

Observation no: 148

Country-year: Cambodia 1969

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

Yes

In 1952, Norodom Sihanouk mounted a bloodless coup against his own National Assembly with the help of Moroccan troops brought up from Saigon. He effectively sidelined the Democrats in the National Assembly and took over the role of prime minister.¹

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

Yes

See answer to question 1. Additionally, Sihanouk had a continuing fear of plots against him originating in Vietnam and Thailand with the blessing of the United States.²

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

No

There is no discussion of Sihanouk having had a military background. However, Prime Minister Lon Nol, who took over after the coup of 1970, was an army officer.

4. Is the military officer corps largely closed to those who do not share the leader's ethnic or sectarian background?

No

Cambodia was largely ethnically homogenous, consisting of the Khmer people, so this distinction was not especially relevant for army formation.

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

No

¹ David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008), p. 225.

² Chandler, p. 234.

I find no evidence of this in the authoritative histories of the period.

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

No

In fact, Sihanouk wanted to keep communists out of the military, and by the late 1960s his army was waging an active counterinsurgency campaign against them.³

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

No

There is little evidence of ideological influences in military training, other than an emphasis on loyalty to Sihanouk.⁴

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

Yes

By the late 1960s, the Cambodian army was fighting an active communist insurgency that controlled roughly one-fifth of the country.⁵

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

No

Authoritative histories show that the country was firmly under control of the civilian regime led by Sihanouk.

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

No

Sihanouk did fear plots against him (see question 2), but there is no evidence that he created a paramilitary force in response.

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

³ Chandler, chapter 11.

⁴ Chandler, chapter 11.

⁵ Chandler, pp. 246-8.

No

Sihanouk did fear plots against him (see question 2), but there is no evidence that he used his intelligence apparatus against his own military in response.

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

No

Authoritative histories provide no evidence of such purges in the late 1960s.

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

No

Sihanouk's regime was relatively closed to dissent, and authoritative histories show little evidence of civil-military dialogue. Rather, most decisions were a function of Sihanouk's personal power and whims.⁶

⁶ Chandler, chapter 11.