

Communist Arms Shipments
via Sihanoukville

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18 May 70 Blind Memo re DCI Briefing Memo on the Communist Use
of Sihanoukville

22 May 70 Blind Memo re CIA Estimate of Communist Arms Shipments
Delivered to VC/NVA Forces via Sihanoukville

Attachment: Table, CIA Estimates of Communist
Military Deliveries to Sihanoukville,
1965-1969, dated 2 Jun 70

Table, CIA Estimates of Communist Ordnance
Shipments to Cambodia, 1963-65 and
1966-69

Table, Comparison of MACV and CIA Estimate
of Communist Military Shipments to
Sihanoukville, October 1966-December 1969

11 Jun 70 Dendo to DD/ER memo re Unidentified Cargoes Delivered to
Sihanoukville, January 1967-April 1969

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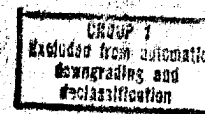
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18 May 1970

SUBJECT: DCI Briefing Memo on the Communist Use
of Sihanoukville

1. I would like to deal with the question (of North Vietnamese use of the port of Sihanoukville for the movement of arms and ammunition to Communist sanctuaries along the borders of IV, III, and southern II Corps) at some length because the Agency's position is sometimes misunderstood and because our work on this problem is a good example of the close and effective meshing of CIA's field collection efforts with Headquarters analysis.
2. In brief, CIA's position is that the Sihanoukville route became an important source of arms supply sometime in 1968 and continued as such into early 1970. But even in those two years, the Sihanoukville route probably provided no more than one half of the estimated Communist resupply requirements for arms and ammunition in southern II, III, and IV Corps. Thus, it seemed obvious that the Communists were using other routes, principally the system of trails and road segments leading southward from the Laos panhandle along the Cambodian border to support their forces in southern South Vietnam.

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3. As far as we know, there has never been any important disagreement in the Intelligence Community in Washington on this subject. The Agency, DIA, INR, and NSA have worked closely together on all aspects of this complicated problem and our agreed positions are to be found in several National Intelligence Estimates, Memoranda, and Special Briefing papers dating back to 1966.... There has, however, been disagreement between the Intelligence Community in Washington and the field; specifically the Intelligence Directorate of the US Command in Saigon -- the J-2 MACV.

4. In discussing these differences, it is important to understand that the fundamental issue has not been the narrow question of the amount of arms moving through Sihanoukville. Rather, the larger question since the fall of 1968 has been this: Is the Sihanoukville route vital to the Communist forces in lower II, III, and IV Corps? In other words, if the use of Sihanoukville were denied the Communists, would they still be able to provide essential arms and ammunition to their forces in southern South Vietnam?

5. CIA's position on this central question has never changed; it has been that sufficient arms and ammunition could be moved from North Vietnam over the Ho Chi Minh trail(s) in Laos and

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southward over the extensions of these trails and road segments along the Cambodian/South Vietnam border to meet and satisfy Communist requirements in southern South Vietnam. We have said, in other words, that whatever the flow from Sihanoukville and whatever this route's attractions in terms of ease of movement, the Communists would not permit themselves to become critically dependent on it because it was vulnerable to Cambodian political action -- it could be cut without warning. The overland route, on the other hand, was completely under Communist control; they would continue to improve it and defend it and they would consider retention of an overland route as basic to their strategy in all of South Vietnam.

6. The J-2 MACV took a contrary position beginning in the fall of 1968, arguing that insufficient supplies were moving through Laos (because of the 7th Air Force interdiction effort) to support Communist forces in southern South Vietnam, that there was, in any event, little or no evidence of supplies moving southward from the tri-border area, and that intelligence available in Saigon showed a flow of arms and ammunition through Sihanoukville far in excess of Cambodian needs and more than sufficient to supply Communist requirements in southern South Vietnam. MACV concluded that the Sihanoukville route had been

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the primary source for Communist arms in southern South Vietnam since October 1966.

7. MACV's conclusions obviously generated great interest in Washington and I dispatched a joint CIA, DIA, INR team to Saigon under the leadership of senior and highly experienced intelligence officers to review the evidence with MACV. This group first of all determined that all the evidence being used in Saigon was also available in Washington so that any differences which might exist rested on the evaluation of raw data and the analysis of that data.

8. The Team's report, dated 31 December 1968, agreed with MACV to the extent of saying that there was little remaining doubt that elements of the Cambodian Army, with high level complicity, were engaged on an organized basis in shipping arms to the Communists. But it also found that the evidence available did not permit a quantification of this flow. Much of the evidence came from suspect sources, from hearsay, or reflected misinterpretation of normal commercial and economic activity within Cambodia. For example, MACV claimed in December 1968 that almost 14,000 tons of arms and ammunition had entered Sihanoukville between October 1966 and August 1968. But at that time we were able to substantiate

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with hard intelligence less than 1,700 tons of military supplies,
less than a fourth²⁸⁵⁵ of which was arms and ammunition. We also
noted that MACV classed all the military deliveries to Sihanoukville
as arms and ammunition and failed to distinguish between arms and
other types of military supplies.

9. Our inability to quantify the arms flow through
Sihanoukville was, of course, unsatisfactory in view of the high
level interest in the problem. We moved on the basis of the
Team's recommendation to a concentrated collection and analytical
effort to clarify the many uncertainties about the role of Cambodia
and, hopefully, to resolve our differences with the field. This
was no easy problem. Cambodia itself was to a considerable degree
a denied area to the US at that time.

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10. At Headquarters, the CIA International Transportation Branch (which gained great credit for its work on Soviet arms shipments to Cuba) turned its years of professional experience in monitoring Bloc ship movements, to an analysis of cargos entering Sihanoukville from 1966 onward. It examined and re-examined the MACV data on munitions arrivals at that port and made its own independent analysis.

11. As a result of these activities, and other studies and collection efforts too numerous to mention, we began to get a more confident and firm grip on the role of Sihanoukville, the Cambodian Army, and individual Cambodian personalities in the movement of arms to the Communists. By early 1970 we were able, for example, to produce a highly reliable analysis of all Communist military deliveries to Sihanoukville, and to specify with much greater assurance how much of these deliveries included actual ordnance. Moreover, we were able to derive reliable estimates of the minimum ammunition stocks held in FARK depots. By subtracting FARK consumption and inventories from total deliveries to Sihanoukville, we were able to calculate a residual representing the probable maximum amount of arms that might have been available for delivery to the Communists. These calculations provided a cross check on actual shipments by truck from Cambodian depots to Communist base areas.

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12. The result of our study makes two things clear:

a. That military deliveries to Sihanoukville until some time in mid-1968 fell far short of Communist requirements and that the Sihanoukville route simply could not have been the primary supply channel since October 1966 as maintained by MACV.

b. That even when the Sihanoukville route did become an important supply route in 1968-1969, it probably supplied little more than half of the enemy's requirements in southern South Vietnam.

13. At the same time, our continuing analysis of the flow of supplies through Laos showed more than enough arms and ammunition moving on these routes to meet Communist requirements in all of South Vietnam. Photography revealed that the Communists continued to improve trails and road segments from the tri-border area southward to lower II Corps, and other sources continued to confirm the existence of a functioning logistic organization along these trails. For all these reasons, we continued to conclude that while Sihanoukville had become an important source of arms for the Communists, the overland route was basic to the Communist position and strategy in southern South Vietnam.

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14. We are proud of our effort on this subject; it has been highly professional, highly objective, and aimed at providing our consumers with authenticated data. We are still not satisfied, of course, because we still lack a firm overall figure for the arms passed to the Communists through Sihanoukville, nor do we have any basis in hard evidence to quantify the actual flow of supplies on the overland routes to southern South Vietnam.

15. We hope, however, that with a little bit of luck, documents will soon turn up in the recently invested Communist base areas that will provide the final answers to these questions and permit us to close the books -- one way or another -- on the Sihanoukville versus the overland route issue.

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AN EVALUATION OF RECENT CLANDESTINE REPORTING
ON CAMBODIA

October 1969

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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Foreword

One of the most intriguing -- and important -- intelligence problems of the war in Vietnam concerns the flow of materiel from external sources to VC/NVA troops in South Vietnam. In recent months there has accumulated a large body of clandestine reporting that points to Cambodia as an important route for such supplies which, it is argued, arrive by sea at the port of Sihanoukville and are transported surreptitiously, [redacted] to the South Vietnam border.

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This evaluation examines in detail the clandestine sources which have provided the bulwark for the "Cambodian supply route" thesis. The strengths and weaknesses of each source and their principal contributions to our knowledge of enemy logistics in Cambodia have been set forth without any intention to lead to conclusions beyond the obvious one that there are still important gaps in our information yet to be filled, particularly the data needed to quantify the flow of supplies from Cambodia. No attempt has been made to weigh the evidence of an active Cambodian supply route against the substantial picture which has been developed over the years of a logistics system operating through the Laotian Panhandle, this being outside the scope of this evaluation.

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