

MEMORANDUM

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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

INFORMATION

Gen Heng

December 9, 1971

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ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

MEMORANDUM FOR:

MR. KISSINGER

FROM:

JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE

SUBJECT:

Lon Nol and Political Problems in Phnom Penh

Handwritten notes:
H - what do you think?
Ozid JCS get older?
2 what exactly is the situation in Phnom Penh?

Recent Khmer military reverses have created serious political friction in Phnom Penh. Specifically at issue is Lon Nol's arbitrary and ineffective handling of the recent Chenla II operation along Route Six. All of the Embassy, military, and CIA reports we have seen indicate that Lon Nol's mismanagement contributed substantially to the magnitude of the government defeat.

Late last week, Sirik Matak, Chief of State Cheng Heng, and members of the FANK General Staff appealed to Lon Nol to coordinate the direction of military operations and to use established command channels. According to all reports, Lon Nol rejected these ideas out of hand.

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As a result, Lon Nol and Sirik Matak are now at loggerheads, although relations between the two have not yet been permanently damaged. As you know, the Lon Nol-Sirik Matak axis has been the major stabilizing factor in the political scene, and the question now is whether that relationship will survive the current difficulty. If it does not, Lon Nol would probably remain in power, but would be more isolated and even less effective.

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Sirik Matak [redacted] only American intervention could prevent a government crisis of major proportions. He urged that we persuade Lon Nol to take six month's rest abroad. [redacted]

[redacted] CIA's Far East Division chief in Washington, told me today [redacted] that Matak means what he says, and that we should act before it is too late.

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DOS and JCS reviews completed.

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Ambassador Swank also regards the situation as very serious, but at last report he does not believe that we should intervene directly (Tab B). He is stressing the need for Khmer unity and solidarity as appropriate. (However, Swank may have filed his cable before receiving word of Matak's direct appeal.)

Comment. I agree [redacted] that the situation is serious and that we should consider taking actions of some sort. These might include:

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-- Getting to Lon Nol through his doctor and move him out of the country for medical treatment, either to a U. S. facility or elsewhere as appropriate (he was considering going to Japan for a check-up some weeks back).

-- Having Admiral McCain, General Abrams or General Weyand approach Lon Nol for a heart-to-heart military talk, stressing the need for military professionalism, i. e. getting Lon Nol out of the direct chain of command. If successful, this would alleviate the root of the political friction as well, and allow Lon Nol to remain in the country.

-- Instructing Ambassador Swank to intercede with Lon Nol, using essentially the same argument as above.

I have asked the CIA to forward any suggestions it might have for easing the problem.

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