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Intelligence Memorandum

Cambodia and the Vietnamese Communists

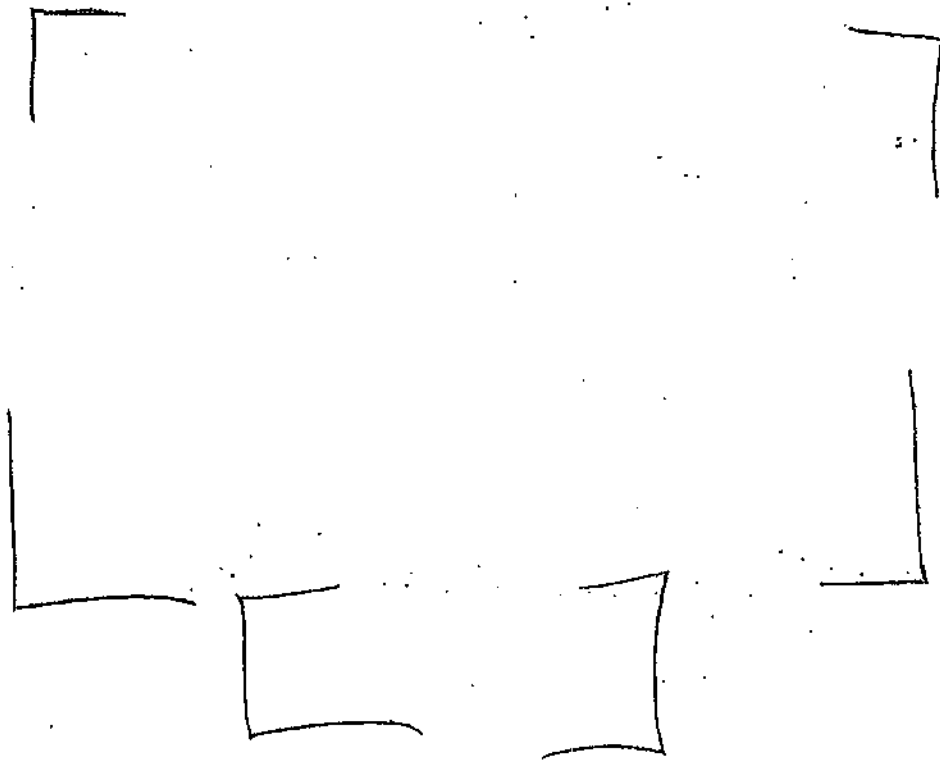
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
16 November 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Cambodia and the Vietnamese Communists

A Monthly Report

Contents

I. Military Developments: Major elements of the North Vietnamese B-3 Front, which had been based in Cambodia since 1966, have moved to the Dak To area of South Vietnam (Para. 1). Other B-3 Front elements have moved from their normal operating areas in Cambodia into South Vietnam (Para. 2). There is no evidence that Communist units involved in the attack on Loc Ninh in late October staged from Cambodian territory, although it is likely that the territory was useful in a supplementary role for the enemy's operation (Paras. 3-4). There are more reports of Communist medical and communications facilities in Cambodia (Paras. 5-6). Cambodia is establishing a number of new outposts in the northeast, possibly to control tribal dissidence rather than to counter the Communists (Paras. 7-9). Phnom Penh suspects Allied intelligence operations in the northeast (Para. 10).

The Vietnamese Communists continue to obtain foodstuffs and other nonmilitary supplies from Cambodia (Para. 11). A Viet Cong soldier defector says

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that his unit was based in Cambodia's Kandal Province, that it procured ammunition in Cambodia, and that a Cambodian border post promised his unit "mortar fire support" if required during operations in South Vietnam (Paras. 12-15). More reports of Chinese Communist arms deliveries to the Viet Cong via Sihanoukville are unconfirmed (Paras. 16-19).

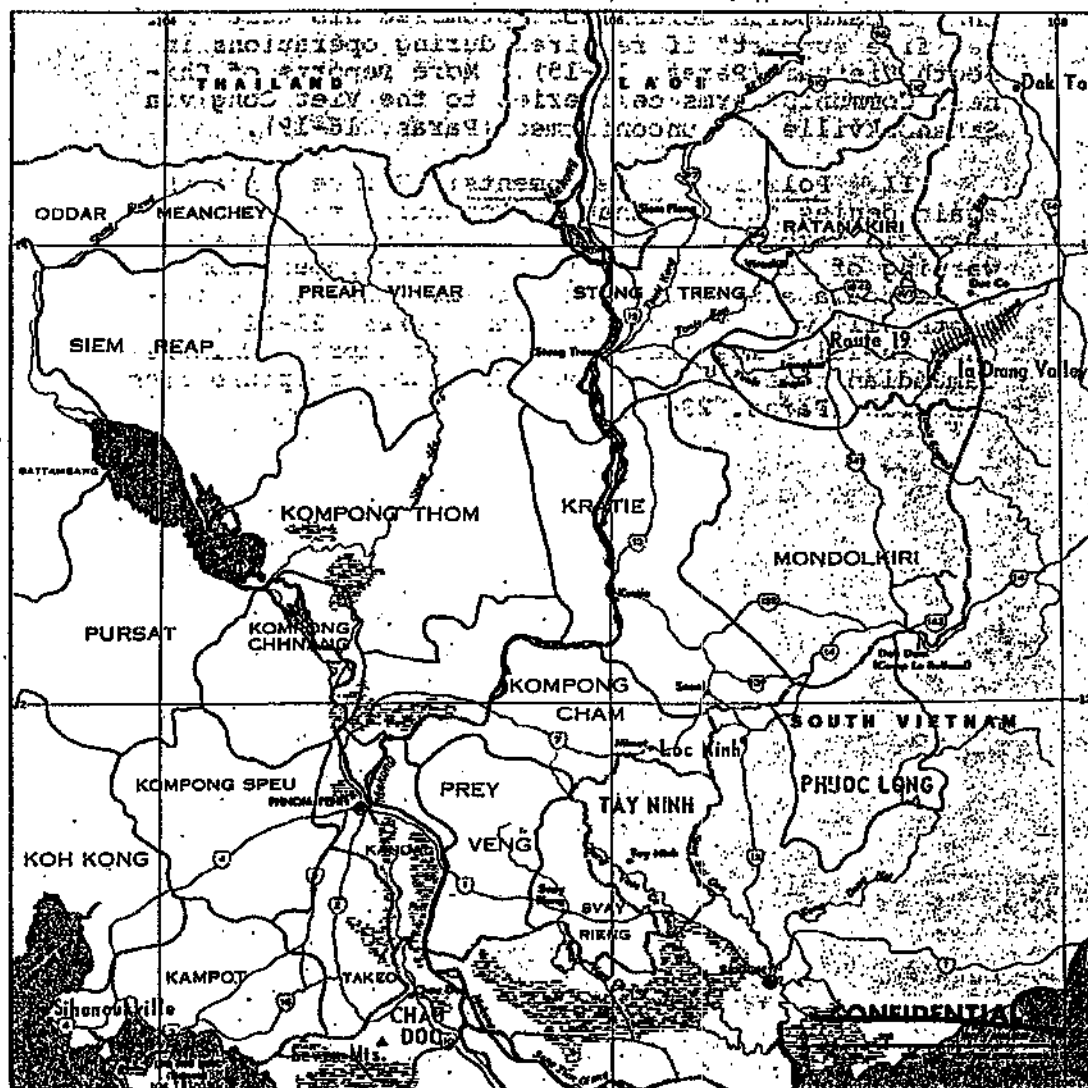
II. Political Developments: Prince Sihanouk again denies that Vietnamese Communist troops are based in Cambodia (Para. 20). Sihanouk reiterates warning of consequences of US military operations in Cambodia and restates his belief that the Communists will win in South Vietnam (Paras. 21-22). Chou En-lai's most recent effort to improve Chinese-Cambodian relations receives favorable response from Sihanouk (Paras. 23-26).

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I. Military DevelopmentsCommunist Base Areas

1. [] during October revealed the northeastward movement of major elements of the North Vietnamese B-3 Front. Two of three NVA regiments--the 32nd and 66th--which are subordinate to the Front and which apparently have been based in Cambodia since 1966, had relocated near the Dak To area of South Vietnam by late October. The third regiment, the 88th, was resubordinated in September, and moved out of the border area of the highlands to Phuoc Long Province in South Vietnam.

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2. Headquarters elements of the B-3 Front 1st Division also moved north from their normal operating area in Ratanakiri Province of Cambodia into the tri-border area. In addition, at least one element of the B-3 Front's 33rd Regiment moved eastward from Cambodia into South Vietnam's Darlac Province. This regiment has been located in South Vietnam during most of 1967.

3. Farther south, the headquarters and forward elements of the North Vietnamese 7th Division were located in Cambodia's Kompong Cham Province in early October, while units of the Viet Cong's 9th Light Infantry Division were located along the border in Kratie Province. There were, however, no indications [] that Communist units participating in the attack against Loc Ninh in late October staged from Cambodian territory or took sanctuary there during the course of the battle.

4. [] Cambodian military [] made reference to the fighting at Loc Ninh and [] Cambodian border units to take precautionary defensive measures. []

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the proximity of Loc Ninh to the border, however, and []

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the fact that the Communists have maintained medical facilities and have received foodstuffs and other supplies in this area, strongly suggest that Cambodian territory played at least a supplementary role in the enemy's operation against Loc Ninh.

5. A North Vietnamese lieutenant, who was assigned to Central Office South Vietnam (COSVN) before he defected recently, has described Communist facilities in Cambodia opposite southwestern Tay Ninh Province. He gave the location of a Viet Cong 300-man hospital and a hand-grenade factory on Cambodian territory and two Viet Cong broadcasting stations and a commo-liaison station along the border. He stated that at one time he had seen 250 North Vietnamese troops at the latter installation.

6. The area in which these facilities are located is one long associated with heavy Communist use. Captured enemy documents reveal that one of the principal uses the Communists make of Cambodian territory is the location of medical facilities. In addition, Liberation Front radio stations have long operated along this portion of the border. The defector's statement also underlines the extent to which Communist base areas often overlap the Cambodian - South Vietnamese border.

Cambodia Increasing Border Forces

7. Meanwhile, there are signs that Phnom Penh is making a greater effort to increase the government's presence in isolated areas of the northeast.

[] a number of new border outposts have been recently established in Ratanakiri and Mondolkiri provinces along the South Vietnamese and Laotian borders.

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[] elements of the Cambodian Army's 23rd Battalion were being deployed to positions in the Ia Drang Valley. North Vietnamese troops have been active in the valley since late 1965, when a major battle was fought on the South Vietnamese side of the poorly defined border. Other small Cambodian military detachments are moving into sparsely

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inhabited and rugged country north of Route 19 in Ratanakiri Province.

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8. Although these new Cambodian posts are located in areas of known or suspected Communist activity, there is no indication that their immediate purpose is to counter the Communists.

9. The deployments probably do reflect a sharper appreciation in Phnom Penh of the serious deficiencies in the government's hold over the northeast. In addition to the problem of North Vietnamese regulars operating on its territory, Cambodia is now faced with a fresh and potentially serious outbreak of tribal dissidence there. Although no clashes have been reported, tribal people have mounted a number of large demonstrations and in one case surrounded and forced the evacuation of a police outpost. The tribesmen have been demonstrating against food shortages and the establishment of additional security posts by provincial authorities. Although there have been reports over the years that some of the montagnard tribes have been brought under Communist influence, it is not clear whether the current dissidence is Communist inspired. Some of the tribal dissidents, however, did protest Mrs. Kennedy's visit--a line which the Communists have pushed in other areas of Cambodia.

10. Phnom Penh is also showing some sensitivity to possible Allied intelligence operations in the northeast. The Cambodian press agency on 7 November cited "journalistic sources" in reporting that US forces were placing small teams in Ratanakiri Province to seek out "Viet Cong" forces and to lay the groundwork for a US "invasion."

Cambodian border units have been instructed to increase their vigilance against possible US cross-border operations involving the use of helicopters. There is also one unconfirmed report that three South Vietnamese soldiers who allegedly participated in such operations have been captured. The low-key attention which Phnom Penh has thus far accorded the alleged operations, however, suggests that it lacks hard evidence of any such activities.

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Supply Activity

11. The Communists are continuing to procure substantial amounts of foodstuffs and other non-military supplies from Cambodia.

a large number of boats were moving north on the Tonle Kong River in September with foodstuffs and medical supplies for North Vietnamese forces in Laos. Although some lengthy disruptions have been reported, the level of traffic on the river so far this year appears to be similar to that observed in 1966. Meanwhile, supplies are also reaching the Vietnamese Communists along the South Vietnamese border, despite some Cambodian effort to curtail this illicit flow.

12. A Viet Cong soldier who defected last May has given an account of his unit's participation in combat and supply operations involving Cambodian territory. His unit, the Tan An Rear Service Section, was based in Cambodia's Kandal Province. It transported ammunition from a cache on the Mekong River a mile inside Cambodia to a transfer area, also within Cambodia. Another unit relayed the ammunition to the Seven Mountains area of South Vietnam's Chau Doc Province. The ammunition, mostly of Chinese Communist origin, was for 60-mm. mortars, B-40 rocket launchers, and small arms.

13. The source did not explain how the ammunition arrived at the Mekong pickup point, but he said that the Viet Cong did not use the Mekong as a north-south transportation route. They crossed the Mekong only at night, as required by the Cambodians to avoid "diplomatic embarrassment." He claimed that Cambodian civilians feared the presence of the Viet Cong because of the danger of hostilities developing in the area. The Viet Cong did, however, enjoy compatible relations with Cambodian military personnel. There were no restrictions on the Viet Cong other than the regulation to move supplies only at night.

14. The defector noted that his unit supported the Viet Cong 267th Battalion last March in an attack on an Allied post in South Vietnam. The battalion later retreated across the border to Cambodia

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with the dead and wounded, and remained there to "prepare for future operations." He claimed that a Cambodian border post provided the Viet Cong with small amounts of recoilless rifle ammunition during the attack and that the Cambodians assured them of "mortar fire support" if needed.

15. The border area of Kandal Province has long been used by the Communists for sanctuary and supply. The source's account of the battle, however, is at variance with captured Viet Cong documents which specifically prohibit Viet Cong units from crossing the border with weapons or conducting assaults from Cambodian territory, []

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[] The source's account of Cambodian soldiers providing small amounts of ammunition may be true. It is doubtful that the Viet Cong were given a broad guarantee of Cambodian mortar support, or that instances of fire support are common along the border. The rallier's statements, however, provide further evidence that the use of Cambodian territory by Communists is often determined by the extent of friendly relations with local officials.

Activity at Sihanoukville

16. Another report has been received suggesting that Communist China is delivering arms and ammunition to the Viet Cong through the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville.

17. An untested [] source reports that he was told by the manager of a Phnom Penh shipping company that Peking is no longer supplying arms for the use of the Cambodian Army but that shipments so consigned are being turned over to the Viet Cong. The manager, who is believed to have good contacts with the North Vietnamese mission in Phnom Penh, did not indicate whether his allegation was based on specific information or merely reflected the kind of speculation that is common in Phnom Penh. Other sources who apparently are in a position to know deny

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that there have been important diversions from Cambodian stocks to the Viet Cong.

18. The same source was told by a Chinese Communist shipping agent that most of the cargo unloaded from the Chinese merchant ship You Yi, in Sihanoukville in late October was consigned to the Cambodian Government. The source was told by the Cambodian in charge of unloading the You Yi that it carried "military cargo" in addition to 600 tons of general merchandise. [] reflected the presence of general cargo on the You Yi.

19. There are reasons for viewing the reported military delivery by the You Yi with caution. For one thing, the ship apparently was not unloaded quickly as is usually the case with military deliveries. Moreover, there has been no report of the disposition of the cargo []

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II. Political Developments

20. Prince Sihanouk took advantage of the presence of a large contingent of Western newsmen in Phnom Penh in early November to reiterate denials that Vietnamese Communist troops are based in Cambodia. As he has in the past when affecting a "reasonable" posture, Sihanouk admitted that it was possible that "small numbers" of Communist troops may occasionally pass through Cambodian territory. He asserted that when such troops are encountered by Cambodian patrols they are asked to return to South Vietnam. He also offered the newsmen government transportation to the northeast to "see for themselves" if North Vietnamese "divisions" are in Cambodia or whether the "Sihanouk trail" is being used.

21. Sihanouk did go farther than he has in the past to warn of the possible consequences of US military operations in Cambodia. He stated that Cambodia would resist any effort by the US to occupy territory along the border to prevent the Viet Cong from taking refuge there. He warned that such action would only serve to drive Cambodia into the hands of the Vietnamese Communists and Communist China.

22. Sihanouk also indicated that he still believes the Communists are going to prevail in South Vietnam. His reference to a US withdrawal within two years, however, does not jibe with his previous assertions that the US would not be driven from South Vietnam. He was also forced to admit that a Communist take-over in South Vietnam did not bode well for Cambodia's future.

Cambodia's Relations with Communist China

23. Prince Sihanouk has responded favorably to Peking's latest effort to ease its relations with Cambodia. Sihanouk announced on 1 November that he had received a message from Premier Chou En-lai calling for "re-establishment of sincere friendship" between the two countries. According to Sihanouk,

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Chou acknowledged Sihanouk's leadership of the Cambodian people and reaffirmed China's adherence to the "Bandung principle" of nonintervention in Cambodia's internal affairs. Sihanouk has charged repeatedly over the past several months that China's propaganda activities in Cambodia amounted to a repudiation of these "principles."

24. The Chinese premier's message, which played on Sihanouk's personal regard for Chou, appears to be a more artful version of one Chou sent in mid-September which caused Sihanouk to reverse a decision to withdraw Cambodian diplomatic personnel from Peking.

25. In response to the latest message, Sihanouk stated his willingness to terminate anti-Peking propaganda and accept a "complete reconciliation." Subsequently, he also called off a referendum he had previously scheduled for early next year. The referendum was intended as a vote of confidence in Sihanouk's government and, as such, would have been embarrassing for the pro-Peking leftists who have called for a change in Sihanouk's policies.

26. The Prince has also stated, however, that a real reconciliation will depend entirely on the cessation of Communist activity in Cambodia. Thus, continued dissemination of Communist propaganda throughout the country, and a reported renewal of small-scale Communist dissident activity, could prove to be persistent irritants in Cambodia's relations with China. Nevertheless, although Sihanouk recently again voiced his suspicion that Peking will continue discreet support of Cambodia's pro-Communists, his response to Chou's letter underlines his desire to maintain at least a facade of cordial relations.

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