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September 7, 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. ROSTOW

SUBJECT: The Vietnamese-Cambodian Border Control Problem

Following our conversation this morning, I talked to Cottrell about what we can do to make use of the recent clash between Cambodian and Viet Cong forces to make some progress on the Cambodian-Vietnamese border control problem. I have agitated this question several times previously in the Task Force. There is a general feeling of frustration and futility in the State Department on the subject of making any improvement in Cambodian-Vietnamese relations. One specific effort that has been made recently to improve relations has been to attempt to get the Cambodians to release a C-47 military aircraft flown by the Rebels to Phnom Penh after the abortive coup attempt against Diem last November. I am not certain how that came out.

An immediate difficulty in establishing contact between the two sides on the border problem has been the frequent absence of Sihanouk from the country. I suggested recently that perhaps some kind of contact between him and the Vietnamese might be established at the UN General Assembly meeting. State pointed out, however, that the Vietnamese are not members of the UN and have only a low-level observer there.

Today I suggested to Cottrell two possible lines of action which he has promised to explore. The first was to suggest to the Cambodians the reactivation of the ICC in Cambodia and the use of it to give publicity to such incidents and also to establish teams that might patrol the Cambodian side of the border. It is my understanding that a Cambodian ICC does still exist although it has been quiescent. Cottrell was not sure whether the ICC was still in existence in Cambodia but promised to look into the question.

My second suggestion was that we actively seek new means of establishing communication between Cambodia and South Viet Nam. I suggested that this might be done initially through the U. S. as an

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E.O. 11652, Sec. 3(E) and 5(D)

*Archivist of U.S.*  
By *MFD* NARS Date *5/26/76*  
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intermediary. I also suggested that we explore the possibility of talks with Sihanouk while he is at the UNGA. I suggested that the pendulum was swinging our way in Cambodia at present and that Sihanouk may actually wish to give publicity to border incidents. He may wish to show that he is prepared to deal in a tough manner with Communist infiltration. I argued that we should take advantage of this present mood to see if we could not get some action.

In the course of our conversation, Cottrell asked whether you would be interested in talking with Bill Trueheart who will be leaving sometime this fall for Saigon to become Nolting's deputy. If you would like to see him, Cottrell would be happy to bring him around.



Robert H. Johnson

Since preparing the above, I have had a further call from Cottrell. He has discussed the matter within State and as a result it has been agreed that it would be desirable to prepare a talking paper for the Secretary to serve as the basis for discussion between him and Sihanouk during the UN General Assembly Session.

This talking paper will refer to the recent Cambodian action on the border, express our concern to Sihanouk about the border problem, ask him for his views, and, in particular, solicit his suggestions as to what he thinks can be done about the problem. In particular, we would raise again the possibility of talks between the Cambodians and the Vietnamese. We would suggest that, at a minimum, it might be useful for the Province Chiefs on both sides of the border to get together for a discussion of their mutual border security problems.

Cottrell found a "deep pessimism" among State people as to the utility of attempting to make use of the Cambodian ICC. The ICC in Cambodia has only two people in Pnom Penh and Sihanouk has kept them there only for possible use against the South Vietnamese. State is of the view that any suggestion to Sihanouk that he make use of the ICC to deal with the VietCong problem would be tossed out ~~SECRET~~.

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window by him. The State people concerned did not think it would even be worthwhile to solicit the views of the U.S. Charge in Phnom Penh on this question.

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