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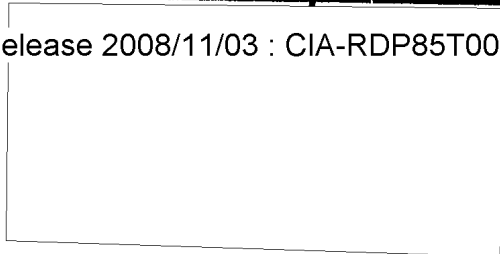
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DIRECTORATE OF
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Developments in Indochina

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

(Information as of 1500)

SOUTH VIETNAM

Viet Cong briefings indicate that the Communists are preparing for action sometime after 24 January to coincide with a cease-fire announcement. PRG President Huynh Thanh Phat in a New Year's message strikes a more militant tone about the future than Hanoi has been doing lately. Non-Communist political groups are also maneuvering in anticipation of a cease-fire.

LAOS

Communist negotiators are eager to get back to Vientiane. Prime Minister Souvanna is going ahead with his plans to visit New Delhi. The Chinese road from Nam Tha is now motorable some 24 miles to the southwest. The Communists are probing government positions around Paksong.

CAMBODIA

Sihanouk insists that a cease-fire in Vietnam will have no effect in Cambodia. Lon Non now controls the Khmer Krom association.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

The Communists are preparing for increased action in anticipation of an early cease-fire announcement. New instructions have been passed to Communist officials throughout South Vietnam in meetings and briefings during the past ten days or so. The orders call for a wide range of pre-cess-fire actions from showing the flag to large-scale, coordinated attacks against important government installations, lightly defended population centers and outposts, and major highways. The objective is to strengthen the enemy's territorial position as well as to gather as many more people as possible prior to a cease-fire.

Although some of the enemy briefings describe plans for major military operations, it still is not clear just how much the Communists hope to escalate the fighting. None of their major combat units have left the country; many, in fact, remain relatively close to major target areas and some have been noted moving closer to potential targets. Local units in some areas have also been detected moving toward populated areas. It does not appear, however, that the Communists are in the state of readiness that they were prior to their spring offensive last year.

[redacted] there have been some references to combat units celebrating Tet early--several units near Saigon were allegedly told to celebrate the holiday from 20 to 23 January and then be ready for battle. [redacted]

[redacted] The Communists appear to be planning about four days of increased activity between the announcement of an agreement and the time that it actually goes into effect. The reports indicate that most enemy cadre are being told that the cease-fire will be observed by the major military units, but the political action will continue.

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Many South Vietnamese officials also seem to think that a cease-fire is imminent. The Thua Thien Province chief and mayor of Da Nang recently claimed that there would be a cease-fire sometime between 25 and 30 January. The commander of South Vietnamese forces in the provinces around Saigon has suspended his offensive operations and redeployed his units closer to the major population centers, and units elsewhere are being shifted to strengthen weaker areas. Orders for strict leave policies have been sent to National Police units, and some military units are on full alert.

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Phat Looks At the Past and Future

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At the PRG's "New Year" meeting earlier this month the participants heard a long state-of-the-movement report from PRG President Huynh Thanh Phat. Phat's peroration--and the only part of his report picked up so far by the North Vietnamese and Chinese news agencies--follows the meeting's final communique in emphasizing conciliation, peace, and a political effort based on a united front. At some points in his speech, however, his comments have a far more militant tone than is currently coming from the Hanoi leadership--a tone which gives the impression that the PRG is, at the least, planning to keep up its guard and strengthen its armed forces after a cease-fire.

Phat delivered a euphoric account of alleged Communist military "victories" in the last year and then asserted that the military balance is shifting more and more in the Communists' favor. In fact, he said, "the more the war is prolonged, the more the puppet army declines and disintegrates in an irremediable way." This is one of Hanoi's standard lines, of course, but it has been absent from recent North Vietnamese propaganda. Phat seems to be asserting, if only for the record, that he believes the military struggle should continue.

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Phat addressed the question of aid from the North in a way that suggests that the PRG may have some worries on this score. Among the reasons he gave for past PRG "victories" was North Vietnam's "immense and ardent love for the South." Hanoi, he said, "has always kept its firm oath by assisting kith-and-kin South Vietnam with manpower and materials." For its part, Phat pledged the PRG to fulfill its own obligations toward the common fatherland and to keep up the fight for the "liberation of the South and the defense of the North." These passages could be aimed at reminding Hanoi that it is not absolved of its "oath" until victory is achieved. Later Phat asserted that "people of the same country must love one another." The immediate context of this remark is the need for unity among South Vietnamese, but the passage is so worded that it could apply to the North as well.

Phat took a defensive stance when he addressed the question of Communist political activity in South Vietnam. He as much as acknowledged that the PRG has fallen short in this regard, but he attributed any shortcomings to the "insidious tricks" of the Communists' enemies. The latter, he said, have made people "commit crimes, have forced people to take up weapons and kill their compatriots, or have pressured people into joining the coercive organizations." Even worse, the enemies have been able to "instill erroneous sentiments" and render people "unable to see the truth." Nonetheless, he asserted somewhat lamely, "the overwhelming majority of our people" remain united in their patriotism. (Phat says nothing about whether they are also united in their devotion to the PRG).

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Political Forces Seek to Strengthen Their Positions

South Vietnam's major political groups are continuing to maneuver in preparation for the cease-fire and in response to the recent presidential decree stiffening criteria for political parties. Most independent and opposition elements still appear to be thinking in terms of operating outside of the government camp.

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The An Quang Buddhists continue to worry about Communist pressure on them when the fighting stops. One An Quang monk recently told US Embassy officers that just before the expected cease-fire in October, Viet Cong cadres had visited many pagodas, even in Saigon, to demand cooperation on pain of punishment. The monk said the Buddhists are accelerating efforts to tighten their organization and to educate young bonzes on how to counter expected Communist subversion. They are also planning to organize various social welfare activities in the provinces as a means of developing more direct ties with the faithful. Although there continue to be indications that some An Quang leaders favor cooperating with the government to meet the Communist challenge, most remain unhappy over the decree on political parties.

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Catholic political leaders appear to be the furthest along in trying to meet the terms of the decree. Several Catholic factions associated with Senate Chairman Nguyen Van Huyen are planning to set up a new "Freedom Party." Some of the participants are optimistic that they can bring in non-Catholic groups, and they already have had contacts with the Farmer-Worker Party and a faction of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD), among others. Nevertheless, the Catholics admit that many of their politically active followers have joined the government's Democracy Party. Many others, they assert, would prefer political inactivity to forced affiliation with the government party.

The largely southern-based Progressive Nationalist Movement also hopes to qualify under the new decree, although it doubts that it can do so on its own. One party leader told US Embassy officers that the party will try to gain the adherence of several small factions, including Hoa Hao and Cao Dai groups, a VNQDD faction, and a "right-wing" An Quang Buddhist element. He asserted that his party will make "every effort" to maintain its legal existence as a "constructive opposition" party.

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The status of South Vietnam's non-Communist political groupings seems likely to remain in doubt for some time as the various groups try to adapt to the new conditions brought on by the cease-fire and the decree. Some now seem overly optimistic about forming alliances and remaining active as legal and independent parties. If President Thieu continues to develop the Democracy Party at the expense of other groups without making any conciliatory gestures toward them, some groups could become more alienated from the government. On the other hand, the pressure of a confrontation with the Communists could yet induce some factions to join the government camp.

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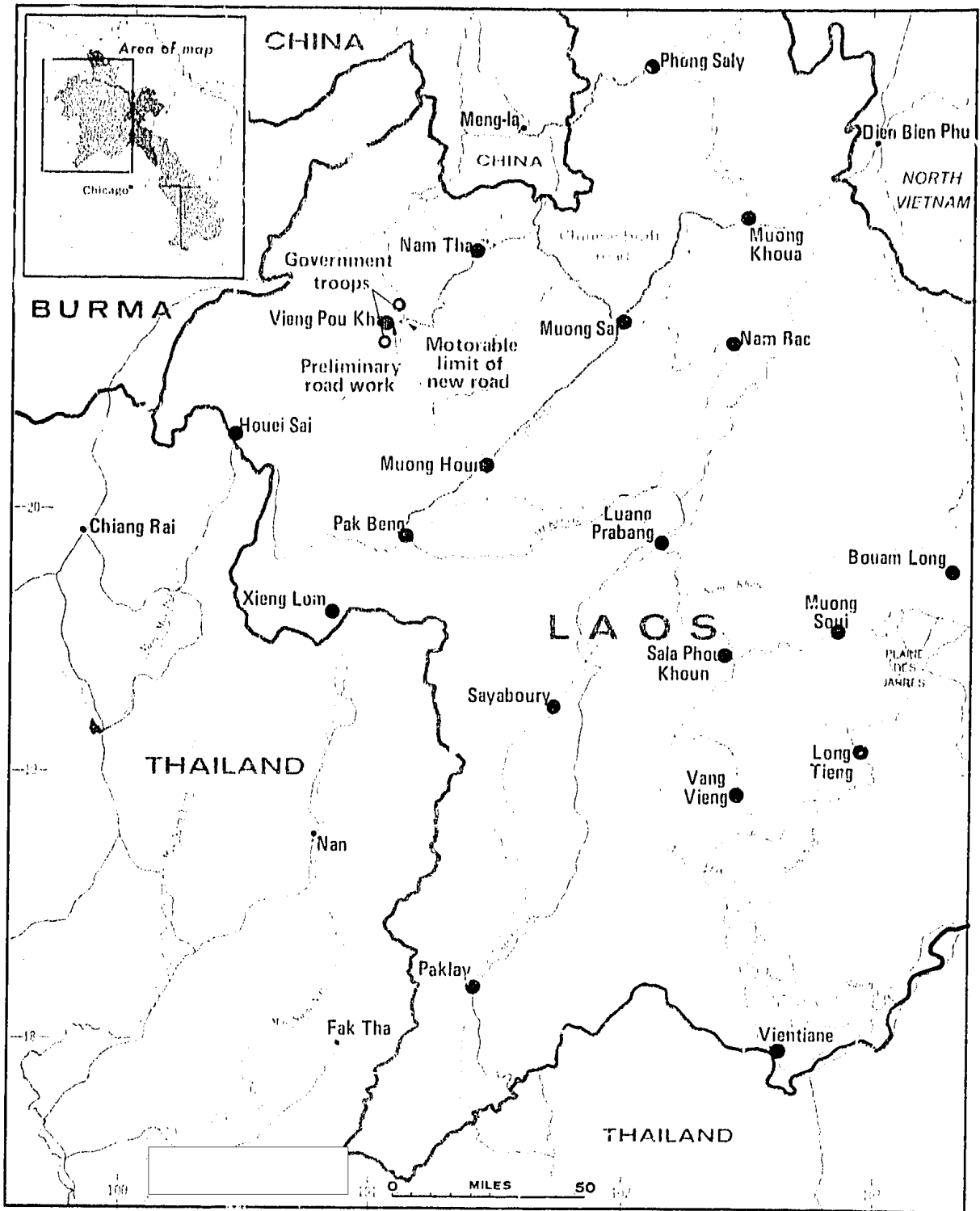


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● Government held position ● Communist held position

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LAOS

The chairman of the Lao Communist negotiating team, Phoune Sipraseuth, and four other delegates apparently will miss this week's session of the Vientiane peace talks. The Communist delegates left for Sam Neua on 16 January saying that they hoped to return by 23 January, but the regularly scheduled flight from Hanoi to Vientiane on that day has been canceled. A Communist representative in Vientiane has requested the International Control Commission to provide a special flight to Hanoi and back on 26 January--presumably for Phoune and his party. 

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Souvanna Off to New Delhi

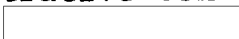

Government officials in Vientiane report that, peace speculation notwithstanding, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma still intends to leave for New Delhi on 27 January. Souvanna will spend three days in the Indian capital where he will discuss continuing Indian support to the International Control Commission.  Souvanna will also seek Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's support in persuading the Soviet and British governments to participate in a settlement of the conflict in Laos. On his way home Souvanna is scheduled to stop off in Bangkok to confer with Thai leaders for several days before returning to Vientiane on 2 February.

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Chinese Road Construction

Chinese construction crews in northwestern Laos are continuing work on a road extending southwest from Nam Tha, a Pathet Lao administrative center near the China border. Photography   showed that vegetation has been cleared along the alignment of old Route 3 to within less than a

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mile of the former government refugee center at Vieng Pou Kha; the road is motorable for 24 miles southwest of Nam Tha. Two government battalions several miles north and south of Vieng Pou Kha have been trying to retake the settlement from the Pathet Lao since early December.

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Stirrings on the Bolovens Plateau

The recent lull in the fighting on the central Bolovens Plateau was broken on 21 January when small Communist units probed government positions around Paksong. The attacks probably were carried out by patrols reconnoitering government defenses near the town in preparation for larger attacks in the near future.

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North of the Bolovens, troops from a 3,000-man government force are edging toward Saravane. Enemy shellings and ground attacks have slowed the irregular units advancing on Saravane from the southwest, and the eight-battalion force moving on the town along Route 16 is also beginning to encounter some resistance.

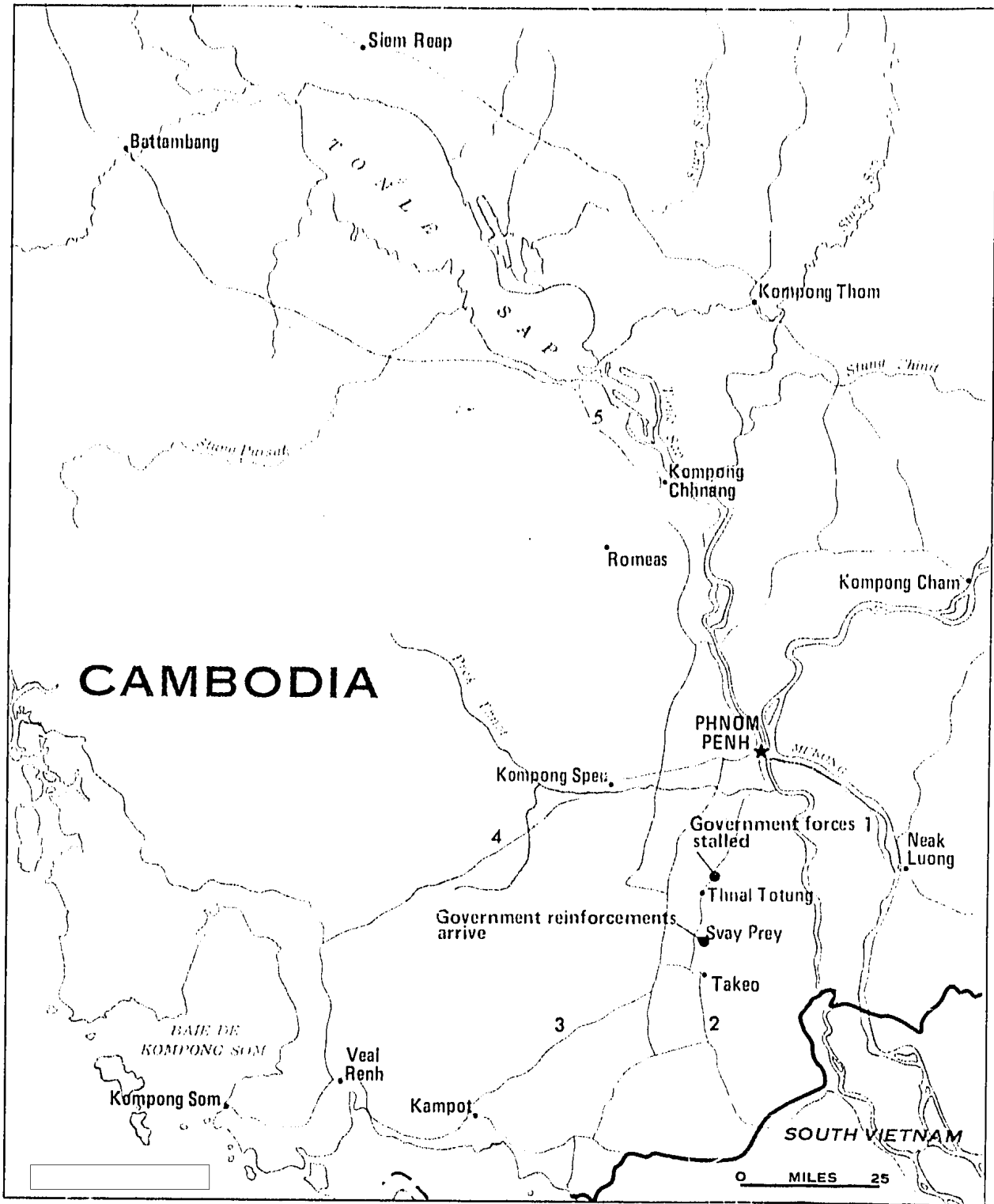
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CAMBODIA

In an interview with a group of journalists in Peking on 21 January, Sihanouk stated that there was no question of a cease-fire between Hanoi and Washington being applied to Cambodia. Without expanding, he also said that the Soviet Union and France will lose a great deal when Cambodia is "liberated." Turning to his travel plans, Sihanouk said that at the end of this month he would spend a week in Hanoi for the signing of a joint declaration. After returning to China, he will make an official visit to Canton. In May and June, he will make official visits to Senegal, Guinea, Mali, and the Congo. En route he will also make unofficial stops in the five countries he visited last summer--Romania, Albania, Yugoslavia, Mauritania, and Algeria.

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The Military Situation

Communist pressure against the former government training camp at Romeas eased slightly on 20 January, and several groups of Cambodian reinforcements are continuing to advance toward the town. Elsewhere, the squadron of armored personnel carriers that had been supporting the slow movement of government paratroops down Route 2 toward the encircled village of Thnal Totung has temporarily abandoned its effort to break through Communist resistance and returned to Phnom Penh. Farther south, other government paratroops have again linked up with the battalion defending Svay Prey. These forces are now to push up the highway toward Thnal Totung.

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Lon Non Strikes Again

Brigadier General Lon Non has gained control over the leadership of the Khmer Kampuchea Krom

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Association (AKKK), an organization of Vietnamese-born Cambodians that includes military and civilian members. [REDACTED] all of the 20 directors who were recently elected at the AKKK's annual meeting are supporters of Lon Non. He evidently rigged the balloting by bribing many of the voters. Although the AKKK claims a membership of 200,000, less than 1,000 actually voted. Neutral AKKK leaders--those who do not back Lon Non--knew that the voting was rigged and have lost interest in the association. Even though the AKKK is not politically important, Lon Non apparently could not resist the opportunity to put his personal stamp on it. [REDACTED]

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