

SNIE 57-70

The Outlook For Cambodia

6 August 1970

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SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE  
57-70

**THE OUTLOOK FOR CAMBODIA**

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Concurred in by the

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf

6 August 1970

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

6 August 1970

SUBJECT: SNIE 57-70: THE OUTLOOK FOR CAMBODIA

NOTE

Evidence on many aspects of the Cambodian situation is fragmentary and subject to conflicting interpretations. This is true with respect both to the situation within Cambodia and to communist intentions concerning it. Hence, this Estimate devotes more attention than is usual to identifying areas of particular uncertainty and to assessing alternative explanations. The principal conclusions of this Estimate are stated in Section III.

DISCUSSION

1. In the four months since Sihanouk's ouster, the communists have overrun half of Cambodia, taken or threatened 16 of its 19 provincial capitals, and interdicted -- for varying periods --

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all road and rail links to the capital, Phnom Penh. In the countryside, VC/NVA forces generally continue to move at will, attacking towns and villages in the south and converting the north into an extension of the Laos corridor and a base for "peoples' war" throughout the country and in South Vietnam as well.

2. This being the situation, survival of the Lon Nol government will depend heavily on the extent of foreign assistance as well as on the will and ability of the people and their leaders to organize themselves for effective military resistance to the communists; on the unity and morale of the country in the face of hardship, destruction, and death; and on the reaction to the divisive political appeals issued in Sihanouk's name. But of equal or greater importance are the capabilities and intentions of the Vietnamese communists; the extent to which they can bring pressures to bear on the Lon Nol government and the degree to which they are willing to allocate available resources to such an effort.

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## I. THE SITUATION OF THE LON NOL GOVERNMENT

## A. Military Strengths and Weaknesses

3. *Manpower.* Prior to Sihanouk's removal the Cambodian Armed Forces (FANK) totaled about 38,000 men, almost all in the army. Their main role was that of a civic action and internal security force; their chief military role was to cope with minor border transgressions and scattered insurgent bands. The army lacked qualified officers, was poorly trained (despite French efforts) and had low morale. Although its fighting units had some new communist equipment, their overall combat effectiveness was low.

4. In their frantic expansion since March, the FANK have more than tripled in size and now number some 135,000 men. Almost all of this increase has been in the army. The infantry, in particular, has grown from some 55 battalions totaling about 20,000 men to 205 battalions with about 100,000 men (as of 30 July). Some of these battalions exist only on paper, however, and it appears that less than half of the units have had any real preparation for battle. The rapid expansion of the army has been accomplished mainly by recruiting raw young volunteers, but reserves and retirees have also been called up

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and provincial guard personnel mobilized. Since VC/NVA attacks began in earnest in early April, Cambodian youth have been flocking to enlist in the army and in various auxiliary security forces; they apparently come from all parts of the country and all walks of life, and their morale seems high.

5. The government's ability to use the available manpower is limited by a number of factors. One of the most serious has been the generally poor state of training of the regular forces prior to March. The French Mission in Cambodia did a reasonably good job of assisting in training a number of junior officers and NCOs; in most cases, however, these men were not used effectively. Moreover, the Cambodian Government never permitted the French to conduct unit training. Basic training conducted by the Cambodians themselves was perfunctory and seldom went beyond absolute essentials; most troops for example, fired only a few rounds from their weapons during their entire military career. Unit training was virtually non-existent, the men being assigned to garrison chores and civic action projects rather than to military exercises. There are indications that training deteriorated even further in the aftermath of the communist attacks; in some instances, recruits received only a day of military instruction before being shipped

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to the "front." The situation now appears to be improving; there is an effort to provide a full six weeks of training at the unit level for all recruits.

6. *Logistics.* Before the recent, rapid expansion of the army, most Cambodian infantry battalions were reasonably well equipped with communist-supplied weapons. Newly-formed units are being equipped from existing stocks of Chinese, US, Soviet, French, and other foreign weapons, as well as light weapons recently supplied by the US and captured communist weapons provided by South Vietnam. Yet many of the weapons in stock are inoperable, and many of the new units are inadequately equipped. Moreover, the heterogeneous nature of the arsenal has created an extremely difficult supply problem. Ammunition reserves have been rapidly depleted, primarily to supply newly-formed units rather than in combat. Weapons losses to the communists have not been as great as initially thought, although some ammunition was left behind by troops evacuated from outposts in the north and northeast; at Kratie, a regional arms and ammunition depot containing an unknown quantity of ordnance was abandoned.<sup>1/</sup> There is a serious shortage of communications equipment throughout the army and a general lack of trucks and other vehicles; even uniforms are in short supply.

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<sup>1/</sup> All the weapons at the ordnance depot at Kompong Speu and possibly at Lovek were evacuated before VC/NVA troops attacked these towns.

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7. *Combat Effectiveness.* As might be expected, the performance of Cambodian forces so far has generally been poor. This is due in part to the generally low professional competence of their officers and NCOs. Most of the small number of Cambodian military successes have been the result of timely allied intervention, on the ground or in the air. Patriotic zeal alone has been insufficient to cope with experienced VC/NVA units or even roving communist bands. According to official FANK reports, Cambodian Army casualties from 18 March to 8 July 1970 totaled about 800 killed, 1,700 wounded, 1,500 missing, and 1,600 desertions. These figures are roughly consistent with our own information which indicates that some 18 FANK battalions have either been overrun or dissolved since March. Cambodian military planning is poor and operations are further hampered by inadequate tactical intelligence and communications, and by general inexperience in combat situations.

8. But the picture may not be entirely bleak. There has been some degree of improvement over the months among units consistently engaged, particularly with regard to troop discipline and unit coordination. Cambodian forces have also shown increased ability and determination in defending fixed



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positions (Kompong Thom) and in attacks on communist-held positions (Kirirom). Given enough time, the Cambodians probably could become good soldiers. It is clear, however, that a lengthy period of training and re-equipping would be necessary before very many Cambodian units could be a match -- on a unit-for-unit basis -- for the VC/NVA forces operating in the country.

9. *Foreign Assistance.* Obviously, at this stage, Lon Nol's army is counting heavily on allied assistance -- including fighting forces, materiel, and air support. The withdrawal of US ground forces from Cambodia on 30 June was a major disappointment to Phnom Penh. The Cambodians clearly have reservations about relying on their traditional enemies, the Vietnamese, for assistance; they have been angered by the behavior of some ARVN units in eastern Cambodia and they also wonder if ARVN troops would withdraw from Cambodian soil once the communist danger had passed. It is possible that these feelings could increase to the point where they represented a serious hindrance to collaboration between the two countries.

10. For the present, however, Lon Nol seems relieved that ARVN has set up a major combat base at Neak Luong at the junction of the Mekong and Route 1 (Saigon-Svay Rieng-Phnom Penh), and is prepared to keep open those vital supply links from South

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Vietnam. He is also reassured by President Thieu's agreement to move troops as necessary deep into Cambodia's eastern border regions and to respond militarily to any major communist assault on important towns in the Phnom Penh region, including any attack on the capital itself. South Vietnamese air is also available for Cambodian defense to the extent deemed appropriate by Saigon; and the South Vietnamese Navy intends to maintain its surveillance of Cambodian coastal waters. Finally, Saigon has agreed to provide facilities for the training of some 10,000 Cambodian recruits on an annual basis, as well as numbers of FANK officers and NCOs.

11. ARVN will probably not, however, undertake significant defensive responsibilities in areas remote from South Vietnam's borders; its capabilities for action in Cambodia are not unlimited, and its actions outside South Vietnam are subject to US-imposed restrictions. Most important, President Thieu appears sensitive to the dangers of overcommitting his forces in Cambodia at the expense of internal security and pacification in South Vietnam.

12. With regard to ground defense in western Cambodia, therefore, Lon Nol has been anxiously soliciting Thai involvement. Despite enthusiasm among some Thai leaders for ambitious military

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operations in Cambodia, Bangkok has been slow and cautious in extending actual commitments. The Thai are providing some tactical air support from bases in Thailand to FANK units in western Cambodia. Thai border security detachments are patrolling in adjacent Cambodian frontier zones and occasionally have engaged communist units. (The Thai have also occupied the coveted Preah Vihear Temple on Cambodian soil.) Bangkok has provided a number of small river patrol craft to Cambodia and will provide more. There have been shipments of other types of military materiel in small quantities. Finally, the Thai are recruiting two regiments from their ethnic Khmer (i.e., Cambodian) population and have scheduled them for deployment to Cambodia in the fall.

13. Beyond this, the Thai have been constrained by opposition at home and -- more important -- by uncertainty over the availability of US financial support to any Thai military enterprise in Cambodia. If such support is not forthcoming, it seems probable that any commitment of regular Thai troops to Cambodia will be relatively small and limited to defense of areas contiguous to Thailand.

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14. Although the Lon Nol government has been soliciting international support, no other nation is likely to send troops to Cambodia in the foreseeable future. South Korean ardor has cooled because of US unwillingness to pay the bills as it has in South Vietnam. There was never any possibility that any other nation might dispatch troops though a few -- including Australia, Indonesia, and Nationalist China -- may provide some military materiel. Sustained US air attacks on communist supply lines and troop concentrations should be of considerable value to the Lon Nol forces. And Cambodia counts on extensive material assistance from the US.

#### B. The Political Situation

15. *The Government.* When they took control after deposing Sihanouk, the new Cambodian leaders moved quickly to consolidate their position. The Cabinet and both houses of the National Assembly continued to display the same unity and support for Prime Minister Lon Nol and his deputy, Sirik Matak, that they had throughout the months leading up to Sihanouk's ouster. A few administrative figures whose allegiance was questionable

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were removed from their posts. For the most part, provincial governors, ambassadors, and the bureaucracy fell into line.

16. As communist military and psychological pressures have increased, however, cracks have begun to appear in the facade of unity. In the main, these result from the resentment of civilian politicians over their lack of influence in the present government. There are also personal criticisms of the two top leaders and stories of rivalries between them. So far, these frictions do not appear to be serious. Lon Nol has responded constructively to most criticisms and recommendations; for example, he has eased pressures from young intellectuals by bringing them into responsible government positions. Lon Nol and Sirik Matak appear to work together well and to complement each other. In general, Lon Nol runs military affairs and Sirik Matak the political sector, although there is some evidence that both are now spending so much time on military matters that other problems receive insufficient attention from them. We have had one report that the two hold differing views regarding the possibility of some kind of deal with either the communists or Sihanouk -- that Sirik Matak would be more inclined than Lon Nol to accept a compromise settlement of the conflict.

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17. The possibility of such an arrangement does, of course, exist. The political unity that followed Sihanouk's ouster and the sense of nationalism (with strong anti-Vietnamese overtones) that was artfully used by Lon Nol and Sirik Matak in their bid for power could weaken over time. If the military situation does not soon improve, for example, Lon Nol's support might begin to dissipate and his policies come under open attack.

18. There is no way of knowing whether Lon Nol and Sirik Matak have the fortitude and the inner resources to meet such a challenge. While they have surmounted many difficult problems, there is a disquieting note in the continuing optimism -- bordering on wishful thinking -- that the two leaders have displayed in private talks. They seem to believe that the Cambodian Army will be able to take the offensive in the relatively near future; and they seem unprepared for the possibility of a long war. If their leadership should falter, the attitudes of Cambodia's Army and the urban elite would be critical.

19. *The Army* The real power behind the Cambodian Government today is the army. Despite some grumbling, it has remained loyal to Lon Nol through the trying period since Sihanouk's removal and

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if this situation persists it is difficult to imagine a successful effort by any group in Phnom Penh to overthrow the government.

20. But we have little basis for judging the depth of the commitment among individual officers to Lon Nol; nor do we know much about political attitudes within the army as a whole. It would be prudent to assume that there are military elements who still are pro-Sihanouk, others who are probably disturbed by the troubles that now beset Cambodia and hold Lon Nol accountable, and some who are simply concerned over their personal interests and safety. At the same time, the rapid expansion of the army has brought increased authority and opportunity to the officer corps, reinforcing longstanding personal bonds to Lon Nol. And there is, no doubt, a strong and genuine sense of nationalist commitment to the government in the face of the foreign threat. On balance, we think the army's loyalty will hold up so long as there appears a reasonable prospect for continued foreign assistance and for the survival of a viable non-communist regime in Cambodia.

21. *The Elite and the Youth.* For years, members of the Cambodian bureaucratic, economic and political elite have complained about Sihanouk's policies of economic nationalization

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and his accommodations with the Vietnamese communists, while continuing to serve him. Although the Lon Nol/Sirik Matak regime has made little progress toward fulfilling its promises to rid the country of North Vietnamese, to eradicate corruption, and to establish a republic, major political components are muting their dissatisfaction in view of the military threat posed by the communists. For example, elements within the National Assembly complain about the lack of progress in implementing reforms and appear increasingly dissatisfied with the minor role the government is allowing it to play, but they have confined their reactions to verbal criticisms. The majority of students and young intellectuals, another key group, although they were at the center of left-wing sentiment in the past, also see the present government as an improvement over the past and as the only viable alternative in present circumstances. As a result, at least for the present, the students continue to constitute an element of support for the new regime.

22. *The Buddhists.* Buddhism is an influential force in Cambodian life, particularly in the countryside where the temple is the center of social life and the interpreter of most news. For the most part, Cambodian monks have been



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apolitical, unlike those in some other Asian countries. But they played a critical leadership role a century ago in a Cambodian revolt against the Vietnamese and some elements actively opposed the French as part of the post-World War II movement for Cambodian independence. The regime recognizes the political importance of the monks and has made efforts to gain their support. In the villages, however, the monks have been slow in responding to government requests to rally the peasants. In a recent tactic, the government has sought to portray the war as a struggle between Buddhism and the atheistic communists of North Vietnam. Such efforts may be having some success; the government now claims that monks in some areas are providing information about VC/NVA movements and activities.

23. *The Peasantry.* The Cambodian peasantry has no serious problems of land tenancy and its village-oriented way of life has changed little over the centuries. Although governmental authority extends down through the provincial and district capitals into the villages, actual contact with the bureaucracy at local levels is infrequent. And the social and political aspirations of the governing group in Phnom Penh have generally had little in common with those of the villagers. Conservative

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and religious in their outlook, the peasantry has traditionally had great respect for royalty and affection for Sihanouk, providing a broad base of support for his leadership. They have been the slowest to demonstrate approval of the new regime. In large part, this may be due to the traditional apathy of the peasants toward events in the capital.

24. Few, if any, government leaders have ventured into rural areas since the coup, and there is some question whether any government services are being provided in the countryside. Indeed, the government appears to have abandoned most outlying areas and withdrawn back to the major towns. Virtually no reliable information is available to indicate the developing attitudes of the peasantry or the depth of its commitment, when made, to either side of the struggle. The government recognizes that more has to be done to establish closer ties with the peasantry and is beginning to develop programs aimed at gaining the loyalty of the rural population and counteracting communist organizational activities.

25. *Imported Khmers.* The introduction of comparatively well-trained ethnic Cambodian troops from South Vietnam -- the so-called

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Khmer Krom -- has injected a new factor into the political equation in Phnom Penh. Although they have thus far accepted their military mission, the political character of their parent organizations<sup>2/</sup> may foreshadow political ambitions on the part of Khmer Krom leaders. Lon Nol has dealt with the Khmer Krom through his brother Lon Non, an indication that he understands their political importance. He has also engaged in gingerly bargaining with Son Ngoc Thanh -- the Khmer Serei leader -- in an effort to limit Thanh's future political role while gaining the assistance his recruits can provide. In the fragile consensus which has so far characterized the Lon Nol regime, men like Son Ngoc Thanh with the backing of the Khmer Krom could emerge as political factors of some importance.

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<sup>2/</sup> *These are the Khmer du Kampuchea Krom (KKK or "White Turbans") and the Khmer Serei. The KKK, a semi-bandit group, was initially supported by Sihanouk as a means of maintaining contact with Khmer and Montagnard elements in South Vietnam and harassing the GVN. The Khmer Serei, an anti-Sihanouk group led by Son Ngoc Thanh, has -- off and on -- enjoyed South Vietnamese and Thai support. Neither group played any significant role in Cambodia while Sihanouk was in power.*

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## C. The Economic Situation

26. The rising tempo of the war has confronted the Cambodian Government with critical economic problems. Defense costs, of course, have skyrocketed, while wartime destruction and dislocations have greatly reduced governmental revenues and the availability of foreign exchange. Some basic consumer necessities are in short supply in the urban areas, and manufacturing -- such as it is -- has been slowed almost to a halt. Disruptions to transport resulting from communist interdiction of lines of communication and commandeering of civilian trucks by the Cambodian military have contributed heavily to the severe constriction of domestic and foreign trade. Moreover, half a million people or more have been uprooted from their homes, causing serious labor shortages in many regions. In particular, the repatriation of ethnic Vietnamese has removed many skilled workers from the economy.

27. On the other hand, the Cambodian peasant and village economy is still in tolerable shape. There is no shortage of food; rice, sugar, vegetables, and meat are relatively plentiful and should continue so for some months. If severe transport

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disruptions continue, however, the urban population, especially those in Phnom Penh who are largely dependent on earnings from trade and industry, will have an increasingly difficult time. As shortages and inflation develop, the urban middle class, which provides the nucleus of Lon Nol's political support, could become increasingly disenchanted.

28. The loss of hard currency export earnings will cause problems for the government, especially because of the impact on the urban middle class, who are highly dependent on imported consumer goods. Estimated earnings from the three major exports -- rice, rubber, and corn -- are down sharply. <sup>3/</sup> Most rubber processing facilities have been destroyed and no

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<sup>3/</sup> These products normally account for about 85 percent of Cambodia's foreign exchange earnings. Rice exports for 1970 will probably be less than half the 460,000 tons (valued at US \$44 million) originally projected; rubber exports will probably be less than one-third the 52,000 tons (valued at about US \$20 million) originally projected; and corn exports, derived largely from the war-torn southeastern provinces, will be greatly diminished.

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further production is expected this year. It will probably take at least a year to put facilities back in service once security is established. Moreover, many mature trees have been damaged and their replacement would take much longer. Planting of the rainy season crop of rice and corn has been disrupted by hostilities and the displacement of rural population, and this may cause a significant decline this year in the production of both. Tourism -- i.e., the temples at Angkor -- which had been growing rapidly as a source of foreign exchange for Cambodia, has been all but wiped out. Despite this generally bleak foreign exchange picture, reserves on hand total about US \$60 million and are probably sufficient to sustain necessary imports into early 1971.

29. A related problem is in the realm of government operating expenditures. While revenues have been reduced to a trickle, expenses have soared, particularly in the defense sector. The government is already in arrears on its military (and civilian) payroll. Government expenditures this year will be considerably in excess of the US \$176 million budgeted; and a deficit of between \$60 and \$100 million seems likely. The Cambodian Government will probably be forced increasingly to

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resort to the printing press. With supplies of imported and domestic goods reduced, an expansion of the money supply will almost certainly produce a major inflation, unless foreign financial assistance is made available.<sup>4/</sup>

30. So far, however, there are few firm commitments for any substantial foreign aid. The French made a commitment in January 1970, before Sihanouk's ouster, for a \$22.7 million loan; it is being implemented, but with many strings attached. Cambodian officials have high hopes for substantial aid from Japan, but so far the Japanese have provided only a \$2 million grant for refugee relief. Miscellaneous commitments from Australia, New Zealand, and Denmark total only a few million dollars. Aid from communist countries, once an important element in the Cambodian economic picture, has now been cut off.

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<sup>4/</sup> One of the most significant indicators of Cambodia's financial difficulties has been the rapid depreciation of the riel. Businessmen, especially Vietnamese and Chinese elements, have been exchanging large riel balances for hard currencies; consequently, the riel, which traded at 65 to US \$1 shortly after devaluation a year ago, has been quoted as high as 130 to US \$1 in recent weeks. The riel is officially exchanged at a rate of 55 to US \$1.

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II. THE SITUATION OF THE COMMUNISTS IN CAMBODIA

A. Military Capabilities

31. *Available Forces.* According to the latest order of battle estimates based on newly-captured documents, there probably were, in April 1970, some 50,000-60,000 VC/NVA troops operating in the Cambodian/South Vietnamese border region, almost all of them in Cambodia. About 60 percent of these forces are believed to have been in administrative units -- primarily concerned with operating and protecting the various communist command, logistic, and intelligence functions in the region -- and 40 percent in combat units. Virtually all of these troops were deployed deeper into Cambodia at some time over the past few months, though many did not move any further than necessary to avoid confrontations with US and ARVN forces. Indeed, all available evidence indicates that fewer than 10,000 combat troops have been involved in the deeper deployments and wide-ranging attacks against Cambodian towns and cities.

32. Precise determinations of communist deployments are difficult to make.



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To the extent that we can determine, it appears that communist operations in the northeast were largely the work of one regiment; and that elements of this same regiment, augmented by an undetermined number of troops from southern Laos and some Cambodian recruits, were responsible for the initial communist thrust across northern Cambodia as far west as Siem Reap. As far as we can determine, all the attacks south and southwest of Phnom Penh (in the area of Takeo, Angtassom, Kompong Speu, and Kirirom) were the work of roughly the equivalent of two regiments.

33. In sum,

the communists have ranged over much of Cambodia with what appears to be a relatively small combat force. Thus, if Hanoi should decide to increase the weight of its attacks against the Lon Nol government, it already has additional combat troops in nearby border areas and would not necessarily have to await reinforcements from North Vietnam. Nevertheless, many of these forces are needed to defend supply caches still remaining in the old border base areas, to guard against attacks on supply routes through Laos, and to support the struggle in South Vietnam. Thus, Hanoi might think a considerable

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reinforcement from North Vietnam was desirable before making an all-out effort to topple the Lon Nol regime -- an effort which might provoke substantial allied opposition on the ground and in the air.

34. At the moment, it is difficult to see how the communists could effect such a reinforcement -- if they feel they need it -- before the end of the year. The 12,000 infiltrators scheduled to reach COSVN during the May-July period were only sufficient, together with local recruiting, to balance losses suffered by communist units in Cambodia during the May/June allied incursions. And the scheduled arrivals in August and September in the COSVN area number only some 1,500<sup>5/</sup>, almost certainly insufficient to cover continuing attrition. To be sure, the communists could, with considerable difficulty, move substantial numbers of troops through the Laos panhandle in the midst of the monsoon (July-October). Even so, it would be two or three months before they would be ready for operations in Cambodia.

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35. *Logistical Factors.* At this point there is still great uncertainty about the communist supply situation in part because we do not know the extent of supply caches before the allied intervention. In the Cambodian interior, a new theater of operations for communist forces, it seems likely that their system for the distribution of supplies is still rudimentary. Though obviously adequate to support the relatively light combat of the past few months, it is probably not as secure and effective as Hanoi would wish before embarking on any large-scale or sustained combat. The communist forces no longer have assured sanctuaries south of the DMZ; and their former supply route through Sihanoukville is no longer available. Aside from supplies, there is also the problem of evacuating or caring for wounded. And, in the absence of a friendly population and a well-developed infrastructure, the communists in Cambodia could be forced to employ large numbers of combat troops in a support role. The peculiarities of the Cambodian situation could require many other modifications of the efficient supply procedures developed in South Vietnam and Laos over the years.

36. *Subversive Capabilities.* The communists, true to their doctrine of "peoples' war," are making a considerable effort to win over the rural population. The north and northeast areas, however, which the government has virtually abandoned to communist

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control, contain relatively few people. The population of the four provinces in the Hanoi-controlled northeast, for example, totals less than 250,000 or only about 4 percent of Cambodia's 6.8 million people.<sup>6/</sup> However, the communists are active in many heavily populated areas of the south as well.

37. Access to the population is only part of the communist problem. The communist movement in Cambodia has always been weak and has suffered in the past from its identification with alien Vietnamese. We have no good estimate of the number of Khmer communists, but at the time of Sihanouk's overthrow there probably were no more than a few hundred in Battambang Province in the far west and some 2,000 in the eastern regions. These Khmer communists will probably have the role of fronting for the Vietnamese in the effort now underway to develop a communist-controlled infrastructure in the Cambodian countryside.

38. Sihanouk's name probably remains something of an asset to the Vietnamese communists in their efforts to rally the rural populace.

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<sup>6/</sup> Most of the population in three of the provinces -- Stung Treng, Ratanakiri, and Mondolkiri -- is Lao or Khmer Loeu, not ethnic Cambodian.

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At the same time, his involvement with the Chinese and Vietnamese communists -- particularly the latter -- has hurt him in Cambodia. It won over to the new regime many among the elite, the students, and the army who were fence-sitters when Lon Nol first took over. Moreover, although Sihanouk probably has the sympathies of many peasants and some of the Buddhist monks, there is no political apparatus available to him in Cambodia except that which Hanoi can develop.

39. Whatever the current extent of Sihanouk's appeal, the job of establishing a viable communist infrastructure in Cambodia will not be easy. The Vietnamese are racially, culturally, and linguistically distinct from the Khmer, and they must overcome the burden of longstanding Khmer animosity toward all Vietnamese. But the Vietnamese communists are superb organizers, and they know how to use terrorism to get what they cannot obtain otherwise. The information available on their recruitment effort is meager, and what we do get provides a mixed and confused picture. In some areas, particularly those long subject to communist influence, entire villages are apparently collaborating, and local recruits are being rapidly if superficially trained for military and administrative

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tasks. Elsewhere, while there is undoubtedly a good deal of coercion, the communists have apparently not yet resorted to large-scale terrorism. On past form, particularly in Laos, it seems likely that they will succeed in winning the active loyalty of some peasants to a communist-dominated Khmer resistance front and the passive acquiescence of many more to the presence of such an organization in areas where communist forces predominate.

40. Another potential asset for Hanoi in Cambodia is the community of some 300,000-400,000 Vietnamese. This community did contain a sizable Vietnamese communist apparatus, including a "Rear Services Group" in Phnom Penh which supported the war effort in South Vietnam. But the recent evacuation of close to 150,000 ethnic Vietnamese to South Vietnam has reduced the potential for exploitation of this group in Cambodia.

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## B. Hanoi's View of the Cambodian Situation

41. Hanoi has given no firm clues as to how it views the situation arising from recent developments in Cambodia. There have been some public and a few private statements, which demonstrate little more than that the communists are neither panicked nor elated by events. There has been some military action which was to be expected, such as that to restructure the supply system, and some which would not necessarily have been expected, such as operations westward as far as Siem Reap and Angkor. These give some small basis for judging Hanoi's attitude, but the following paragraphs actually present no more than some of the pros and cons which, from our own view of the situation, must have occasioned debate or concern among the communists.

42. The overthrow of Sihanouk, the adoption of a strong anticommunist line by the Lon Nol government, and the allied incursions into Cambodia upset a situation which had been highly advantageous to Hanoi in its campaign to take over South Vietnam. And, while communist forces in Cambodia have weathered the May-June phase of allied operations and continue to extend their presence into large portions of the country, Hanoi can scarcely

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assume that its troubles are over. It has recognized its problems with statements to the effect that new difficulties and increased demands will have to be met in supporting the Indochina-wide struggle.

43. The obvious immediate problem was to restore and secure as far as possible the channels of supply and infiltration into South Vietnam. Communist forces advanced westward to the Mekong (and beyond) in order to open up alternate routes, and their recent advances in southern Laos are presumably a related move. Pathet Lao approaches to Souvanna Phouma since mid-June may also reflect, at least in part, Hanoi's concern regarding possible allied ground incursions into the Laos corridor. In any event, the immunity from attack formerly enjoyed by supply routes (and sanctuaries) in Cambodia is at an end. For the time being at least, the route through Sihanoukville is wholly closed to the communists.

44. Experience of past years indicates that the communists will be able to maintain a flow of supplies and manpower to southern South Vietnam and Cambodia. This is not to say that they will have all the material they need for any operation they may contemplate, and still less that their logistic operations will be without severe difficulties and setbacks. Such difficulties and setbacks



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will of course play an important part in Hanoi's estimate of what it can accomplish, and within what time, and at what cost. All the evidence suggests, however, that the communist leadership is still committed to a long struggle, carried on primarily by relatively small-scale military actions over extensive areas, and that such a struggle will not be rendered infeasible by material or manpower shortages.

45. As respects Cambodia itself, from one point of view Hanoi may perceive tempting opportunities. It has always been clear that its ultimate objective was to control, or at least to establish hegemony over that country. Hanoi-inspired insurgency began on a small scale in Cambodia in 1967, but progress was slow, at least until Sihanouk's ouster in March of this year. Now, with Sihanouk in the communist camp and half of Cambodian territory in communist hands, prospects for a rapid advance toward the ultimate objective might seem to be greatly enhanced.

46. In any effort to gain control of Cambodia, however, the communists would lack some of the advantages they have enjoyed in South Vietnam: a well-established and extensive logistic system; a political base and infrastructure deeply rooted among the people;

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and a claim to legitimacy deriving from identification with nationalist aspirations. Moreover, they cannot be certain of how far the US and its allies may go in attempting to preserve an anticommunist regime in Phnom Penh. Hanoi's fears must have been diminished by the extent of US domestic opposition and by the limitations that the US Government has placed upon its military commitment in Cambodia. Nevertheless, if Hanoi plans to persist in efforts to undermine the Lon Nol government, it must weigh the costs of deploying additional resources -- particularly manpower -- to deal with anticipated US and ARVN air attacks, plus ARVN (and possibly Thai) ground attacks. It must also consider that the opposition offered by Cambodian government forces may grow stronger as allied arms become available and allied training programs are carried out.

47. In the wider context of the whole Indochina conflict, Hanoi may also see both advantages and disadvantages in the extension of the area of fighting into Cambodia. On the one hand, it means a diversion of communist resources into new territory, into protecting and maintaining more lines of communication, probably against increased air attacks, and into organizational and propaganda efforts among a largely unsympathetic people. Yet

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it may also give opportunity to tie down South Vietnamese (and possibly Thai) forces in Cambodia without excessive cost or risk and to divert Saigon's attention from the more important struggle in its own country. It may conceivably lead to frictions between the US and its allies over the necessity and the means of keeping the Lon Nol regime in power.

48. Finally, Hanoi has above all to judge the effect of the Cambodian situation upon the will of the US to prosecute the struggle. Obviously it has never doubted the superior physical and material capabilities of the US; its hopes have lain in its ability to outstay the US in a prolonged politico-military contest carried on according to the principles of revolutionary struggle. It has doubtless been impressed by the considerable public outcry against the Cambodian adventure which occurred in the US, and may overestimate its importance. But it must recognize that the contest in Indochina will continue for some time.

#### C. Courses of Action

49. The full range of communist intentions in Cambodia is difficult to judge. Hanoi clearly intends, at a minimum, to retain

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supply and infiltration channels into South Vietnam. But the evidence strongly indicates that its objectives extend beyond this. Communist units have been on the outskirts of Siem Reap, some 250 miles west of the Vietnamese border, for over two months; and Hanoi's attacks in the southerly areas have created serious insecurity almost everywhere and virtually wrecked the national economy. Meanwhile, communist forces and their agents have been working assiduously wherever possible to create a Khmer resistance movement. These developments, and Hanoi's public statements, indicate that the communists have set their sights on the elimination of the Lon Nol government and its replacement by a regime which would be responsive to their wishes.

50. At this point, therefore, the main issue in Hanoi's view is almost certainly one of method and timing: Whether to seek Lon Nol's destruction by early and direct military pressure on Phnom Penh, or by a more prolonged and measured campaign of military, political, and psychological pressures designed to undermine the government's position in stages.

51. There are a number of factors that might incline Hanoi to seek a rapid military victory in Cambodia. The communists

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might believe that the quick removal of the anticommunist leadership in Phnom Penh would provide a timely political-psychological triumph of major proportions, one which would further weaken support in the US for the war in South Vietnam. They might be concerned to finish off Lon Nol before substantial numbers of South Vietnamese, Thai or other Asian troops (with US air support) could be marshalled against them -- or before Cambodian government forces could be made effective. They might also be pessimistic about their prospects for building an effective Khmer insurgent movement, even in a matter of years, and therefore think it more practicable to establish a "neutralist" regime in Phnom Penh as soon as possible. And Hanoi might also hope that a military push on the Cambodian capital would tempt ARVN to overextend its forces, thus opening the way for communist gains in South Vietnam itself. The force of these considerations would be increased if Hanoi perceived signs of collapse by the FANK or signs of serious political instability in Phnom Penh.

52. At the present time, there are arguments of at least equal weight against Hanoi's seeking a rapid military solution in Cambodia. With ARVN at the ready, it would probably require a major redeployment of VC/NVA forces within Cambodia, which might lessen the communist threat to southern South Vietnam. It would also draw

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heavily on available VC/NVA supplies, probably to the detriment of units in southern South Vietnam already known to be subject to rationing of munitions. In any case, Hanoi could not be sure that its campaign, including an assault on Phnom Penh, would be successful. The monsoon rains present an important obstacle at this time to any major offensive in central Cambodia; the low-lying plains around Phnom Penh are particularly subject to widespread inundation. There would almost certainly be resistance by the Cambodians themselves and, more important, Hanoi would expect that ARVN units with US air support would be available to the defense. At best, the military costs of taking the capital and nearby major towns would probably be high; and Hanoi might be concerned over the loss of prestige if a major assault failed.

53. Hanoi may also see the advantages of an early overthrow of the Lon Nol regime as dubious. Such a development would not automatically end the fighting in Cambodia and reduce communist manpower requirements there; indeed, the possible need for defense of occupied towns might impose a larger military burden. The allies could hardly be expected to cease attacks on supply lines in the east, or even in other parts of the country, or to forego a continuing naval blockade, nor would FANK necessarily give up the struggle.

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54. More important, probably, would be the problem of securing a reliable successor government. In this connection, Hanoi might be reluctant to bring the unpredictable Sihanouk back to the scene. It would first have to assess his popular appeal and his willingness, under the circumstances, to act in accord with communist wishes. In any event, unless Hanoi were able to base its control of Cambodia on a well-organized indigenous communist movement, the North Vietnamese would have to assume the main burden of running the country.

55. The alternative to a major military campaign is, of course, an attempt to erode Lon Nol's position over time by some combination of military, psychological, and political means. The current pattern of communist military attacks, for example, could be designed to cripple and demoralize the inadequate military force at the disposal of the government; to create serious insecurity in the countryside; to isolate the populace from the central government; and to wreck the national economy. Hanoi may be bent on making it clear to all that the Lon Nol government is weak and ineffective, incapable of defending even its major towns, and utterly dependent on allied support. In this context, Phnom Penh itself might be harassed occasionally by communist forces. Through such tactics, and

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accompanying propaganda, Hanoi could hope to discourage the faint of heart among Cambodians and to encourage political opposition to Lon Nol. It might hope, in this case, to encourage the formation of a regime prepared to accept the communist presence in Cambodia. Meanwhile, in pursuance of this course of action, Hanoi could be expanding its indigenous insurgent force for the longer pull in Cambodia, and strengthening its grip on the strategic northeastern quadrant of the country. It could be achieving these objectives in accordance with classic communist doctrines and at relatively low cost or risk.

56. This alternative, as we describe it, clearly implies a continuation of communist operations and pressures in Cambodia at levels approximating those of the past several months. There would, of course, be lulls and peaks in military pressures as forces were rested and resupplied, or diverted to support operations in South Vietnam; but the effort to build an indigenous insurgent movement would continue at a steady pace behind the screen of maneuvering VC/NVA military units. Even if this course were followed, the communists would retain the option of an all-out military assault on the Lon Nol government -- at any time.



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### III. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

57. The main points that emerge from the foregoing discussion may be summarized in these propositions:

a. Despite its numerous shortcomings and difficulties, the Lon Nol government is still generally united and in fairly good heart. It has the support of the army, the urban elite, and for the moment at least, the students. The peasantry appear largely apathetic, but certainly there has been no large-scale flocking to the communist cause.

b. The Cambodian Army has with some exceptions performed poorly against communist forces. Its morale is still generally high, but it presently is manifestly incapable of resisting anything more than small-scale attacks, and a lengthy period of training will be necessary before it will be an effective fighting force.

c. Whatever military defense of Cambodia is put up will depend greatly upon assistance from ARVN ground and air forces and on US air support, and (insofar as time is available) on substantial outside help in equipping and training the Cambodian Army. Thai regular forces are unlikely to engage in combat operations

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except in areas adjacent to their own borders. No other countries are likely to send combat forces to Cambodia, or provide more than a small amount of economic or material assistance.

d. Hanoi's forces have caused the Cambodian Government to give up much of the north and the entire northeast areas of the country, and are operating with disruptive effect in the south and southeast. This signifies that communist objectives are not limited to the maintenance of supply lines from Laos through Cambodia into South Vietnam, but almost certainly include the collapse of the Lon Nol regime. Yet it is not clear how rapidly or with what weight of effort Hanoi intends to pursue this aim.

58. We are reasonably confident that the Lon Nol government, with continued allied support, has enough strength and determination to withstand likely communist military and political pressures during the current rainy season. Once the rainy season is over, however, sometime in October or November, the prospect opens up of a stronger communist military offensive, possibly against Phnom Penh itself, to get rid of the Lon Nol government rapidly. For the military and political reasons discussed in Sections I and II above, we doubt that Hanoi would think such a course of action worth the cost

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and risk. If this were the only threat to the government's survival, we would judge that its chances of lasting through 1970 and into 1971 were good.

59. But all-out attack is not the only circumstance in which the Cambodian Government might fail. Hanoi will assuredly continue and perhaps increase its military pressures and political activities within the country. We doubt that either Lon Nol or his adherents have yet faced up to the prospect of a long and difficult struggle. Once it is borne in upon them that death and destruction inflicted by both sides are likely to be the order of the day for months or years, and that Cambodians will have to do much of their own fighting, against very heavy odds, the mood in Phnom Penh could turn to depression and despair. In such circumstances, the present leadership might seek an accommodation with the communists or it might be challenged by other non-communist elements bent on such an accommodation, or central authority might simply dissolve as individual leaders left the country for refuge abroad.

60. Even in view of these considerations, we think the chances are somewhat better than even that Lon Nol's government will still be in existence at the end of 1970. The fact that it

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has survived the major upheavals and disasters of past months suggests that it probably has sufficient stamina and public support to see it through a few more months, and perhaps longer. By year's end, however, its situation is highly unlikely to be improved in any basic way. Thus, the end of the year will not mark any decisive moment of the struggle; the critical period may come in the early months of 1971.