



UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY  
**INFO-MEMO**  
OFFICE OF POLICY AND PLANS

054830  
CAMBODIA  
FILE



No. 4-70  
May 5,  
1970

HANOI'S USE OF CAMBODIA IN THE VIET-NAM WAR

PAGE

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Since late 1965, Cambodia has played a major role in Hanoi's strategy for taking over South Viet-Nam. The Vietnamese Communists have made use of its territory for tactical sanctuary, for base areas, for infiltration of personnel, and for shipment of supplies. They have also procured arms, food and other supplies from Cambodian sources.

Sanctuary

The utility of Cambodia to Hanoi became crucial in 1969, when the North Vietnamese decided after the defeat of their Tet offensive and two subsequent offensives in 1968 that they would shift to a strategy of "protracted struggle." This strategy, as outlined in detail in a document issued in August 1969 by COSVN (the Central Office for South Viet-Nam), which is Hanoi's main headquarters in the southern part of South Viet-Nam, called for the withdrawal of the bulk of the Communist main forces into the Cambodian base areas, from which they would wait out the U.S. troop withdrawals under Vietnamization, stage occasional forays, or "high points," to maintain military pressure on the allies, and support the Communist infrastructure and local forces left behind in South Viet-Nam. Here the Communist forces enjoyed sanctuary, a particularly important feature for the forces operating adjacent to the relatively open, densely-populated, and heavily-garrisoned areas of IV Corps and southern III Corps -- the Mekong Delta and the Saigon region of the Republic of Viet-Nam.

These base areas have now been turned by the NVA/VC elements into comprehensive military installations where troops and new recruits are received, supplied, and trained; military and political staffs maintain their headquarters; and fighting forces receive refuge and medical treatment. Some base areas contain sizeable ordnance depots, weapons and ammunition factories, petroleum storage facilities, truck parks, and POW camps. Clearly, the base areas provide the foundation upon which rest Communist expectations of maintaining an effective military-political apparatus in southern South Viet-Nam while the U.S. withdrawal proceeds.

The more northerly base areas, opposite II Corps and northern III Corps, serve as safe havens for Communist troops operating into these areas, and also facilitate the southward movement of North Vietnamese troops and supplies toward COSVN and eastward into the highlands of South Viet-Nam. They constitute, in effect, an extension of the Laos corridor -- but a sector in which the NVA has enjoyed virtual immunity from allied attack. To the extent that the Communists were denied free use of these areas, their forces in the highlands of South Viet-Nam could suffer a loss in combat effectiveness and increased casualties.

The southerly base

The southerly base areas in Cambodia have grown rapidly in size and importance since August 1969 as Hanoi has sought to limit exposure of its main force units and reduce casualties while attempting to halt the erosion of its political-military structure in the populous and decisive Mekong Delta and Saigon regions of South Viet-Nam.

The Cambodian sanctuaries play a key role in Hanoi's response to the Vietnamization and pacification programs. Because of their existence, especially the sanctuaries in southern Cambodia along the III and IV Corps frontiers, Hanoi can always mass large hostile forces in close proximity to major South Vietnamese population concentrations. This ability enables Hanoi to pose a continuing threat to South Viet-Nam's internal security that progress in pacification or Vietnamization cannot eradicate.

### Infiltration

The Cambodian base structure, as noted above, supports infiltration of NVA personnel into South Viet-Nam, and the shift of units from one portion of South Viet-Nam to another, as in the case of the movement of NVA regiments into the Delta last year. The infiltration system through Cambodia handled nearly 55,000-70,000 NVA personnel in 1969, an estimated 60 percent of total NVA infiltration into South Viet-Nam that year. About 45,000-55,000 of these enemy troops moved as far as the southerly base areas subordinate to COSVN. The foot trails used lie very close to the border and occasionally cross into South Vietnamese territory; they are, for the most part, heavily canopied and secure from aerial observation. The trip from the Laos border to the "Parrot's Beak" opposite Saigon takes 45 to 60 days.

The Communists' north-south logistic route through Cambodia has few motorable segments and is mainly a network of trails and waterways. Occasionally, it utilizes the same trails as the personnel infiltration system. It has never been possible to quantify the north-south movement of supplies to VC-NVA forces in South Viet-Nam via Cambodia, but there is evidence that the trails are being constantly improved and that supplies are being moved.

Large quantities of heavy weapons and bulk supplies have moved until recently through the port of Sihanoukville and along West-East routes to III and IV Corps in South Viet-Nam.

Over the past year the demands of the new NVA force in the Delta would have greatly increased Communist supply requirements there. These increased supply requirements probably account in part for the actions of the Communist forces in attacking Cambodian police and military posts in provinces adjacent to the Delta region of South Viet-Nam. Food needs had evidently been met in part earlier by clandestine shipments of rice to the NVA/VC forces through Cambodia, but the recent decision of the Cambodian Government to halt such shipments has evidently induced the Communists to drive the Cambodian authorities entirely out of large sections of the country so that the Communists can then draw directly on the civilian population for their food

supplies. Other

supplies. Other purposes which the Communists undoubtedly have in mind in attacking the Cambodian forces are to strengthen and deepen the area from which they can threaten the allied forces in South Viet-Nam, as well as to threaten the overthrow of the neutral Government of Cambodia.

Chronology of Cambodian Developments

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|-------------------|--|
| August, 1969      | -- Sihanouk installs Lon Nol as Prime Minister, with a mandate to deal with pressing economic problems.  |
| December, 1969    | -- Sihanouk writes in <u>Sangkum</u> magazine of the danger of associating too closely with Communists: "the bird always gets swallowed." (On various occasions since 1965, he had complained of the Viet Cong presence in Cambodia.)  |
| January 6, 1970   | -- Sihanouk departs for France, leaving Cheng Heng as Acting Chief of State, after a setback in his attack on the Lon Nol Government in the National Assembly, and apparently also to avoid a scheduled visit by North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong.   |
| Early March, 1970 | -- Anti-Vietnamese Communist demonstrations in Phnom Penh lead to sacking of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong Embassies.   |
| March 13, 1970    | -- Sihanouk leaves Paris for Moscow and Peking avowedly to seek Soviet and Chinese assistance in persuading the Vietnamese Communists to leave Cambodian territory.  |
| March 16, 1970    | -- The Lon Nol government begins negotiations with the Vietnamese Communists in Phnom Penh, concerning the Viet Cong presence in Cambodia.   |
| March 18, 1970    | -- The Cambodian National Assembly by unanimous vote declares Prince Sihanouk no longer Chief of State. Cheng Heng, President of the Assembly, stays on as Acting Chief of State. Lon Nol continues as Prime Minister. Sihanouk arrives in Peking, denounces the National Assembly action as an illegal coup d'etat. |
| March 23, 1970    | -- Sihanouk issues first of a series of messages calling for overthrow of the Lon Nol Government.  |
| March 25, 1970    | -- The Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs<br><br>notifies the   |

notifies the Vietnamese Communist representatives of the Cambodian Government's desire to resume negotiations. The Communists reject the invitation and announce withdrawal of all but caretaker staffs from their Embassies.

- March 31, 1970 -- Cambodian Government informs the UN that it has asked the UK and the USSR to reconvene the International Control Commission to protect Cambodian neutrality. (The USSR has refused to act.) Informal Cambodian soundings at the UN indicate that there is little hope of getting Security Council action.
- April 3, 1970 -- Vietnamese Communists begin attacks against Cambodian forces in Svay Rieng Province, later expanded to other Cambodian posts in Eastern Cambodia.
- March/April, 1970 -- Sihanouk sends a series of messages to Communist regimes thanking them for their support.
- April 14, 1970 -- Cambodian Government issues the first of a series of appeals for foreign arms assistance.
- April 18, 1970 -- North Vietnamese forces capture Saang, 18 miles south of Phnom Penh. (Later recaptured by Cambodian troops.)
- April 25, 1970 -- Sihanouk signs a joint Communique with Vietnamese Communist and Pathet Lao leaders, pledging unity and reciprocal support, and rejecting international proposals for a Conference on Cambodia or Indochina.
- April 28, 1970 -- Chinese Communists declare their "powerful backing" for the Communique.
- April 30, 1970 -- President Nixon announces decision to authorize limited military action in border area to save American and allied lives imperiled by Communist occupation of eastern Cambodia.

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