Distribution of this seed has been uneven and geographically limited and, as a crude estimate, Cambodia's 1981 food deficit could be as much as 40 percent of need. Prior to 1970, Cambodia was able to feed a population of 7,500,000 and maintain a significant rice surplus for export. Current and prospective production is inadequate for a population which, at most, is only two-thirds of the 1969 level.

The June 23 Vietnamese attack on refugee concentrations and Thai military positions at the Thai-Cambodian border has severely, although perhaps only temporarily, disrupted the cross-border feeding operation. The attack serves to underline the vulnerability of all Cambodians—whether in Thai refugee camps, on the Thai-Cambodian border, or inside Cambodia—to changing political and military conditions.

¹ On January 6, 1979 the invading Vietnamese Army seized Phnom Penh and replaced the Khmer Rouge regime of Pol Pot with one headed by a Khmer Rouge defector, Heng Samrin. The Heng Samrin regime, which calls itself the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), has been recognized only by the Soviet bloc countries and India. With the support of the Vietnamese military, it does control most of the countryside and almost all of the population inside Cambodia. The Cambodian authorities referred to in this report are those working under the general direction of the Heng Samrin regime.

CHAPTER 1

FOOD

OVERVIEW

In normal times, the December rice harvest meets the greater part of Cambodia's food needs. The December 1979 harvest was, however, exceptionally small as a lack of seed and wartime dislocation had limited planting. A severe drought further reduced the crop. The harvest, which provided a respite to last fall's famine, is now depleted. A small dry season crop has been harvested and mostly consumed.

Thus, until the December 1980 harvest, Cambodia's estimated 5 million¹ people will be heavily dependent on internationally provided foodstuffs. The lead agency organizing the provision of food and humanitarian supplies to needy Cambodians is a joint United Nations Children's Emergency Fund/International Committee of the Red Cross (UNICEF/ICRC) program. Among other U.N. agencies, the joint program draws on the resources of the World Food Program (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Private voluntary organizations (PVO's), relying on the individual contributions of U.S. citizens and the citizens of other Western countries, as well as on government grants, provide important assistance to Cambodians inside Cambodia, on the Thai-Cambodian border and in the refugee camps.² A consortium of PVO's led by the British based anti-hunger organization, OXFAM, has been particularly important to the incountry relief program, not only because of the volume of supplies delivered, but also because of the influence it has had with the Phnom Penh authorities.

Food and other humanitarian supplies reach Cambodians from two main sources: (1) direct distribution by the combined UNICEF/ICRC relief operation to individual Cambodians at the Thai-Cambodian border; and (2) distribution of UNICEF/ICRC, OXFAM, and Socialist country supplies in Cambodia by the Cambodian authorities. Until it was severely curtailed by the June 23 Vietnamese attack, the border operation was feeding approximately 1 million people, principally from the western Cambodian provinces of Battambang, Pursat and Siem Reap. The incountry operation is supposed to reach the approximately 4 million Cambodians under Heng Samrin control, but in fact reaches many fewer.

¹ There is no way of determining how many Cambodians died from war, mass executions and famine during the last decade. Consequently, any population figure for Cambodia today can only be a very rough estimate. A May 1980 CIA study estimates Cambodia's population falls within a range of 4.7 million to 5.5 million. Many IO and PVO sources use a lower range of 4 to 5 million. A U.N. projection based on earlier fertility trends indicates that, without the devastation of the 1970's, Cambodia's 1980 population would have been between 8.7 million and 9 million.

² The PVO's include the Catholic Relief Service, CARE, Church World Service, International Rescue Committee, Seventh-Day Adventist World Service, Food for the Hungry International, and CAMA.

The long term effects of the Vietnamese attack on the border operation cannot be ascertained yet. By the end of July, the border distributions again had been resumed, though not at the pre-attack level.

1980: PARTIAL FAMINE

In 1979 Cambodia's famine was country-wide. This year, as long as the flow of relief supplies is maintained, famine will be geographically limited. Until the June disruption, the international relief program was effectively assisting about 2,000,000 Cambodians.³ This includes the population of Phnom Penh and some of the surrounding Kandal Province (probably around 600,000), some of the population along Cambodia's main highways, and the estimated 1 million Cambodians serviced by the border food distributions. Other food resources, including vegetables and Tonle Sap (Great Lake) fish, provide primary or supplementary sustenance for a part of the population. A growing free market allows Cambodians not receiving international rice to trade for it.

However, large parts of Cambodia are clearly not receiving any food assistance at all. Outside the distribution channels is much of rural Cambodia as well as the less accessible northeast and southwest provinces. People in these areas are already hungry and in the coming months may face starvation. At the Thai-Cambodian border, several Cambodians spoke of recent starvation deaths in their villages. Doctors and relief personnel reported a significant upsurge in malnutrition cases. Faced with renewed famine, hungry Cambodians are likely to move to the border and Phnom Penh food distribution points, which, in turn, will further disrupt efforts to restore Cambodia's shattered agricultural economy.

While the international relief operation sustains several million Cambodians, the inadequate distribution of supplies imperils hundreds of thousands of others. Even if the Heng Samrin regime had the will to improve distribution it may be too late for many Cambodians. Cambodia's secondary roads, already in abysmal shape after a decade of war and neglect, will become impassable later in the rainy season, thus precluding food deliveries to large areas of the country.

1981: ENOUGH SEED?

Relief officials are as concerned about Cambodia's 1981 food prospects as they are about 1980's. The small size of the December 1979 harvest and widespread hunger precluded significant accumulation of seed stock. UNICEF/ICRC and OXFAM have made the provision of seed rice to Cambodian farmers a major priority. As with food assistance, rice seed has been widely distributed in some parts of the country and in other parts not at all.

Since the beginning of the year, UNICEF/ICRC have delivered over 22,000 metric tons of seed rice, mostly of indigenous varieties, to individual Cambodians at the Thai-Cambodian border. Most of this seed has gone to farmers from the adjacent Pursat, Battambang and Siem Reap provinces. Since the FAO has estimated need in this area at 15,000 metric tons, and since deliveries have been made

³ This is a crude estimate developed by the staff. For obvious reasons, there are no reliable statistics in Cambodia. This estimate is derived from journalist and IO/PVO reports on areas of effective distribution combined with intelligence and other estimates of population in these areas. Estimating population served by the border operation is easier since it is possible to count the number of people receiving food assistance.

directly to individuals, there is reasonable assurance that adequate seed has reached the farmers of these provinces. These provinces usually produce 25 percent of Cambodia's food.

Some seed delivered at the border is reaching further into the interior. Several farmers interviewed at the border were from the more eastern provinces, making a 2- to 3-week roundtrip journey by oxcart or bicycle to collect seed. Seed is also traded to the interior, perhaps by the oxcart owners who typically charge 30 to 50 percent of the load for rental. Further border seed deliveries are likely to be channeled to the areas of greater need. Any local excess is not wasted, as seed is easily converted into milled rice and is only marginally more expensive.

UNICEF/ICRC has provided 18,000 metric tons of rice seed to the Cambodian authorities in Phnom Penh. The OXFAM-led consortium has provided 12,000 metric tons and the Vietnamese reportedly have given an additional 10,000 metric tons. Five thousand metric tons of the UNICEF/ICRC and OXFAM rice seed were airlifted to Phnom Penh in April and May and, by most reports, were distributed by the Cambodians in a timely fashion. Much of the airlifted rice seed was floating rice suitable for the fairly unique conditions of the Tonle Sap. Since most of the Tonle Sap region was already being served from the border, the airlifted rice has tended to reinforce the position of a *relatively* well supplied region.

While UNICEF and OXFAM sources now express satisfaction with the distribution of rice seed shipped to Cambodia, this program has significant problems. Because of the limited offloading facilities at Cambodia's ports and because of distribution bottlenecks, the seed did not reach the countryside until after the planting season was underway. Further, since the seed distribution has not been accompanied by food distribution, there is a continuing danger that some of this seed will be eaten.

Most of the UNICEF/ICRC and OXFAM rice seeds shipped to the Cambodian authorities are newly developed strains like I.R. 36. (Indigenous varieties have been scarce on the export markets. Indigenous varieties have been available for the border program because the Thai do not consider seeds delivered to the border as exports.) The principal advantage of the new strains over the indigenous varieties is a shorter growing season which helps compensate for the late deliveries. On the other hand, Cambodia's farmers have no experience with these new strains which require fertilizer and regulated irrigation to achieve maximum yield. Fertilizer is generally unavailable in Cambodia and the irrigation system is in disrepair. Without agricultural extension services (which are well beyond the capacity of the Heng Samrin regime) observers fear these new seed varieties will produce very low yields.

Using the more efficient transplant cultivation method, Cambodia needs about 80,000 metric tons of seed to feed its people in 1981. Deliveries, now at 62,000 tons, remain short of that goal. This deficit, the uneven distribution of already delivered rice seed, and an expectation of low yields, mean that even under ideal weather conditions Cambodia will need some food assistance next year. Unfortunately, the population with the least seed (and the poorest 1981 prospects) are those most inaccessible to international relief.

CHAPTER II

THE DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

UNICEF/ICRC food enters Cambodia at four different points: (1) it is delivered to individual Cambodians at the border; (2) it is shipped to the port of Kompong Som; (3) it is taken by barge up the Mekong to Phnom Penh; and (4) it is delivered by air to Phnom Penh's Pochentong Airport. The latter three points of entry constitute the incountry program with distribution controlled by the Heng Samrin regime. While most agree the border feeding has worked much better than the incountry program, the two programs are inseparable. By the terms of its agreement with the Heng Samrin regime UNICEF/ICRC agreed that the Cambodian authorities in Phnom Penh would be the sole distributors of food in Cambodia. The ad hoc land bridge at the border violates this agreement and was tolerated only because the Heng Samrin regime benefits so significantly from the incountry operation. Any strong effort to pressure the Heng Samrin regime to improve the incountry program runs the risk that it will cut off the border feeding.

A. THE BORDER

The UNICEF/ICRC joint operation at the border, and the private voluntary organizations there, service two distinct groups of Cambodians—transients and residents. Two border feeding points for transients—Phnom Chat and Nong Chan—and three resident camps—those at Phnom Chat and Nong Chan, and Nong Samet—were visited. The resident camps are associated with various anti-Heng Samrin factions. Phnom Chat is Khmer Rouge; Nong Chan and Nong Samet are Khmer Serei (Free Khmer).

TRANSIENTS

The transients, which up until June numbered as many as 130,000 at any one time, come to the border by oxcart, bicycle or on foot to collect food and seed to take back to the interior. UNICEF/ICRC distributions occur twice or thrice weekly, and in spite of significant logistical difficulties, appear to be well organized and well run. Since distributions are made to individuals and since interviewing by U.N. and U.S. personnel is extensive and relatively free, there is good assurance that food so provided is going to needy Cambodians. While at the border, transients take advantage of medical and supplementary feeding services provided by the international organizations (IO's) and PVO's.

The Vietnamese attack seriously disrupted the transient feeding operation and, while the feeding has again resumed, its future is uncertain. Until the June attack there was no Vietnamese or Heng

Samrin policy of confiscating or taxing the rice and seed traffic, although on occasion an individual military unit did take some. Since the attack, Cambodians coming to the border have reported a range of Vietnamese/Heng Samrin policies. In some instances, the Vietnamese/Heng Samrin forces have limited the amount of rice or seed that can be brought into Cambodia. In other instances, farmers have been prohibited from going to the border and have had to evade patrols to get supplies. In yet other cases, the Vietnamese have not interfered with the rice and seed traffic.

If and when the oxcart land bridge is fully restored, one significant practical measure to improve the feeding operation would be to increase rations. In April each adult was receiving 20 kg. of rice and 20 kg. of seed per distribution. As a result, transients had to wait through two or three distributions to fill an oxcart. Waiting time at the border is time diverted from agricultural activities. It is also critical that as much rice and seed be pushed into Cambodia before the rainy season makes the country's roads impassable. Rations ought to be sufficient to fill an oxcart at a single distribution.

RESIDENTS

Approximately 210,000 Cambodians live in hastily constructed camps on the Thai-Cambodian border. While assumed to be mostly located on the Thai-side of the imprecisely delineated border, parts of several camps extend into Cambodia. Living conditions vary according to the age and administrative authority of the camp and range from the spartan Khmer Rouge controlled Phnom Chat to the bustling Khmer Serei Nong Samet.

The central problem facing the Cambodians resident at the border is physical security. The Thai military, in the hopes of avoiding a clash with the Vietnamese or the armed Khmer factions, stations its troops several kilometers back from the border. This leaves the border residents exposed to a potential renewed Vietnamese attack, and to ongoing fighting among the rival Khmer factions. At each of the camps visited, armed personnel, many in their early teens, were present. From time to time, gunfire could be heard which the staff was told intensifies at night. During the trip the largest border camp, Nok Mak Mun (population 80,000), was destroyed by a rival Khmer Serei group. Wounded civilians caught in the crossfire filled the wards of nearby Khao-I-Dang's hospital.

The border Khmer are also at the mercy of their military leaders who range from the benign to the bizarre and homicidal. The Khmer Serei, who claim to be anti-Communist freedom fighters, generally appear more interested in controlling the thriving black market than in fighting Vietnamese. The Khmer Rouge continue to rule through intimidation and brutality (although one of their leaders did admit that some of Pol Pot's excesses had been a "mistake"). Outside their own areas, the Khmer Rouge seem to be universally feared and hated. Knowledgeable observers say that only one or two of the anti-Vietnamese factions, and notably those under the command of former Prime Minister Son Sann, have the potential to be militarily effective and to obtain popular support.

As long as the Khmer civilians remain on the border—and on Cambodian soil—little can be done to improve security. An obvious solution is to set up new holding centers on the Khao-I-Dang model

on Thai soil. The Thai, for domestic political reasons and to maintain a valuable negotiating point, are unwilling to admit more Khmer. They have proposed to consolidate several border camps into one, called Camp 42. The camp would straddle the border, with 50 to 90 percent of the population on the Cambodian side. UNICEF/ICRC and the PVOs would dispense food and medical services from the Thai side. (Their own charters prohibit U.N. organizations from operating on foreign territory without permission of the national authorities.)

International organization and PVO personnel are unanimous in their condemnation of the Camp 42 approach. By leaving the population on the Cambodian side of the border, the security problem is unresolved. Because of its large size, Camp 42 would be, the IO's say, a very tempting target for the Vietnamese. Such an attack could spark a second Thai-Vietnamese clash.

Cambodians have fled to the border to escape hunger and chaotic conditions inside Cambodia. At the border they often find themselves subject to the instability and tyranny they hoped to escape. Relief personnel say the best way to ameliorate the conditions of the border people is to grant them temporary asylum in Thailand under UNHCR protection. Failing this, they urge that the Thai be dissuaded from taking steps, like the Camp 42 approach, which might worsen the plight of the border people.

In a difficult environment, the UNICEF/ICRC operation and the private voluntary organizations perform well on the border. Medical facilities are crude, but appear to have adequate medicines and medical personnel. The supplementary feeding programs and the food distributions reach most of the needy populations. The U.N. and PVO personnel put in long hours at some personal risk and in some cases without pay. They do a good job. The U.S. Government has a small team at the border, the Khmer Emergency Group, carrying out the Congressional mandate that aid provided to Cambodia be monitored. This team, which includes several Cambodian-Americans, is dedicated and professional. They take the same risks as the U.N. and PVO personnel.

B. THE INCOUNTRY PROGRAM

The incountry program has been less satisfactory than the border program. According to journalists and IO/PVO sources, the food has been neither efficiently nor fairly distributed.

Although a new currency has been introduced recently in Cambodia (the first money since 1975), the basic means of exchange and units of account are still rice and gold. The Heng Samrin regime apparently has chosen to use its rice (i.e., its capital) in four ways. First, rice is used to reward party cadres and to pay government employees (included in this group are not only Phnom Penh and provincial bureaucrats but also teachers, health workers, factory workers, and certain other categories). Monthly rations range from 10 kg. for those at the lower levels to 22 kg. for top officials. Second, rice is used to acquire needed services and goods on the market. Labor, for example, is paid from 10 kg. a month for light work to 18 kg. for heavy work. Third, rice has been "banked" in anticipation of future needs and, perhaps, as a potential tool in the regime's effort to consolidate control of the countryside. Much internationally provided rice has been stockpiled in Kompong Som and Phnom Penh warehouses, although, in response

to repeated prodding from the international organizations, the percentage distributed has increased dramatically since January. Finally, some internationally provided rice is distributed, as intended, to needy civilians. Beneficiaries include hospitals, orphanages and schools.

Still, the ordinary people of Cambodia *directly* receive little of the internationally provided rice. Refugees consistently reported receiving no more than one or two distributions of one or two milk cans of rice a month (one-half to two kilos a month; or one to four days ration for an adult). Interviews by journalists visiting Cambodia confirm these reports.

The failure of the Cambodian authorities fully or fairly to distribute rice does not mean that the incountry program is pointless. Even the present biased distribution system does give a significant benefit to large numbers of people, many of whom are not dedicated Communist cadres or high level bureaucrats (indeed, many government employees and PRK party cadres are former Sihanouk and Lon Nol supporters motivated only by a desire for adequate food). The level of rations even at the top—22 kg. a month—is not excessive.

According to journalist and IO/PVO sources, there is also a significant trickle down effect of the incountry rice. Phnom Penh has a thriving free market as do other Cambodian population centers. Farmers, fishermen, and other Cambodians not on the official distribution rolls can and do trade vegetables, fish, handicrafts, labor and smuggled Thai goods for rice. Hoarded gold stocks, including gold from the teeth of the exhumed victims of Pol Pot, are also used to pay for rice.

POLITICAL PARALYSIS

For some time the international organizations have been blaming the poor distribution of their supplies on logistical difficulties. It is true that an utterly devastated Cambodia still has too few trucks and no postal or telephonic communication system. Roads and bridges are in terrible shape after a decade of war, vandalism and neglect. The offloading capabilities of the Phnom Penh port have been sharply reduced by the collapse of a pier. And Cambodia certainly suffers the enduring results of Pol Pot's purge of educated and foreign influences which has left the country with only a handful of doctors, engineers, drivers, mechanics, competent administrators and skilled technicians.

Nevertheless, there are steps the Heng Samrin regime could take to avert or vitiate the coming famine. Its failure to do so is, in the opinion of knowledgeable visitors, indicative of the paralysis that exists in that government.

Installed by the force of Vietnamese arms and staffed by survivors who owe loyalty neither to the Khmer leadership nor to the Vietnamese overlords, the Cambodian Government barely functions. Information for decisionmaking is rarely coordinated and decisions are often ill-considered or not made at all. According to several visitors, the government has no grasp of the urgency of the impending famine. During the first week of the staff's visit in the area, the government and the relief operations shut down for a week of holidays, in spite of the urgent need to get seed and rice into the country before the rainy season.

Privately, the international organizations and the relief agencies despair at the magnitude of the incompetence in Phnom Penh. Medical teams have had to wait for months in Thailand for permission to

enter the country, while the government devotes enormous effort to receiving and entertaining various Socialist country delegations. While people go hungry, stockpiled rice is allowed to rot in Cambodia's ports. Trucks intended to carry relief supplies are used for private (or public) transport or are so poorly maintained that they no longer work. Corruption is also becoming a significant factor. One relief agency sympathetic to the Heng Samrin regime reported a ministerial request that the next relief plane bring furniture (ostensibly for the Ministry guest house) instead of food. Reports of pilferage by government officials and of featherbedding are increasingly common.

U.S. law (Public Law 96-110) requires end use monitoring of food distribution by personnel having freedom of movement in the areas where food is being distributed. The Cambodian authorities have never permitted this level of access, and indeed during the first half of 1980 further restricted IO and PVO movement in the countryside. As the restrictions apparently also applied to Socialist country personnel, relief workers speculated that the government was attempting to minimize criticism of its incompetence and corruption.

In early summer, a Cambodian governmental Committee to Combat Famine finally began functioning. The Committee is empowered to deal directly with the district authorities (bypassing the provincial bottlenecks) and some IO's, PVO's and U.S. Government sources are guardedly optimistic that distribution will now improve. The PVO's and IO's also report some easing of access to the countryside. It remains to be seen whether this apparent improvement in the situation will last.

THE VIETNAMESE ROLE

A major focus of this inquiry was on the Vietnamese role in Cambodian relief, and, in particular, on the question of whether international relief supplies have been diverted to the Vietnamese military or to Vietnam. Those groups following the Phnom Penh relief operations—visitors, international organization personnel, intelligence sources, U.S. Embassy—do not believe that any significant quantities of relief goods are being diverted to Vietnamese use. There are scattered tales of occasional Vietnamese looting of relief supplies (and of other Cambodian assets including art treasures) but most agree these appear to be the acts of individual soldiers and officers.

The Vietnamese have provided rice to Cambodia under a sister province program, as have the Lao. Knowledgeable sources say the Vietnamese are as frustrated as the IO's about the incompetence of the Cambodian authorities in handling food deliveries.

Overall, however, the Vietnamese role in relief cannot be described as benevolent. It is generally agreed that the Vietnamese Army is the sole institution currently inside Cambodia capable of handling food distribution so as to avoid a recurring famine. For essentially political reasons the Vietnamese have eschewed this role. They maintain, of course, that the Heng Samrin regime is a sovereign and independent government worthy of diplomatic recognition. The non-communist world (and the United Nations) reject this view, but still must deal with the Heng Samrin regime directly or indirectly in the vital area of humanitarian relief. Thus, in the Vietnamese view, the myth of Heng Samrin independence requires a hands-off approach to the relief operation.

As in the case of the boat people, the Vietnamese have shown themselves on occasion to be susceptible to the force of world opinion on humanitarian issues. If Vietnamese inaction again leads to starvation in Cambodia, many in the IO and PVO communities believe that it will again be necessary to mobilize world opinion.

CHAPTER III

THE REFUGEES

Although the 1979 Vietnamese invasion and subsequent famine displaced well over one million Cambodians, only a fraction of this number found refuge in neighboring Thailand.⁴ Altogether, approximately 180,000 Khmer refugees live in four holding centers—Khao-I-Dang, Sakeo, Mai Rut, and Kamput—located near the border, but inside Thailand. These holding centers are not only under UNHCR protection but are, in fact, run by the UNHCR. This is one of the first times the UNHCR has been “fully operational” and the Khmer experience will unquestionably have significant implications for future UNHCR operations.

KHAO-I-DANG

Only one of the holding centers was visited—Khao-I-Dang—but with an estimated 130,000 people it is by far the largest. (If it were a city, it would be the second largest Cambodian city and the second largest city in Thailand). The camp extends over a large area and, not surprisingly, is very crowded.

Khao-I-Dang's population includes many of Cambodia's surviving bourgeoisie. As educated urban dwellers, this class suffered disproportionately from the Khmer Rouge rustication policies and from the effort to eradicate educated and foreign influences. Nevertheless, the Khao-I-Dang Khmer seemed in reasonably good spirits and, in conjunction with the IO's and PVO's, have been using their skills to help restore a semblance of normal life. The camp has schools (which children attend in 2 hour shifts), a well staffed hospital, a family planning clinic, and a range of other services. The people of Khao-I-Dang looked healthy and seemed to be adequately fed.

While at Khao-I-Dang, several complaints were heard about UNHCR management, notably in the area of camp construction. The UNHCR Deputy Administrator at the camp accepted many of the criticisms, pointing out that this was the UNHCR's first fully operational experience. (UNHCR staff in Thailand has mushroomed from 37 in September 1979 to more than 300). UNHCR inexperience has caused problems, but the attitudes of the IO and PVO personnel working in Khao-I-Dang toward the UNHCR Administration, and the degree of cooperation with the Administration, seemed much more positive than in the Thai-run camps where there are reports of endemic corruption and badly shaken morale.

⁴ For a brief period in late 1979 Thailand had an “open door” policy toward Cambodian refugees. Now, except for unaccompanied minors, those requiring medical attention, and certain other limited categories, the door is closed. For a fee and at some risk, a refugee can arrange to be smuggled from the border to the holding centers. Effectively, however, the flow of Cambodian refugees into Thailand has ceased.

The UNHCR headquarters is now in the midst of a debate as to whether to retain an operational role and capacity. Serious consideration should be given to retaining and developing the operational capacity not only because, with the bugs worked out, the UNHCR has the potential to do a first class job in Thailand, but also because the operational experience will allow the UNHCR to respond more rapidly and more efficiently to new emergencies. Retaining the operational capacity will involve, of course, an increased and sustained financial commitment by the donor countries.

SAKEO

Sakeo is the oldest (established last October) and with 25,000 people, the second largest refugee camp. It is the camp Mrs. Carter visited and the site of some of the most vivid TV footage last fall.

Sakeo differs from the other holding centers in that the Khmer Rouge leadership remains firmly in control of the camp population. The Khmer Rouge rule Sakeo, as they did Cambodia, through intimidation and fear. In early spring the UNHCR representative at Sakeo left the camp reportedly because of threats made by the Khmer Rouge leadership. After this incident, a handful of the top Khmer Rouge leaders left the camp, without, however, altering the basic control system. U.S. Government sources say the June departure of 7,410 Sakeo residents for the Khmer Rouge border camps has weakened—but not fundamentally altered—Khmer Rouge control.

The UNHCR claims, at least privately, that as long as the Thai want the Khmer Rouge leadership in place there is little the UNHCR can do. A long planned move of the camp residents to higher ground does provide an opportunity to separate civilians from the Khmer Rouge. If the UNHCR is to do this, it may have to enlist the support of its principal donors, including the United States, to secure Thai agreement.

REPATRIATION AND RESETTLEMENT

The UNHCR and the Thai frequently speak of the need for “durable solutions” to the refugee problems. These durable solutions include:

- (1) Repatriation: forced or voluntary.
- (2) Local resettlement.
- (3) Third country resettlement.

The Thai have explicitly ruled out local resettlement for any Indochinese refugees. Third country resettlement for Cambodians (except for a limited number of Khmer with families in France or North America) is not an option because of the large numbers and because, as both United States and Thai officials noted, the contribution of the refugees is considered essential to the reconstruction of Khmer society.

The UNHCR, the Thai, and the U.S. Refugee Office maintain that repatriation is the only option for the Khmer. Each party, however, sidesteps the very difficult question of whether the repatriation is to be voluntary by maintaining that the Khmer in Thailand want to return to Cambodia and are only awaiting more peaceful conditions.

At Khao-I-Dang, many refugees were interviewed who have no

desire to return to Cambodia under any circumstances. For them, the memory of a decade of war, famine, terror and death is still traumatic and they would like to start a new life in a new land.

The UNHCR may, at some point, have to make a determination that conditions in Cambodia are such that the refugees should return. In making this determination, the UNHCR will have to resist Thai pressure for an earlier (and perhaps premature) return date. The UNHCR will also have to work out a plan to deal humanely with those Khmer who do not wish to return home, and yet for whom there is no alternative. Finally, the UNHCR will have to make arrangements with whatever regime emerges in Cambodia so that repatriates (whether voluntary or involuntary) are provided for and not punished. This will require far better monitoring arrangements than exist for the U.N. food distribution programs. Several UNHCR officials privately questioned whether the organization is adequately dealing with these issues.

EARLY REPATRIATION

Since the beginning of 1980 some Khmer have been leaving the holding centers to return to Cambodia. Until June the numbers were small and mostly confined to those joining the guerrilla movements. Although the UNHCR did not participate in these early repatriations, knowledgeable sources believe most repatriates returned voluntarily.

In June the Thai authorized and assisted a much more ambitious repatriation program. Seven thousand four hundred and ten Khmer left Sakeo, primarily to join the Khmer Rouge forces on the border south of Aranyaprathet, and 1,612 left Khao-I-Dang, either to join the Khmer Serei or to return to Cambodia. These repatriations deeply worried the IO/PVO community who feared that the Sakeo Khmer Rouge might be intimidating families into returning to a very uncertain fate in the mountainous Khmer Rouge bases. At Sakeo and Khao-I-Dang the UNHCR did interview to determine if the repatriations were voluntary.

Even so, many PVO observers were not satisfied. They argue that at a minimum future repatriations should include UNHCR interviews with prospective repatriates in a coercion-free environment. Those who refuse repatriation, they say, should be protected against potential retaliation.

The June repatriations were cited by the Vietnamese as a provocative act justifying the subsequent attack. The Heng Samrin regime has stated its opposition to any repatriation before talks on the issue with Thailand. (The Thais do not recognize the Heng Samrin regime and will not negotiate with it.) Whether the Vietnamese will again enforce this Heng Samrin position is not clear. Until the Vietnamese position is clarified, however, future repatriations will involve a significant risk.



