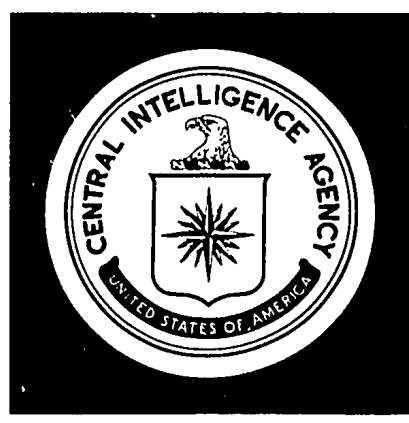
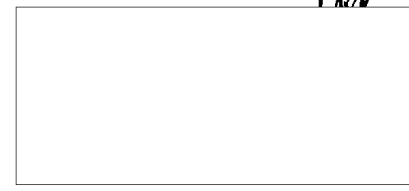


Approved For Release
2008/03/03 :
CIA-RDP85T00875R00170003

Approved For Release
2008/03/03 :
CIA-RDP85T00875R00170003

25X1

Secret



DPSPD

**DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE**

Intelligence Memorandum

*VC/NVA Combat Forces in Cambodia
Since the Deposition of Sihanouk*

25X1



Secret

ER IM 72-36

25X1

March 1972

Copy No. **62**

Page Denied

[REDACTED]

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
March 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

**VC/NVA COMBAT FORCES IN CAMBODIA
SINCE THE DEPOSITION OF SIHANOUK**

Introduction

1. VC/NVA combat forces have been located on Cambodian territory in varying degrees throughout most of the Vietnam War. Initially they were confined to base areas along the border with South Vietnam and seldom ventured further into Cambodia. After the deposition of Prince Sihanouk, however, the VC/NVA began to move deeper into Cambodian territory, rapidly occupying large areas of the countryside. To control this additional territory and to cope with an expanded war, the VC/NVA force structure was enlarged by infiltrating additional units and personnel from North Vietnam and recruiting local Khmer into their units. This memorandum describes the development, current strength, and disposition of the VC/NVA regular combat forces in Cambodia, and offers some judgments on their current capabilities.

2. A significant number of Khmer have been recruited into VC/NVA units. These are not included in the VC/NVA combat force estimate presented in this memorandum. For a discussion of Khmer combat forces including the fillers in the VC/NVA forces, see ER IM 71-218, **Khmer Communist Combat Forces in Cambodia**, November 1971, [REDACTED]

25X1

25X1

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Economic Research and coordinated within CIA.

[REDACTED]

Discussion

Evolution of VC/NVA Force Structure

3. At the time of the deposition of Prince Sihanouk -- 18 March 1970 -- an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 VC/NVA combat personnel in Cambodia were deployed in base areas along the Cambodia-South Vietnam border.⁽¹⁾ There, they enjoyed sanctuary for resupply, training, resting, and refitting and conducted offensive operations against South Vietnam.

4. The entry of Cambodia into the war fundamentally altered the strategic situation and required that the enemy make significant adjustments in its force commitments. Within a few weeks, major elements of the VC/NVA 5th, 7th, and 9th Divisions moved westward from GVN Military Region 3 into Cambodia, and by 29 April 1970 they had seized the Cambodian towns of Krek, Mimot, and Snuol. On 30 April, US and South Vietnamese forces launched operations across the Cambodia border, and the remaining elements of the 5th, 7th, and 9th Divisions deployed deeper into Cambodia,⁽²⁾ overrunning the countryside northeast of Phnom Penh. At the same time, elements of the NVA 1st Division (redesignated the Phuoc Long Front) deployed from GVN MR 4 into Cambodia, southeast of the capital [REDACTED]. These deployments increased VC/NVA combat strength in Cambodia to between 20,000 and 25,000 men.

5. North of Phnom Penh, the VC/NVA continued their push to the west. Upon arriving at Siem Reap, the 275th Regiment of the VC 5th Division apparently split to form the core of an additional regiment. Subsequently, these new units were augmented both by locally recruited Khmer and by personnel newly infiltrated from North Vietnam and

25X1

25X1

1. The number of troops in Cambodia before the deposition of Sihanouk fluctuated widely depending on the annual campaigning cycle and the tactical situation in South Vietnam. Administrative Service units also were located in the Cambodian base areas during this time, but they will not be covered in this memorandum.

2. The 69th Artillery Command, which supports these three divisions, also deployed into Cambodia at this time. This unit was composed of the 96th and 208th Artillery Regiments.

Page Denied

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Denied



25X1

7. By September 1970 the VC/NVA combat forces in Cambodia had established standard areas of operation, which continue to the present. The

25X1



thus far in the current dry season, has now increased the VC/NVA force structure in Cambodia to between 30,000 and 35,000 men, representing an expansion of about 15,000 men since the deposition of Sihanouk in 1970. During this same period, the Khmer Communist (KC) combat force grew to between 15,000 and 30,000 men. Thus the total Communist combat



25X1

25X1

[redacted]

force augmentation in Cambodia since early 1970 has been 30,000 to 45,000 personnel. While the KC combat forces are not as capable as those of the VC/NVA, they do bring total Communist combat strength to between 45,000 and 65,000 men.

25X1 11. [redacted] the bulk of the combat force is deployed in Kompong Cham Province northeast of Phnom Penh and in Kompong Speu Province east and south of the capital. The forces in both these provinces pose the greatest threat to FANK units defending the capital, and those in Kompong Cham pose the main threat to ARVN forces defending South Vietnam's MR 3.

Current Combat Capability

[redacted]

25X1

dual organization gives the Vietnamese Communists the ability to use regional forces to protect their supply routes without tying down the offensive capability of the mobile strike force. Being primarily defensive, the regional forces have limited their activities to population control, harassment of FANK lines of communication, and attacks by fire against FANK units moving into their areas of responsibility. Reports that these regional regiments are understrength and lack sufficient arms and ammunition may also account for their relatively light combat role.

13. The VC/NVA mobile strike forces are similar in strength and character to VC/NVA main force units operating in northern South Vietnam. The strike force battalions average about 300 men each and are well equipped with modern small arms and crew-served weapons. At the regimental and division level additional combat support units are available, which increase the fire power of the mobile strike force battalions when operating as a part of these larger formations.

[redacted]

25X1

14. The mobile strike force battalions are about the same strength as the FANK battalions in the field. Unit for unit these mobile strike forces are generally superior to FANK units because of their better training and higher firepower. They are about half the size of ARVN units which operate out of GVN MR 3, but any comparison with ARVN is obscured by the presence of Allied air power.

25X1

Page Denied

25X1

25X1

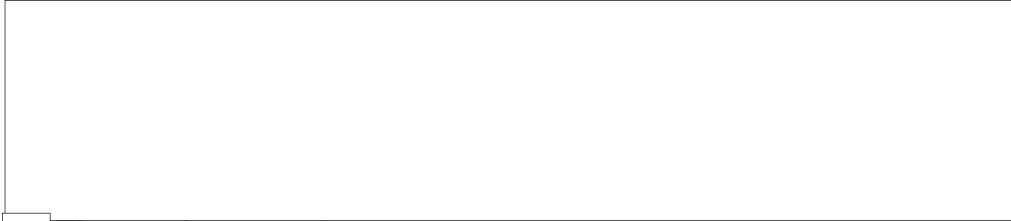


15. On the other hand, the VC/NVA regional forces are probably less capable than many of their FANK counterparts. These units contain substantial numbers of locally recruited ethnic Khmer who are much less motivated than recruits from North Vietnam. These units also lack most of the combat support that the mobile strike forces enjoy. However, since their mission is largely one of holding areas previously liberated by the mobile strike forces, their requirement for combat support is somewhat less.

16.



25X1



25X1

The requirement of such a large part of the COSVN force structure in Cambodia to perform rear area security missions has greatly relieved the pressure on ARVN forces operating in southern South Vietnam. There have, as yet, been no substantial enemy attacks either in the Saigon region or in the important rice producing Delta since VC/NVA forces left for Cambodia in 1970.

Conclusions and Outlook

17. The VC/NVA combat force in Cambodia is presently stronger than at any previous time during the Indochina conflict. The continuing augmentation of the force structure by personnel infiltrated from North Vietnam has kept the original VC/NVA units well up to strength while providing much of the additional manpower for the creation of as many as ten new regimental echelon formations. This force structure is probably now capable of overrunning any given military objective in Cambodia. However, an assault on the capital of Phnom Penh could, if FANK fought well or ARVN intervened, cost the VC/NVA much of their current combat force, and they would probably be unwilling to take that risk.

18. Prospects for continued growth of the VC/NVA force structure in Cambodia are difficult to determine because it is not possible to predict what kind of casualties will accompany the expected heavy fighting during the remainder of the current dry season.

25X1

If loss rates and the number of personnel sent into South Vietnam remain

25X1



25X1



25X1

25X1

about the same as last year, the VC/NVA force structure in Cambodia could expand at a moderate rate. The continued development of the KC force structure will, in turn, enable the VC/NVA to take on more ambitious offensive operations while the KC guard the rear areas. These operations could include moves against the ARVN forces along the Cambodia-South Vietnam border in preparation for a push into South Vietnam's MR 3 or more comprehensive offensive action against key government-controlled areas in Cambodia.

Page Denied