

PHNOM PENH IS SERIOUSLY CHALLENGING SIHANOUK'S POWER

Sihanouk is returning to Cambodia to reassert his authority in the wake of unprecedented attacks against the Vietnamese Communist embassies in Phnom Penh. The sacking of the North Vietnamese and Provisional Revolutionary Government diplomatic installations by thousands of students caps a period of growing anti-Communist sentiment and has produced the most serious crisis to date in Cambodia's relations with Hanoi and the Viet Cong.

There is no doubt that the attacks, which protested the presence of Vietnamese Communist troops on Cambodian territory and the forthcoming visit of North Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, were government inspired. The assaults in the capital were preceded and followed by anti - Viet Cong demonstrations in several provinces, and portions of the Vietnamese community in Phnom Penh also were objects of mob actions. The attacks received the unanimous support of a special session of both houses of the Cambodian legislature, which passed a declaration asking the government to take all measures necessary immediately to solve the problem of Viet Cong infiltration.

The Cambodian chief of state has curtailed his scheduled visits to Prague, Moscow, and Peking and notified the Queen that he is returning to Cambodia to call for a referendum, asking the people and the army to choose between himself and "those personalities" who or-

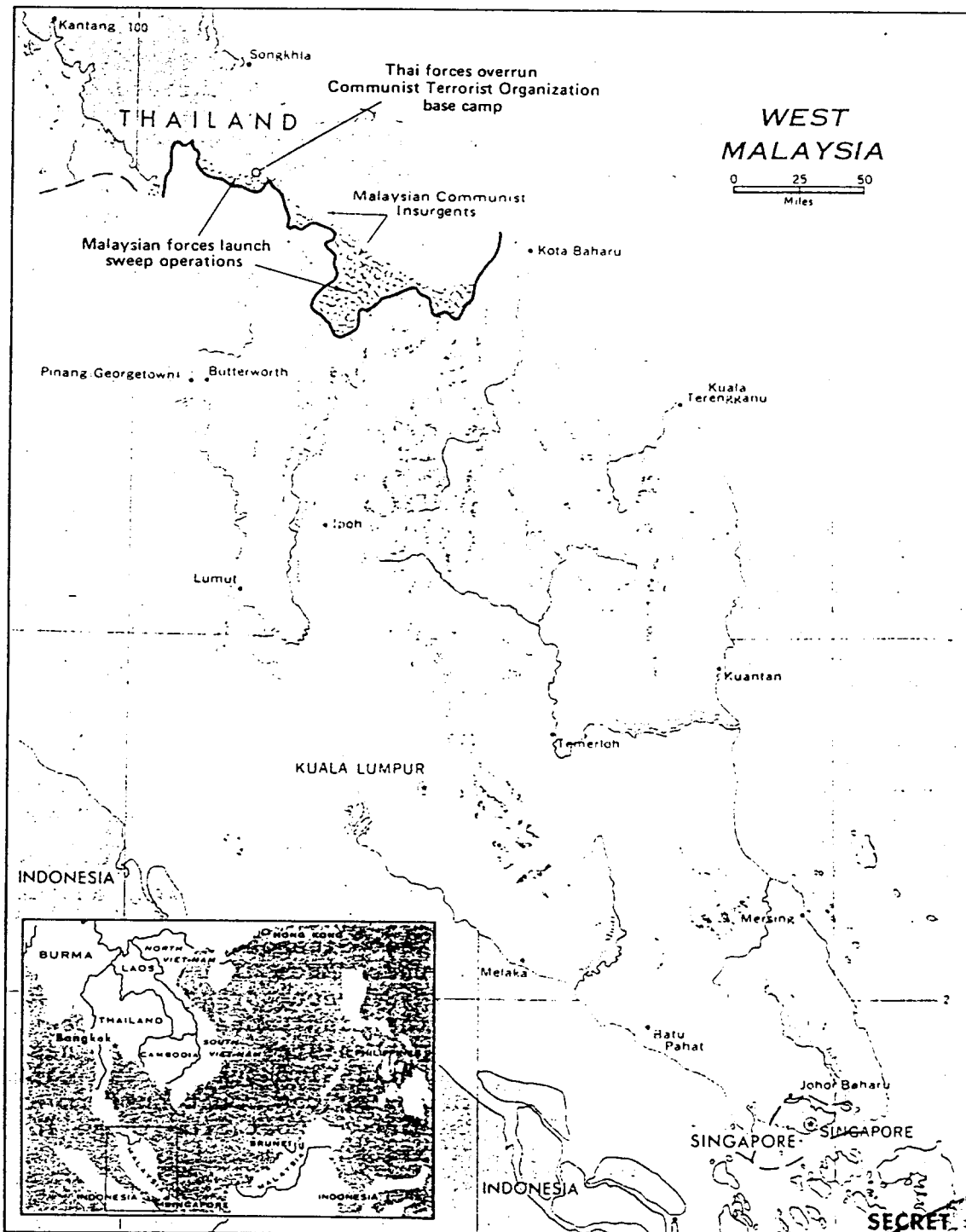
ganized the sieges on the embassies on 11 March. He threatened to step down if he loses; he has used such threats in the past to quiet domestic criticism.

Sihanouk's decision to return abruptly is a clear sign that he interprets these events as a strong challenge to his authority. Sihanouk and the government have been at odds for some time, but the assaults on the Vietnamese represent the first overt attempt by the government to undermine his foreign policy. Although Sihanouk has led the criticism of Vietnamese Communist activities in Cambodia, he has taken some pains to avoid pressing the Communists too far.

It is still not clear what government leaders hoped to achieve by the attacks. By playing on traditional Cambodian animosity toward the Vietnamese, they may have wanted to confront Sihanouk on an issue on which popular opinion would be against him. They may also, however, have miscalculated Sihanouk's reaction. Until now, the government's strategy has been to limit Sihanouk's power slowly and carefully. They must now decide whether to meet Sihanouk head on or give ground. Much will depend on how hard Sihanouk presses them and whether individuals like Deputy Prime Minister Matak, who has led the anti-Sihanouk forces, calculate that they can count on firm and continuing support from those forces.

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BANGKOK STIFFENS EFFORTS AGAINST MALAYSIAN COMMUNISTS

Thai security forces, operating under Bangkok's newly reorganized security command in the south, are exerting more pressure along the Malaysian border against the Communist Terrorist Organization (CTO). The Thai Government, responding to rising domestic criticism of increased banditry and Communist terrorist activity in the southern provinces, late last year ordered its civilian-military Communist Suppression Operations Directorate (CSOD) to take over security responsibilities in the south. CSOD's newly appointed regional commander, who set up his headquarters in January, has indicated that he intends to step up operations against the CTO along the border as well as against Thai Communists. A gradual increase in minor contacts with CTO elements attests to greater Thai patrolling efforts.

In early March, Thai security forces in the border region may have ended their past practice of avoiding contact with the well-ensconced CTO units when they overran a major CTO base camp. It was their largest skirmish to date with the Malaysian Communists. Although discovery of the camp--believed to have been the headquarters of the CTO 8th "regiment"--was mostly accidental, Thai commanders were quick to commit substantial reinforcements to the fray, which claimed a dozen casualties on each side. Although poor Thai tactics allowed the 200 defending guerrillas to escape, a precedent

for future actions may have been set.

As part of its pressure on the CTO, Bangkok has responded to Malaysia's long-standing effort to expand the limited border agreement that has governed joint border security operations between the two countries since 1965. The two governments announced last week the signing of a new agreement that for the first time allows Malaysian military forces to cross the border in "hot pursuit" of guerrillas and to operate five miles inside Thailand for a 72-hour period. Kuala Lumpur took immediate advantage of this concession by launching a sizable sweep operation into Thai territory. The agreement also provides for a new bilateral headquarters to facilitate joint security operations.

In spite of their increased aggressiveness, it remains to be seen if Thai security forces will mount a serious military challenge to the well-armed 1,300-man CTO military organization. Bangkok has yet to make a credible effort to counter the CTO's well-developed political infrastructure among the predominantly Muslim and Chinese border population. Although Malaysian leaders have not forgotten Bangkok's traditional lethargy in dealing with the CTO and are less than fully satisfied with the terms of the new border agreement, they are hopeful that the recent Thai actions are a sign of greater willingness to cooperate. ~~(SECRET)~~

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CHINA'S ABSENT LEADERS

Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao Tse-tung and his designated heir Lin Piao have once again slipped into the shadows. This time they have been publicly inactive for five months. In fact, aside from three ceremonial appearances in October 1969, they have been out of the public eye since last April and May, when they appeared in connection with the Ninth Party Congress.

Mao, now 76, may well be slowing down, but there have been no reports that his current absence has been caused by ill health. Instead, it appears that infrequent public appearances have become a style of leadership in China. Although Chou En-lai and several other leaders have appeared frequently, about one half of the politburo has failed

to make a public appearance yet this year.

Adding to the impression of aloofness from Mao is the fact that he has entirely stopped turning out "latest instructions," pronouncements which played such an important part in Peking's propaganda during the Cultural Revolution. The last such instruction was originally issued in September as a National Day slogan without attribution to Mao, but later propaganda described it as Mao's own composition.

Despite his public inactivity, Mao may be very active behind the scenes. He presumably is following the Sino-Soviet border talks closely and he may also be receiving various provincial leaders in private, as he has over the past several years. (~~CONFIDENTIAL~~)

CHINA: Public Activity of the Politburo Members (as of 10 March 1970)

	Currently Active	Out 1 Month	Out 2 Months	Out 4-5 Months
Standing Committee	Chou En-lai	K'ang Sheng	Ch'en Po-ta	Mao Tse-tung Lin Piao
Full Members	Huang Yung-sheng Ch'en Hsi-lien Chang Ch'un-ch'iao Li Hsien-nien Hsieh Fu-chih	Hsü Shih-yu Tung Pi-wu Wu Fa-hsien Ch'iu Hui-tso	Chiang Ch'ing Yao Wen-yüan Li Tso-p'eng	Liu Po-ch'eng Chu Te Yeh Ch'un Yeh Chien-ying
Alternate Members		Li Te-sheng Chi Teng-k'uei		Li Hsüeh-feng Wang Tung-hsing