

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

26 June 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. David Mark, State (INR)  
Mr. John Easton, DIA  
Mr. Richard P. Sweeney, Boards and  
Estimates Division, NSA

SUBJECT : SNIE 14.3-1-70: NORTH VIETNAMESE  
INTENTIONS IN INDOCHINA

1. The attached draft estimate is forwarded for review.
2. A representatives' meeting to discuss this draft has been scheduled for 1000, Wednesday, 1 July, at CIA Headquarters.
3. Please telephone Mrs. Rauch, Extension 5688, by 1600, Tuesday, 30 June, to give her the names of your representatives and their clearances. Arrangements will be made for them to enter the building at the Main Entrance.

*Abbott Smith*  
ABBOT SMITH  
Director  
National Estimates

DISTRIBUTION B  
cc: Colonel J.D. Foulk, USA (ACSI)  
Captain Luther E. Mayes, USN  
Lt. Colonel F.J. Mackey, USAF (AFNIE)

~~GROUP 1~~  
~~Excluded from automatic~~  
~~downgrading and~~  
~~declassification~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

RELEASED 20 JUL 1977

**CONTENTS**

	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION.....	
THE ESTIMATE.....	3
I. HANOI'S SITUATION IN THE WAKE OF CAMBODIAN DEVELOPMENTS.....	3
A. The Situation Prior to Allied Intervention in Cambodia.....	3
B. Impact of Developments in Cambodia on Communist Capabilities.....	5
Supply Losses.....	6
Manpower Losses.....	10
Loss of Sanctuary and Base Areas.....	11
Command and Control Problems.....	13
C. Communist Actions to Minimize the Immediate Impact of Cambodian Developments.....	13
D. Hanoi's Current View of Its Problems and Opportunities in Cambodia.....	17
E. On Balance.....	21
II. HANOI'S PROBABLE COURSE OF ACTION IN INDOCHINA...	25
A. General.....	25
Negotiations.....	25
Large-Scale Military Action.....	27
Prolonged Warfare.....	29
B. Cambodia.....	30
C. Laos.....	34
D. South Vietnam.....	36

**GROUP 1**

~~Excluded from automatic  
downgrading and  
declassification~~

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~  
~~RESTRICTIVE~~

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

26 June 1970

SUBJECT: SNIE 14.3-1-70: NORTH VIETNAMESE INTENTIONS IN INDOCHINA

INTRODUCTION

Developments in Cambodia since the ouster of Sihanouk have opened a new front in the Indochina conflict. The Communists have suffered losses and are confronted with immediate tactical problems. But the situation also contains the potential for Vietnamese Communist gains in their long-term struggle to unify Vietnam and to extend a predominant influence to all Laos and Cambodia.

We attempt in this paper to assess the extent of Communist losses in Cambodia and their impact on the situation in Vietnam as well as the probable nature of their policies to cope with new difficulties and to exploit any new opportunities which they may perceive. There are, however, considerable difficulties in undertaking this analysis at this time. Operations in Cambodia are

~~SECRET~~  
~~RESTRICTIVE~~  
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
~~NOFORN~~

~~SECRET~~  
~~RESTRICTIVE~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

continuing and the data on results to date is, in the nature of things, incomplete and provisional. Beyond that, the data on losses requires careful analysis and perspective before its true significance can be established.

In discussing Communist intentions, we are forced to put ourselves in the position of the leaders in Hanoi and attempt to see the situation from their point of view. This always difficult exercise is even more complicated in a rapidly moving situation in which there are a number of unknown elements, particularly with respect to US and Allied courses of action. In any event, we lack a direct line into the inner councils of Hanoi. When we estimate what Hanoi "believes," or "calculates," or "intends," it is of necessity no more than an estimate, based in varying degree on Hanoi's past and present statements -- public and otherwise, on such covert intelligence as has come to hand, on the record of Hanoi's behavior in the past, and ultimately on our weighing of the validity and meaning of such evidences.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

THE ESTIMATE

I. HANOI'S SITUATION IN THE WAKE OF CAMBODIAN DEVELOPMENTS

A. The Situation Prior to Allied Intervention in Cambodia

1. Following the massive Communist military offensive at Tet 1968, Hanoi obviously felt the need to make adjustments to its strategy in South Vietnam. Not only did Communist manpower losses skyrocket, but captured Communist documents and high-level statements by leaders in Hanoi indicated that the emphasis on large-scale military action led to the neglect of the Communist political apparatus and a deterioration in Communist influence and control among the population in the South.

2. The solution adopted by Hanoi was to settle down for a prolonged and relatively low cost struggle. Spelled out in such key documents as COSVN Resolution 9 (July 1969), Hanoi's new military approach called for primary reliance on small unit sapper, and terrorist actions, and shellings instead of all-out offensives. As Communist military action was scaled down, there was a concomitant drop in the infiltration of manpower from North Vietnam. In the

~~SECRET~~

political field, the Communists set out to repair deficiencies and to strengthen the Communist infrastructure. Heavy stress was placed on improving the mass organizations which the Communists had created to aid their political activities. Military proselyting and the "legalization" of Communist cadres were other key aspects of Hanoi's strategy.

3. By late 1969, Hanoi's new course seemed to be working with some degree of success. Communist casualties had declined. The infrastructure appeared to have survived more or less intact. Further, there were indications in some areas that the Communists had succeeded in stalling, and in some cases reversing, the forward movement in the Allied pacification program. In short, the Communists had managed to maintain a credible military posture, without employing many of the Communist main force units which remained in nearby sanctuary areas. Communist documents continued to show concern over the pacification program and the possibility that Vietnamization might work sufficiently well to long delay the achievement of Hanoi's objectives in the South. Nonetheless, the Communists appeared to believe that they had successfully ridden out the peak of US and South Vietnamese military pressures

~~SECRET~~  
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

and that as US forces were further drawn down, the situation would improve in the Communists' favor.

B. Impact of Developments in Cambodia on Communist Capabilities

4. Whatever the actual situation prior to the turn of events in Cambodia, the Allied move into Cambodia was a tactical upset for the Communists. They suffered large supply losses, extensive casualties, disruptions of their supply routes, dispersal of their forces and their command and control apparatus, and the loss of immunity in sanctuaries and base areas astride the Cambodian-Vietnamese border. It is necessary to retain a good deal of caution in judging the lasting impact of the Cambodian affair on the Communist position in Indochina, however, since preliminary analysis of these losses suggests that the Communists' situation is by no means critical.

5. Supply Losses. Through 21 June, US and South Vietnamese forces captured about 9,300 tons of Communist supplies in Cambodia\* as follows:

	<u>Tons</u>
Food (Class I)	6,842
Weapons and Equipment (Class II and Class IV)	317
Ammunition (Class V)	<u>2,142</u>
TOTAL	9,301

These losses represent a substantial reduction of the stocks available in the Cambodian base areas. But their full impact of the losses cannot be measured precisely, however, because we do not know the amount of supplies originally there. Nor do we have any firm estimates of the amount of supplies stockpiled in southern Laos and South Vietnam. These stockpiles are undoubtedly large, and current Communist military operations indicate that supply losses to date have not resulted in any immediate degradation of Communist capabilities.

6. The significance of Communist losses can best be put in perspective by comparing them with losses in South Vietnam during

\* These are preliminary figures based on analysis of data currently available in Washington. The estimate for ammunition, will probably be revised substantially when more complete returns are received from the field.



~~SECRET~~

1969 and the losses the Communists sustained last year in northern Laos during Vang Pao's operations on the Plain of Jars -- operation "About Face" -- and in the Xieng Khouang area:

	<u>Cambodia</u>	<u>South Vietnam</u>	<u>Northern Laos</u>
Food	6,842	5,883	1,761
Weapons	158	450	640
Ammunition	2,142	1,638	2,563

The losses in South Vietnam, for example, had disruptive effects on specific planned operations but put no significant long-term restraint on Communist capabilities. In northern Laos, the Communists lost a much greater share of their estimated ammunition stockpiles, but their operations were disrupted for only a few months.

7. Communist food losses, mainly rice, are the least significant. Although they are to the equivalent to 10 months of external resupply requirements for Communist forces in southern South Vietnam,\* they can be replaced from the excellent South

---

\* This term covers southern II Corps and in III and IV Corps, the areas normally supplied by the logistics apparatus deployed in the Cambodia base areas.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Vietnamese harvest or from the bumper January Cambodian crop. Communist forces in Cambodia now have greater access to rice producing areas, and the overall availability of rice is now greater than at the start of the operations. Thus, the Communists could provide rice for even greater numbers of troops in Cambodia. The continuation of ARVN ground and air operations in Cambodia will make it more difficult, however, to move rice within from Cambodia. Some Communist units in South Vietnam's rice deficit areas will suffer temporary and localized shortages.

8. Communist weapons losses in Cambodia have been insufficient to degrade seriously their combat capabilities. Those captured to date comprise a small share of their stocks and is equivalent to only one month's external resupply requirement in southern South Vietnam. A substantial portion of Communist weapons losses, moreover, may be made up by Cambodian arms captured by the Communists. In any case, only 35 percent of the identified small arms captured are relatively new, and of the types currently being used by Communist forces. (The remainder are older Communist and Free World types.) Furthermore, if Hanoi regards these weapons losses as serious, it can be expected that infiltrators will begin carrying their own arms in the future. In 1968 and 1969, most infiltrators

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

did not carry arms during their movement from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, but were given weapons after arriving in the base areas along the Cambodian-South Vietnamese border.

9. Ammunition losses, however, will be more serious. Reported losses of small arms ammunition, calculated at 1969 force levels and combat rates, are equivalent to 18 months requirements; losses of large rocket and mortar rounds are equivalent to 3-7 months of requirements. Even before the Allied move into Cambodia, many Communist units reported periodic shortages of ammunition due to in-country supply movement difficulties. The capture of large quantities of ammunition and the forced dispersal of once ample border stockpiles will compound these continuing resupply difficulties inside South Vietnam, particularly in III and IV Corps. The Communist capture of relatively small Cambodian ammunition stocks will not alleviate Communist major resupply problems in South Vietnam, although they may prove useful in supporting small-unit operations in Cambodia.

10. The Communists have also lost access to Sihanoukville (once again named Kompong Sam) as a source of seaborne supplies for their forces, particularly for those in southern South Vietnam.

~~SECRET~~

The Sihanoukville route had served as a useful and convenient channel of supply for the Communists, although we have never been able to determine its precise importance in the overall supply picture. In any case, loss of access to Sihanoukville is not critical; the last known arms delivery to the part was made in April 1969. Even under Sihanouk, the route had been unreliable, and Lon Nol severed it upon taking power. The Communists will now be forced to fall back almost exclusively on the Laotian corridor for the movement of supplies. The network through Laos has a capacity greatly in excess of traffic requirements and during the past dry season handled a higher level of traffic than in any previous year, and despite mounting difficulties is maintaining some flow of traffic during the current rainy season. The Communists may also succeed in making occasional sea shipments across Cambodian beaches, but these are not likely to be a major source of supply because of the blockade of the Cambodian and South Vietnamese coasts.

11. Manpower Losses. The figures being reported for Communist manpower losses as a result of operations in Cambodia -- 11,000 killed and 2,200 captured or detained -- are highly suspect.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

If other losses -- died or disabled from wounds, missing in action, and deserters -- are considered, total Communist losses from all causes would be in excess of 15,000. Many of the alleged casualties were as a result of air and artillery attacks. Thus, a precise body count is difficult and may result in civilian and non-combatant personnel being included in the loss figures. Furthermore, a sizeable proportion of the reported casualties were inflicted and reported by South Vietnamese forces without a chance for independent US verification. High ranking ARVN officers have admitted that these figures are grossly exaggerated and include large numbers of civilian casualties. Whatever the actual level of losses, and they still may be substantial, the scheduled arrival of known infiltrating groups should keep these forces essentially up to strength.

12. Loss of Sanctuary and Base Areas. Perhaps more damaging to the Communists than the supplies lost in the Allied sweeps is the loss of sanctuary in Cambodia. Throughout the war, the Communists have enjoyed relative immunity in their Cambodian sanctuaries; their troops could escape the heat of battle in South Vietnam simply by retreating across the border. Through the use

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

of Cambodian sanctuary, the Communists were able to limit their casualties, and to a large extent, to pick the time and place for much of their military activity in nearby areas of South Vietnam. Similarly, Cambodian sanctuary gave the Communists the luxury of being able to train and refit units without fear of having such activities disrupted. Now Allied air or ground attacks will force the Communists to devote more time and personnel to defensive measures.

13. The Allied move has also had other adverse consequences for the Communists. Many of the LOC's in eastern Cambodia have been disrupted, even if only temporarily. Most of the major Communist base areas have been overrun, and, with immunity no longer provided by the Cambodian border, the Communists will be forced to resort to wider dispersal of their supply caches. This will lead to some operational difficulties, particularly since the Communists normally prefer to preposition supplies before undertaking military action. Thus, it is likely that operations against frontier outposts in southern II Corps and northern III Corps will be more difficult to mount and sustain than in the past.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

14. Command and Control Problems. The impact of the Allied move into Cambodia on the Communist command and control apparatus appears to have been minimal. The principal elements of COSVN escaped essentially intact, although some of them were forced to move, thereby temporarily reducing contacts with subordinate elements. But the key characteristic of the Communist command and control system is flexibility. For over a year, the Communists have been increasing the amount of discretionary tactical latitude permitted to individual commanders. In any event, despite some temporary disruption during the early weeks of the Cambodian campaign, the Communist command and control system was quickly restored to almost normal efficiency, and no lasting damage seems to have been inflicted on the apparatus.

C. Communist Actions to Minimize the Immediate Impact of Cambodian Developments

15. The Communists have generally avoided major confrontations in Cambodia with the better-equipped US and South Vietnamese units. In general, they have maneuvered to escape encirclement in the border areas, moving out of their bases when necessary. More than half of the Communist combat forces in Cambodia, however, appear

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

to have remained within 21.7 miles of the border, testifying not only to the importance the Communists attach to the area, but also indicating the existence of substantial quantities of supplies still in the area, the need for retention of them, and perhaps the Communists' confidence in their ability to defend these caches.

16. Besides holding on to some bases, the Communists have moved quickly to increase their logistic flexibility in Cambodia. In northern Cambodia, Communist units pushed westward, gaining control of innumerable roads, trails, and waterways. In the key northeastern quadrant, Communist forces are well on their way to gaining control to a depth of over 100 miles, all the way to the Mekong. These moves give the Communists relatively uncontested control of the Se Kong-Mekong water routes. The capture of key points in southern Laos was also related in part at least to Hanoi's desire to strengthen and diversify its logistical system. Finally, Communist forces have pushed far into rice producing areas of Cambodia.

17. Hanoi has also embarked on a variety of other efforts to keep open the vital supply corridor from North Vietnam. In early May, the Communists apparently decided to maintain the logistics flow through Laos during this rainy season. This decision



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

was clearly related to developments in Cambodia. The 559th Transportation Group has not returned to North Vietnam, and logistics flows are continuing at a significant level. Gasoline shortages may, at least temporarily, affect the movement of supplies; it appears that gasoline reserves were allowed to dwindle, probably because Hanoi initially planned to withdraw its major transportation units during the rainy season. Use of the corridor will also be complicated by the monsoon rains which often make the roads impassable, but substantial quantities of supplies will probably continue to get through. Increased reliance on the Laotian corridor will render the system more vulnerable to air interdiction, but past experience indicates that bombing alone is not sufficient to impair critically the movement of Communist supplies to South Vietnam.

18. The urgency of supply problems is probably greatest in the southern reaches of Cambodia and adjacent South Vietnam may reflect even greater urgency to remedy supply problems. These areas are far removed from the exit points of the Laotian corridor and probably relied heavily on supplies which transited Sihanoukville. Although there has been no appreciable decline in Communist military activity in these areas of South Vietnam, there

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

are indications that at least some Communist units in the region are now under even more rigid orders to conserve ammunition. Indeed, the Communists may be so hard pressed that they are once again attempting to supply forces in the far south by sea. There have been three recent attempts to utilize ocean-going trawlers to infiltrate supplies into the region.\* Such efforts are likely to be infrequent and limited, but it should be noted that only one successful seaborne shipment of 100 tons (the normal trawler load) would satisfy Communist external supply requirements in the Delta region for about two months.

19. Hanoi can replace personnel losses -- if it desires -- simply by increasing the numbers of infiltrators from North Vietnam. The average time required to move a replacement group from the border of North Vietnam to the Fishhook area in Cambodia has been 90 days. There are already some tentative indications that infiltration may be picking up, though it is not possible to link such an increase directly with developments in Cambodia.

\* We are unable to determine whether any seaborne infiltration attempts have escaped detection, though we are reasonably certain that such occurrences are rare at best. Since September 1969, eight seaborne infiltration attempts have been detected -- all of them apparently were aborted.

( ~~SECRET~~ )

In any event, although a prolonged reduction of manpower reserves would cause some strains over time, North Vietnam has ample manpower available.\* As a result, Communist manpower losses caused by the Allied actions in Cambodia are not likely to be a major problem.

D. Hanoi's Current View of Its Problems and Opportunities in Cambodia

20. The Communists are aware of the immediate and potential dangers in the Cambodian situation and the problems caused by the Allied venture into Cambodia. Recent Communist statements, including those made at the Sixth Assembly meeting in early June in Hanoi, have been candid in pointing out the new difficulties and the increased demands that North Vietnam will have to meet in supporting a stepped up Indochina-wide struggle. Although Sihanouk was erratic, his policies allowed the Communists to operate under a reasonably acceptable condition as far as the war in South

\* Some 130,000 physically fit 17-year old males enter the manpower pool annually. Infiltration has not been running at high rates in recent years; in 1968, some 250,000-300,000 troops were infiltrated, while in 1969 the total was about 120,000, and 1970 arrivals through September are expected to be less than 60,000.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Vietnam was concerned. That the Communists were somewhat loathe to give up this status quo is evidenced in their early, but unfruitful, efforts to attempt to strike some sort of deal with the new regime in Phnom Penh.

21. In addition to its tactical impact, the Cambodian action opened up a new front in the Indochina conflict where the Communists might have to deploy additional resources -- particularly manpower -- to deal not only with US and South Vietnamese forces but also those of the Lon Nol regime, the Thais, and perhaps other Asian governments. The move into Cambodia, accompanied as it was by a brief spurt in the US air effort against North Vietnam itself, appears to have raised fears in Hanoi regarding the extent to which the US might be willing to enlarge the war. Communist actions in southern Laos indicate that Hanoi is particularly concerned over possible ground incursions into the important Laotian corridor area.

22. Hanoi also probably calculates that the US is now more or less committed to the preservation of an anti-Communist regime in Phnom Penh -- if not directly in the first instance, then through the use of surrogate South Vietnamese and possibly Thai forces. Although there are no indications that Hanoi is panicky,

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

the prospect of continued Allied involvement in Cambodia is probably viewed with some uncertainty and apprehension by the Communists.

23. At the same time, however, Hanoi's statements and actions suggest that the Communists see significant potential opportunities in the new Cambodian situation. Hanoi appears to believe that the US now runs the risk of becoming bogged down and overextended in Indochina. As a result, the Communists seem to believe that they have a better chance than before to frustrate US policy in the area. In this context, most statements and indications emanating from Hanoi suggest that the Communists actually believe their propaganda that the US move in Cambodia was made out of weakness and defensiveness, and not out of strength.

24. Hanoi's judgment fits neatly with its belief that its forces are better able to carry on an Indochina-wide war for an indefinite period than are the Allies. Moreover, though Hanoi cannot be sure of the scope and nature of future Allied actions, its fears of any massive US escalation have almost certainly been allayed by the extent of US domestic and Congressional opposition to further involvement in Cambodia and by the limitations that the

~~SECRET~~

US has placed on its actions. Thus, while Hanoi still harbors some fears that the US will again become directly involved on the ground in Cambodia or even in Laos, the Communist leaders may now calculate that such involvement would be limited and that it would increase domestic opposition in the US even further.

25. Thus, Hanoi may feel that it has an opportunity to tie down South Vietnamese and possibly Thai forces in Cambodia without great risk or cost to the Communists themselves. From Hanoi's perspective, this not only could divert South Vietnam's attention away from the priority struggle in South Vietnam, but also could lead to frictions between the US and South Vietnam and Thailand over the necessity and means of maintaining Lon Nol in power. And Hanoi's assessment of the ability of either the South Vietnamese or Thai forces alone to exploit Communist vulnerabilities effectively is conditioned by the relatively lackluster performance of both countries' forces in the past.

26. The Communists may also detect tempting political opportunities in Cambodia. The Communists moved rapidly to present the overthrow of Sihanouk as an American machination to set the stage for the "invasion" of Cambodia. And the Allied move into

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
~~SECRET~~

Cambodia, while temporarily propping up Lon Nol, has served to make him in Cambodian eyes a client of outside powers, thereby reducing somewhat the taint attached to Sihanouk for the same reason. Further, without question, Sihanouk gives the Communists a useful tool through which to build a Khmer resistance movement.

27. Hanoi undoubtedly calculates that the fall of the Lon Nol regime, by whatever means, would be a serious blow to South Vietnamese, Thai, and US morale. Indeed, Hanoi may well calculate that if it should acquire control of most of Cambodia and bogging Allied forces down in the process, the ultimate result might be to force the US to move more surely and rapidly toward disengagement from Indochina. Thus, Hanoi may see Cambodian developments as a possible opportunity to upset the US policy of Vietnamization and the Nixon Doctrine as well by leaving the US with the choices of an unending, ever-widening war or of making essential concessions at Paris.

E. On Balance

28. It is too early to make a definitive judgment concerning the lasting impact of Cambodian developments on Communist fortunes.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Much depends on what the Communists, the US, and, the South Vietnamese do in Cambodia and, more important, in South Vietnam -- still the major theater of the war -- in the months ahead.

29. Although the Communists have been hurt by the Allied actions in Cambodia in many ways, it is not yet clear whether or how much this may have inhibited their actual plans or capabilities for waging war in South Vietnam. Allied successes in Cambodia may have placed further limits on the scale of actions open to the Communists in southern South Vietnam, at least for some months. Of course, if the South Vietnamese ground forces and US air strikes inflict more significant losses on the Communists' in Cambodia, the Communists may be faced with greater problems than are now evident.

30. To date, however, we have seen no major adjustments in Communist tactics or strategy in South Vietnam which can be traced directly to the Allied move into Cambodia. In terms of battle-field action, there does not appear to be much of a difference. Even in the III and IV Corps areas, presumably where the impact of Allied operations would be felt most directly, there has been no appreciable decline in Communist military activity. Since the



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
victories in Cambodia and be distracted from the more difficult, but considerably more important, effort needed in South Vietnam itself. In this sense, Cambodia could turn out to be a will-of-the-wisp for the South Vietnamese.

33. But even if the South Vietnamese keep their sights focused on the situation at home, there are few indications that they are really willing to exert the pressure that would be required. Their

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
Allied operations were launched, the Communists have gone through two "highpoints" of activity. Neither of them was very impressive, but none of the earlier spurts in Communist activity since early 1969 was particularly impressive either.

31. Although the Communists' problems in the wake of Cambodian developments may be potentially serious, the question remains whether they will be successfully exploited. In Cambodia, this would require continuing disruption of Communist LOCs and base areas. US air action will help in this regard, but air alone can not do the job -- ground action is a sine qua non for effective blocking action. In South Vietnam, the Communists may be more vulnerable to South Vietnamese counteraction in some areas, but in time such vulnerabilities will fade as the Communists have time to take countermeasures.

32. We are not optimistic regarding the will or ability of the South Vietnamese to move rapidly to exploit potential Communist weaknesses. South Vietnamese forces have performed reasonably well in Cambodia, albeit against an enemy who usually has not stood and fought. Although encouraging in terms of improving ARVN's confidence and morale, South Vietnamese successes in Cambodia also raise the spectre that the South Vietnamese may concentrate on easy

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

victories in Cambodia and be distracted from the more difficult, but considerably more important, effort needed in South Vietnam itself. In this sense, Cambodia could turn out to be a will-of-the-wisp for the South Vietnamese.

33. But even if the South Vietnamese keep their sights focused on the situation at home, there are few indications that they are really willing to exert the pressure that would be required. Their past record offers little grounds for high hopes, and the continuing withdrawal of US forces is more likely to reduce the pressure on the Communists than it is to galvanize the South Vietnamese forces into a more effective fighting force any time in the near future.

34. The Communists, on the other hand, do seem to be moving with vigor to exploit the opportunities in the Cambodian situation and to repair the damages inflicted upon them by the Allied move into Cambodia. And they appear to be willing to pay a heavier price in the war in attempting to meet these ends. How successful the Communists will be is another matter; in a sense, most of the problems facing the Communists are tactical, but immediate, whereas most of the opportunities are strategic, but somewhat more long range. We cannot strike a fine balance between these related but different factors in the situation. But we do believe that the tactical problems facing the Communists are unlikely to be critical, while the strategic opportunities presented to them could seriously undermine the Allied position and policies in Indochina.

~~SECRET~~

## II. HANOI'S PROBABLE COURSE OF ACTION IN INDOCHINA

### A. General

35. Hanoi's basic options in Indochina have not changed. In broad terms, there are three main courses of action available to Hanoi: serious negotiations; sustained large-scale military action in one or more theaters; and continuation of prolonged warfare. The lines of separation between the two military options are not absolute, particularly when viewed on an Indochina-wide basis, and the Communists could shift from one option to another or undertake different options in different countries. Moreover, serious negotiations could still be carried on in parallel with either of the military courses.

36. Negotiations. The talks in Paris are dead for the time being. In the aftermath of the upset in Cambodia, Hanoi is in no mood to negotiate about anything. Hanoi, of course, desires to hasten US withdrawal from Indochina, and negotiations would offer one possible route to this end. Indeed, Communist statements throughout 1969 and early 1970 indicated a continuing interest in the diplomatic track. But Hanoi now believes that nothing is to be gained through negotiations until the US is ready to offer major concessions to the Communists.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

37. But the Communist leaders almost certainly remain highly suspicious of US intentions in the negotiating arena; indeed, Hanoi appears to hold the view that the US has no real interest in any negotiated settlement which does not in practice amount to a de facto admission of Communist defeat. Some of this, of course, stems from Hanoi's view of its previous negotiating experience; it has a firm belief that it was euchred out of what it had agreed on in 1954 at Geneva. More important, Hanoi seems to believe that the US has no intention of dealing with what the Communists consider the fundamental issue of the war -- political power in South Vietnam. The Communists believe that the US remains committed to the preservation of an anti-Communist, pro-US regime in Saigon, preferably that of Thieu, and that US statements about self-determination are rhetoric masking an unwillingness to consider a "realistic" political settlement of the war.

38. At some point, Hanoi might see a way to get around the US position through negotiations on an Indochina-wide basis. From this perspective, Hanoi might consider that it had assets at its disposal, e.g., Sihanouk's prestige in Cambodia and Communist control of most of Laos and Cambodia, to counterbalance

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

the relatively unfavorable Communist position on the ground in South Vietnam. Hanoi might calculate that the US would be hard put to insist on maintaining the Thieu regime in Saigon in the context of any international conference to "settle" the war in Indochina.

39. Despite Hanoi's evident disbelief in the value of negotiations at this time, it might at some point entertain the idea of returning to the negotiating route. But even then Hanoi would be unlikely to accept any arrangement that did not result in a reasonably rapid and complete withdrawal of US forces from Indochina, offer strong security for Communist followers, and show promise of giving the Communists a solid share of political power in South Vietnam. Moreover, Hanoi is not likely to negotiate from a position of extreme weakness. Even if backed to the wall at some future date, Hanoi would be far more likely to scale down its efforts in hope of preserving assets for an eventual renewal of the struggle than it would be to formalize <sup>defeat</sup> a/through negotiations.

40. Large-Scale Military Action. Developments in Cambodia have almost certainly reinforced Hanoi's reluctance to opt for sustained large-scale military offensives in South Vietnam,

( ~~SECRET~~ )

though their attitudes on comparable moves in Laos and Cambodia may be more ambivalent. In South Vietnam, for several months more at least, Hanoi might be hard pressed to launch and sustain such action, except perhaps in the northern part of the country. Communist infiltration into South Vietnam has been low for over a year, and some Communist units have been broken down into smaller operating elements. Furthermore, at least half of the Communist troops in Cambodia, which in the past have comprised a potential reserve for concerted action in South Vietnam, are operating in small groups in the Cambodian interior and would not be available for large-scale action in South Vietnam in the near term. Finally, while there are signs that more North Vietnamese manpower is being put into the war, we see no evidence yet for the kind of manpower push that would be necessary to support and sustain a massive military effort in South Vietnam.

41. All the evidence available shows that Hanoi views a renewal of large-scale offensives as running counter to other major Communist objectives in South Vietnam. Not only would large-scale action be costly in terms of men and supplies, but Hanoi might fear that such action would lead the US to delay troop departures or even to escalate the war in some way. In time, of

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

course, as more US forces withdraw, the restraints might weigh less heavily in Hanoi; the Communists might reassess the situation and be tempted to strike hard on the pattern of Tet 1968 in the hope of quick and conclusive results. As in 1968, however, the costs of failure would be high, and we believe that the possibility of Hanoi's making this decision will remain low, at least for the next year or so.

42. Prolonged Warfare. Believing that time is on its side, Hanoi has been playing for time everywhere in Indochina and adhering basically to a prolonged warfare strategy. We believe that it will continue to do so. The strategy of prolonged warfare does not mean that significant military action will not occur. Phases of intensified military activity are likely in South Vietnam from time to time, and there may be dramatic moves to seize particular objectives in Cambodia and Laos. While generally reaffirming the deliberate approach to the struggle which characterized Hanoi's strategy for at least a year, recent statements from Hanoi, notably those from the 6th National Assembly session, also suggest that Hanoi may be planning some increase in its military actions and is willing to use more North Vietnamese troops than previously anticipated.

~~SECRET~~

B.. Cambodia

43. The full range of Hanoi's intentions in Cambodia are more difficult to judge than in the other two states of Indochina. In large part, this is due to the relatively unsettled situation; -- there are few benchmarks for Communist or Allied actions in Cambodia. Beyond the necessity for sheer survival in the face of Allied assaults on their base areas, Communist maneuvers in Cambodia clearly indicate that one basic priority, certainly the minimum Communist objective, is the maintenance of channels of supply and infiltration into South Vietnam. The bulk of Communist forces have not moved great distances from the border; they are protecting existing supply routes. And Communist forces in northeastern Cambodia and southern Laos have moved rapidly to expand the logistics system in these areas.

44. But Communist objectives in Cambodia clearly involve more than simply retaining logistical flexibility. Hanoi has apparently set its sights on the elimination of Lon Nol and is working assiduously to create a Khmer resistance movement. The pattern of Communist attacks seems designed to cripple and demoralize the inadequate military force at the disposal of the government;



~~SECRET~~

to create serious insecurity in the countryside; to isolate the populace from the central government; and to wreck the national economy. Hanoi seems bent on making it clear to all that the Lon Nol regime is weak and ineffective, incapable of defending even its major towns, and utterly dependent on Allied support. Through such tactics, Hanoi would hope to discredit the Cambodian Government internationally and to encourage opposition in Cambodia itself. In time, the regime might fall of its own weight, opening the way for a political deal advantageous to the Communist cause in Indochina.

45. Communist action in Cambodia thus far, however, is also generally consistent with an intention to move quickly to bring down the Lon Nol regime by attempting to seize and hold Phnom Penh itself, and Hanoi may be embarked on such a course in its current operations near the capital. In the first instance, the Communists may be concerned that excessive delay in ousting Lon Nol will allow time for substantial numbers of South Vietnamese, Thai, or South Korean troops (with US air support) to be marshalled against them in Cambodia, or even to permit the growing Khmer army itself to become more effective fighters through better equipment and training. Moreover, the Communists might believe that

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Sihanouk or some other pro-Communist successor to Lon Nol could generate an important degree of international support for re-establishing the "neutrality" of Cambodia under conditions permitting their continued use of Cambodian soil. In any event, the seizure of Phnom Penh might be viewed in Hanoi as a political/psychological victory of major proportions, one which would further weaken support in the US for the war in Indochina.

46. At this stage, Hanoi is probably keeping its options open while it weighs the potential gains against the possible costs of military move to take Phnom Penh. Hanoi could not be sure that an assault on Phnom Penh would be successful; it would expect, in light of recent Allied action at Kompong Thom and elsewhere in the Cambodian interior, that ARVN units with US air support would be available. At best, therefore, the military costs of a major direct assault on Phnom Penh would probably be high, and Communist prestige would suffer if a major assault failed. Sihanouk's return also might not be an unalloyed good in Hanoi's eyes; certainly the Communists would prefer to develop a viable political apparatus in Cambodia before the popular and erratic Sihanouk returned to the scene.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

47. Nor would an all-out assault on the capital be consistent with the Communist doctrine of "liberation struggle"; it would be clear to all that the move was outright North Vietnamese aggression. More important, there would be the likelihood that South Vietnamese (and perhaps Thai) forces would continue to be active in the country, thereby placing North Vietnamese units in a static defensive position against mobile and better-equipped forces. The capture of Phnom Penh would not automatically confer immunity from further Allied attacks; indeed, in Hanoi's view, Allied assaults -- and a continuing naval blockade -- might be all the more certain in a Communist-run Cambodia, international reactions notwithstanding.

48. On balance, we doubt that Hanoi sees an early effort to eliminate the Lon Nol regime by a direct military assault on Phnom Penh as worth the probable military and political costs. It is not unlikely, however, that the Communists will try to shake the already feeble foundations of the Lon Nol regime by small-scale attacks on the city and by terrorist tactics within it. In any event, even if Lon Nol holds on in Phnom Penh, the situation in Cambodia could come to resemble that in Laos -- i.e., Communist control of much, if not most, of the countryside and a central government unable to exercise authority effectively.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

C. Laos

49. Hanoi has long viewed Laos as a secondary theater in the Indochina struggle. The Communists control what they need in Laos -- the northerly areas guarding North Vietnam's borders, and the southern corridor to South Vietnam. This is still basically the case in our judgment; indeed, recent developments in Cambodia have caused the Communists to place even greater emphasis on retaining and consolidating their position in southern Laos. Further expansion of Communist holdings in southern Laos appears likely in the months ahead, perhaps including sporadic attacks on Pakse, the last major government-controlled town in the region.

50. Hanoi, however, does not seem to be embarked on an effort to overrun all of Laos anytime in the near future. Indeed, Hanoi appears to have no set timetable for establishing its hegemony over Laos; the Communists seem willing to defer this aim until they achieve their priority objective in South Vietnam. In northern Laos, where the Communists are generally roadbound, the rainy weather would impede any major effort to strike forcefully in the near term. In addition, the toll caused by US

~~SECRET~~

bombing in the past dry season has left Communist forces in need of a respite to build up supplies for future action. But the Communists have dug in around the Meo guerrilla bases of Vang Pao and seem determined to resist any effort by his forces to move out onto the Plain of Jars as he did last year.

51. In the dry season, Hanoi will probably renew its efforts to push Vang Pao out of his bases at Long Tieng and Sam Thong. At the same time, Hanoi may step up its efforts to pressure Souvanna Phouma into acceding to an increased political role in Vientiane for the Communist Pathet Lao. Even if the Communists are eventually successful in routing the Meo guerrillas -- the only really effective fighting force blocking Communist access to Vientiane -- we doubt that Hanoi would push ahead to the capital, unless the overall situation in Indochina has drastically changed in the interim. They would anticipate heavy losses from US bombing and perhaps greater Thai military involvement in Laos. And Hanoi could not be sure that the Allies would not counter such action with a move into the vital Laotian corridor -- a fear that has already grown in the wake of Allied actions in Cambodia.

~~SECRET~~

D. South Vietnam

52. South Vietnam will remain Hanoi's top strategic objective in Indochina, and the Communists appear determined to maintain a credible military presence there. Consistent with their general strategy, the Communists are following a low posture, prolonged warfare approach to the war, conserving assets in the expectation of exploiting political and military vulnerabilities when the US presence is further reduced. Developments in Cambodia have complicated the Communists' situation in much of South Vietnam, but we believe that the review of their situation undertaken in this paper supports the judgment that the damage has not been critical so far.

53. The effects of the Allied actions in Cambodia will be felt most by Communist forces in III and IV Corps and perhaps in southern II Corps. As a result, Communist operations in these areas may be somewhat reduced in the months ahead, although the Communists are likely to be able to mount low cost, selective actions such as those that have characterized their actions in recent months, e.g., attacks by fire, sapper and small unit actions, and terrorist tactics. In most of II Corps and I Corps, however,

~~SECRET~~

the Communists are already demonstrating that they retain considerable military muscle at their disposal, and infiltration of fresh manpower and new units into I Corps may already be underway. Action in these areas is likely to increase sharply in the months ahead, both as a means to demonstrate Communist military power and as an attempt to force the South Vietnamese to divert troops from elsewhere (the Delta region or Cambodia) to meet the threat.

54. The Communist strategy also seems to call for increased efforts to disrupt the pacification program -- a target the Communists have been hitting with some success in recent months. This does not require large forces or sustained combat. Hanoi is also likely to increase its efforts to strengthen the Communist political infrastructure and to infiltrate and undermine the South Vietnamese apparatus. This has been a priority goal of the Communists for over a year, and they view the effort as basic to the strategy of prolonged warfare. Finally, the recent flareup of political opposition to the Thieu regime will add increased impetus to Communist efforts to foment and exploit antiregime activities in Saigon.

~~SECRET~~

55. In looking ahead, the Communist leaders in Hanoi will also pay considerable attention to the pace and effect of US troop withdrawals. They clearly believe that the US is caught in an untenable position in South Vietnam, namely the wish to disengage its forces without at the same time causing the country to collapse in the face of Communist pressure. In their view, as US forces depart the scene, the balance of power will ineluctably shift in favor of the Communists. Nonetheless, they are obviously concerned about the possibility that Vietnamization might work well enough to give the US greater flexibility in its policies in Indochina. Hanoi's initial fears that the US move into Cambodia might have signified a reversal of the US policy on withdrawals appear to have subsided. The strong opposition in the US to American involvement in Cambodia and high level statements out of Washington that troop withdrawals might actually be carried out faster as a result of Cambodian developments has probably led Hanoi to conclude that the Nixon Administration will at least attempt to meet its presently announced schedule to withdraw another 150,000 men by 15 April 1971.



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

56. That there will be difficulties and setbacks appears to be an accepted fact of life in Hanoi's strategy in South Vietnam. The key point, however, is that Hanoi believes time is on its side and that if it can continue the struggle and be prepared to exploit any opportunity that might arise, the Communists will prevail ultimately. Of course, the Communists will be constantly reviewing their position; and though possible at any time, a basic decision to shift military strategies, particularly toward a renewal of sustained large-scale combat, would most likely come after Hanoi's annual review of its strategy next spring. But for the months ahead, Hanoi is more likely to adhere generally to a strategy of prolonged warfare until it can gain a better appreciation of the problems and opportunities presented by developments in Cambodia, including the lasting impact of the recent Allied ground action in Cambodia on Communist capabilities and the scope of future Allied actions.