

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
AMBASSADOR AT LARGE

SANITIZED

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December 15, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT AND THE ACTING SECRETARY

Subject: Violation of Cambodian Borders

I well remember the horror felt throughout the civilized world when in 1914 the Kaiser violated the neutrality of Belgium. Of course the present situation in Cambodia as we see it is very different from Belgium in 1914. But the world at large (and a substantial section of the American public) has not yet been presented with convincing evidence that expanding the war into "a tiny, helpless country" is justified.

The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces do in fact have bases and rest areas at several points along the jungle covered, poorly defined border of Cambodia. Some of those areas seem to straddle the border, some are entirely within, by several kilometers, Cambodia itself. It is worth noting, however, that neither air attacks nor ground sweeps (within South Vietnam itself) have eliminated Viet Cong jungle bases; nothing short of actual occupation of the territory would seem to be able to accomplish this.

We do not as yet have evidence that would convince a skeptic that Cambodian territory is regularly being used as a sanctuary by the Viet Cong in the sense that the Viet Cong are staging substantial unit attacks directly from Cambodia and retiring into Cambodia immediately after the engagements. The evidence that we do have (and most of this comes from sources that could not be revealed) demonstrates only that for periods, sometimes of considerable length before engagement, some of the units involved were reinforced and re-fitted in Cambodia but that most of these units were redeployed into South Vietnam well before the engagement began.

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We are currently in the midst of a political-diplomatic campaign to induce the Cambodians to do what they can to discourage Viet Cong use of their territory. On November 26, Prince Sihanouk publicly stated that he would welcome strengthening the ICC with helicopters. On December 4, the Australians delivered a United States note to Sihanouk indicating our concern over Viet Cong use of his territory

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and our willingness to assist him in preserving his neutrality plus a summary of our evidence of such Viet Cong use. While we have received no direct response to that message the absence of vehement denial may itself be significant. We are in the process of sending Sihanouk a note explicitly responding to his November 26 statement and offering two helicopters and related funding to the Cambodian ICC. In anticipation of the probable need to increase the pressure on Sihanouk, we have already prepared the American Embassies in a number of countries which may have influence with Cambodia to present the documentation of our concern to their host nations and to request that they take it up with the Cambodians. If this proves unsuccessful we would then begin to present to the public our efforts to preserve Cambodian neutrality and the details of violations of that neutrality by the Viet Cong.

Until the conclusion of this diplomatic campaign and until we have publicly presented convincing evidence of Viet Cong violations of Cambodian neutrality, we should not consider any action in Cambodia that would be an obvious intentional violation of its borders. I greatly fear that such violation will not bring us any meaningful advantages but will decrease our support both at home and abroad and cause very troublesome problems at the United Nations. We should of course continue and perhaps consider augmentation of reconnaissance and information-gathering activities in Cambodia.

Therefore, I specifically recommend disapproval of General Westmoreland's proposal that he be authorized to subject a portion of Cambodian territory to 72 hours of B-52 and tactical air strikes. In addition steps should be taken to prevent ARVN forces from crossing the Cambodian border in hot pursuit. The major political difficulties that would result from either move should preclude such action at this time.

W. Averell  Harriman