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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

22 May 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Implications of the Refugee Boom on the Hong Kong Border

I. THE SITUATION

1. During the past few weeks the number of refugees illegally entering Hong Kong from Communist China by land has increased dramatically. Until recently the Hong Kong authorities were apprehending only a handful of such illegal immigrants per month. In early May this number rose to around 200 per day. It has continued to rise rapidly, reaching 4,543 in the 24 hours ending at 8 AM 14 May and has continued at around 4,000 a day since that time.

2. Most of those apprehended have been fed (some clothed and given medicine) then sent back across the border via the railway bridge at Lowu. Thus far, most refugees have not resisted arrest, although there have been some instances of violence. Virtually none

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of the escapees carried exit permits or other documents, but
* Communist border guards have been very cooperative in receiving
them back into China. According to some reports, however, the
returned refugees have remained near the border -- milling
about in thousands -- awaiting another opportunity of slipping
across the border.

3. The generally chaotic condition along the border makes
the gathering of precise information difficult. The Hong Kong
police, already trying to manage a population with more than a
million refugees, is much more interested in getting the escapees
off their hands and back across the border than in collecting
intelligence. Thus interrogation has been very spotty and inad-
equate. Also the authorities have kept foreign observers and
the press away from the border zone.

4. Such evidence as has become available indicates that
the refugees are mostly peasants (some with their families) from
Kwangtung province. Some are students and workers who were

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recently expelled from the cities to rural areas. The Hong Kong authorities have unequivocally denied sensational rumors and press stories that members of security forces were found among the refugees. A large proportion of the border crossers are between 15 and 30 years of age. Although they are uniformly lean and nearly all claim hunger as their principal motive for fleeing, sample medical checks have indicated that they are generally not in bad health. They are hungry but not starved.

5. It appears that Chinese Communist officials and frontier guards have relaxed their controls along the border.



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6. Troops of the regular army began to replace some units of People's Armed Police along the border on 1 May after a relatively heavy surge of illegal crossings. The reason for this action is not known; thus far the behavior of the troops toward

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the refugees has not appeared to differ from that previously exhibited by the police. The total strength of Communist security forces now in the border area is not known.

II. IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNAL SECURITY IN COMMUNIST CHINA

7. There are at least three possible explanations for the recent surge of refugees across the Hong Kong border: (1) a general breakdown of the Chinese Communist internal security system; (2) a localized breakdown of the system; and (3) a deliberate policy of permitting the refugees to escape. Present evidence is scanty and insufficient to prove conclusively the correctness of any of these alternative explanations. However, it is worth examining the factors which strengthen or weaken the plausibility of each interpretation.

8. If the situation outlined above is indicative of a general breakdown in the discipline and effectiveness of Chinese Communist security forces, we would expect to find some evidence of such a breakdown elsewhere in China. While there has been deterioration of morale and effectiveness in local administrations and even in the security forces, there is no persuasive evidence

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of a general breakdown in the internal security system. An estimate to this effect was made in SNIE 13-3-62 and NIE 13-4-62 and the Hong Kong Country Team expressed essentially the same conclusion as recently as 12 May.

9. A better case can be made for the second interpretation -- a localized breakdown in the security apparatus. The events on the Hong Kong border certainly raise serious questions about the effectiveness of the security system in that locality. However, two things should be considered before the "breakdown" hypothesis is accepted even on a local basis. First, apparently no members of the security forces have joined the escapees. If there were a serious problem of discipline in the security apparatus, we would expect at least a few of the border guards to join in the flight across the border. Secondly, the border guards have uniformly abstained from the use of force to restrain the flood, and no incidents are known to have occurred. In the case of a breakdown some border guards, in the absence of orders to the contrary, would almost certainly have shot persons attempting to escape.

10. Such evidence as we have tends to support the third explanation: that the sudden exodus has been made possible,

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perhaps even encouraged, by official Chinese Communist policy. The apparently uniform and simultaneous switch all along the border to leniency toward the escapees can best be explained by this thesis. Besides the sympathy or indifference shown by frontier guards and local officials, there are unconfirmed reports of an official policy encouraging the mass exodus. Reports concerning one public security station in Canton indicate that in April officers were told to process as many exit permits as possible for persons desiring to emigrate to Hong Kong and Macao. Other reports describe in detail various schemes worked out by public security cadres to facilitate illegal entry into the two colonies.

11. If a policy of permitting escape has indeed been adopted, it probably derives from many considerations. In the present critical period before the new harvest, the Chinese authorities may have decided that to halt the outflow of refugees violently would have worse effects than allowing some to move across into Hong Kong. They might have reasoned that if Hong Kong authorities continued strictly to return the illegal border-crossers, it would be unnecessary to carry out the unsavory task of shooting down unarmed refugees. In this way the Chinese army and police

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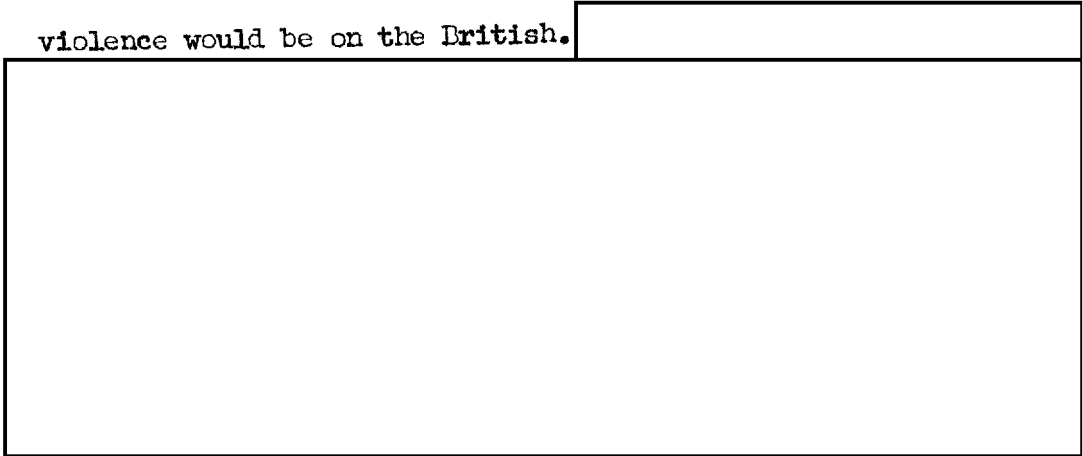
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could avoid antagonizing the population and the onus of enforcing border security with the inevitable incidence of violence would be on the British.

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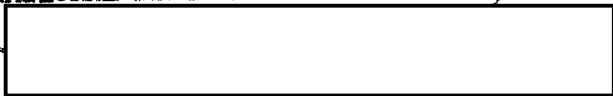
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12. Whatever may be the explanation for the recent flood of refugees, it must be politically embarrassing to the Chinese Communist regime and constitutes further testimony to the deteriorating situation in China. Public morale and discipline have probably declined to the lowest point since the Communists took over the mainland in 1949. However, we believe that the public security system remains essentially intact and effective throughout the country. Present indications are that the regime will continue to be able to isolate and repress any likely internal challenge to its authority.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

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SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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