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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

6 December 1979

ALERT MEMORANDUM*

THAI-KAMPUCHEAN BORDER

A combination of factors could lead to rapid deterioration of the situation along the Thai-Kampuchean border. When Vietnam exerts even greater military pressure against the anti-Vietnamese resistance in Kampuchea--as it plans to do later this month--fighting could occur across the Thai-Kampuchean border to such an extent that the Thai armed forces would be unable to cope. In addition, the government could be faced with an intolerable refugee burden and increased political criticism, possibly leading to a reversal of Thai policy toward Vietnam. Should the Thais see their security imperiled by Vietnamese military operations, they would doubtless appeal for US aid, possibly under the terms of the Manila Pact. Thailand would probably also seek Chinese support. (S-NE)

Vietnamese leaders may come to believe that they cannot eliminate resistance as long as Kampuchean continue to enjoy supposed sanctuary and resupply in Thailand. In such a case, attacks on refugee camps in

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Thailand assumed to be supply depots can be expected. In a further measure to force a reversal of what the Vietnamese clearly feel is a Thai policy of aiding and abetting the enemy, Vietnamese troops may deliberately seek to engage Thai forces in order to deal them a humiliating defeat. ~~(S S)~~

The Vietnamese, with almost 200,000 troops in Kampuchea, intend to eliminate all anti-Vietnamese resistance in an offensive planned for later this month. The major effort will occur in western Kampuchea and, to this end, the Vietnamese have been reinforcing the three overstrength divisions already deployed along the border there. Associated logistic preparations have also been noted, as have air and air defense measures. Vietnamese cross-border shelling and cross-border forays have occurred from time to time, and Thai artillery has responded. To date, troops of both sides have attempted to avoid contact, though there have been minor clashes. The quantitative and qualitative military strength available to the Vietnamese is such that they could deal a crippling blow to local Thai military units--generally opposite Vietnamese concentrations--amounting to approximately a reinforced division (12,000 men). ~~(S S)~~

If, by accident or design, a significant engagement occurred between Thai and Vietnamese forces, and the former did not acquit themselves well, the situation would take on an even graver character. We cannot foresee

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how events would unfold, and what the major players would do. A major Thai defeat, however, could constitute sufficient reason for China to teach Vietnamese a second lesson. Besides the threat of wider international military involvement, there are domestic implications for Thailand as well. At this point, Prime Minister Kriangsak seems to have a fairly secure hold on power and to enjoy the confidence of Defense Minister and Thai Army Commander General Prem, the power behind the Prime Minister. A major Thai military reverse, however, could embolden Kriangsak's civilian and military critics. In particular, they might try to topple the government by exploiting such issues as the alleged Thai support for Kampuchean resistance forces, especially if such support were regarded as a provocation for a Vietnamese attack. Faced with political destruction, Kriangsak might be prompted to call upon the United States--as much to keep himself in power as to provide military assistance against an external threat. Likely principals in a new Thai Government would probably not alter internal policies significantly, but a successor to the current Prime Minister would be freer to begin seeking an accommodation with Vietnam. The long-term political consequences of such a shift may present a serious challenge to the credibility of military government. ~~(S NF)~~

The continuing massive influx of refugees, which the Vietnamese offensive will certainly aggravate, could alone have serious consequences for Kriangsak. The Thai Government and international aid agencies are

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already struggling to aid the more than one-half million Kampuchean refugees in Thailand. Although Thailand's present humanitarian policy of admitting refugees has public support, the refugee issue has aroused domestic opposition in the past, particularly when it appeared that Thailand was being forced to assume too much of the burden. The area of Vietnamese operations harbors large numbers of refugees. Some quarter million are reported encamped in Kampuchea within 75 kilometers of the border town of Poipet alone, and the Vietnamese might decide that the more it can push out of the country, the easier its job of pacification will be. The Thais fear that there may be as many as a million more potential refugees in western Kampuchea. If the refugee situation deteriorates and the international community, particularly the United States, does not respond promptly with increased assistance and cooperation, Kriangsak's political opponents would have a readymade issue to exploit. ~~(S NF)~~

The pressures outlined above are beyond the capabilities of the Thais to control adequately on their own. Should fighting spread across the border in a major way--and bring with it a host of ancillary problems--the Thais will face an array of military and political issues that could force them to seek outside assistance, first from the United States, but also from China. If the Thais should believe that sufficient support is not forthcoming from either quarter, they might find it necessary to acquiesce to Vietnamese control of Kampuchea. ~~(S NF)~~

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