MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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SECRET/SENSITIVE

INFORMATION

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS

September 17, 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR:

State Dept. review completed

MR. KISSINGER

FROM:

WILLIAM L. STEARMAN

Coup Possibilities in Cambodia

SUBJECT:

25X1

Charge Enders has reported separately (Tab B) that while several key commanders have decided the Lon Nol administration should go and are united in their dislike of Lon Nol's watchdog on the military (General Hon Hangsin, Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations), few if any have a

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XGDS 5B(2)

WARNING NOTICE - SENSULIVE WHADS INVOLVED INTELLY No Objection to Declassification in Part 2010/08/16: LOC-HAK-39-3-24-9 firm concept of what and who should replace him. Their goals are as yet wholly negative, but Sirik Matak undoubtedly would be their most congenial ally. Enders believes that coalescence of a coup effort by these dispartite elements and personalities is not in the immediate offing unless prompted by an ill-timed preemptive move from Lon Nol or a general breakdown of authority. The President, however, is most unlikely to take the precipitous kind of action which could trigger a coup by some of his generals. He notes, however, that a strong cautionary word with the Generals is timely and recalls that he has warned them strongly that a coup attempt could provoke the final collapse of U.S. Congressional support for Cambodia. Enders has assured us that he will continue to make this point to all potential troublemakers.

SECRET/SENSITIVE















Department of State

TELEGRAM

SECRET

R 101425Z SEP 73 FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH CONTROL: 1 8 3 0

RECD: 10 SEP 73Z 15 48

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2938

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SECRET SECTION 1 OF 3 PHNOM PENH 9577

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DEPART MENT PLEASE PASS SECDEF, CJCS, COMUSSAG, CINCPAC

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, CB, MILI

SUBJ: POSSIBILITIES OF A MILITARY POWER PLAY IN PHNOM PENH

INCLINATIONS OF THOSE MILITARY COMMANDERS WHO HAVE FORCES CAPABLE OF INSTIGATING OR SUPPORTING A POLITICAL POWER PLAY IN THE CAPITAL. WHILE SEVERAL OF THEM HAVE DECIDED THAT LOW MOL'S ADMINISTRATION SHOULD GO, FEW IF ANY HAVE ANY FIRM CONCEPT OF WHAT AND WHO SHOULD REPLACE IT NOR HAVE TO GO ABOUT THE OPERATION. WE CONCLUDE THAT COALESCENCE OF A COUP EFFORT IS NOT IN THE IMMEDIATE OFFING UNLESS PROMPTED BY AN ILL-TIMED PRE-EMPTIVE MOVE FROM LOW NOL WHICH THREATENS THE SURVIVAL OF ONE OR MORE OF THESE COMMANDERS OR BY A GENERAL BREAKDOWN OF AUTHORITY. THE MOOD OF THESE COMMANDERS IS SUCH, HOWEVER, THAT WE HAVE BELIVED IT TIMELY TO CAUTION THEM ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF A MILITARY TAKEOVER. END SUMMARY.

2. CAPABILITIES
A. EACH OF THE FOUR DIVISION COMMANDERS HAVE THE RIGHT
NUMBERS IN THE RIGHT PLACES TO STAGE A COUP OR COUNTER
COUP. ALL BUT THE THIRD DIVISION COMMANDER" NOW HAVE
AT THEIR DISPOSAL A SQUADRON EACH OF M-113 ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS, WHICH WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY LOOM IN KHMER
MINDS AS AN IDEAL WEAPON FOR AN OPERATION OF THIS SORT.
BEFORE MAKING A MOVE IN THIS DIRECTION. A DIVISION COMMANDER WOULD PROBABLY WISH TO HAVE ON HIS SIDE AT LEAST
ONE OTHER DIVISION (OR THE PHNOM PENH SPECIAL REGION
FORCES) AND AGAINST HIM NO MORE THAN ONE.
B. THE PHNOM PENH SPECIAL REGION COMMANDER HAS MORE MEN
AT HIS DISPOSAL THAN THE DIVISION COMMANDERS. THEY
ARE NOT MOBILE BUT THEY ARE CLOSER TO THE OBJECTIVE. HIS

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ARMY COMMANDERS.

Department of State TELEGRAM

-2- SECTION 1 OF 3 PHNOM PENH 9577, SEPT 10 CAPABILITIES THERFORE APPLAR NEARLY EQUAL TO THOSE OF DIVISION C. THE ARMORED CAVALRY COMMANDER, COLONEL YAI SINDY, COMMANDERS. HAS THEORETICALLY ONLY THREE M-113HSQUADRONS UNDER HIS DIRECT SUPERVISION BUT IN THE RECENT PAST HE HAS DEMON-STRATED SIGNIFICAT CONTROL OVER THE LOYALTIES OF THOSE SQUADRONS ASSIGNED TO THE DIVISIONS. ANY OFFICER ATTEMPT-ING A COUP OR COUNTER COUP WOULD WISH TO HAVE HIM ON HIS SIDE OR AT LEAST NEUTRAL. THE PARA BRIGADE COMMANDER HAS FOUR BATTALIONS OF REASONABLE REPUTATION. HE WOULD FIT WELL INTO A SECONDARY ROLE IN A COUP OR COUNTER COUP ATTEMPT, THE UNITS ARE AT THE MOMENT, HOWEVER, ALL IN KOMPONG CHAM. OF THE INDEPENDENT BRIGADES PROBABLY ONLY THE 13TH AND THE 28TH HAVE THE STRENGTH AND THE GUTS TO JOIN IN A POLITICAL POWER PLAY. LIKE THE PARA BRIGADE, THEY WOULD BE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE SUPPORTING RATHER THAN LEAD-ING ROLES. NEITHER THE AIR FORCE NOR THE NAVY COULD FORM THE NUCLEUS OF A COUP OR COUNTER COUP ATTEMPT AND THEIR COM-MANDERS ARE THEREFORE UNLIKELY TO BE INSTIGATORS OF SUCH AN OPERATION. THEY WOULD, HOWEVER, BE VALUABLE ALLIES EVEN IN A PASSIVE ROLE AND MAY BE COURTED BY DISSIDENT

3. INCLINATIONS A. SECOND DIVISION COMMANDER BG DIEN DEL (WHO ALSO HAS 2,500 KANDAL MSD TROOPS AT HIS DISPOSAL. HAS FOR MORE THAN A YEAR SPOKEN OPENLY AND BETTERLY AGAINST LON NOL AND THOSE HE REGARDS TO BE THE PRESIDENT'S PRINCIPAL AGENTS, IN PARTICULAR ASSISTANT CHIEF OF STAFF FOR OPERATIONS HE HAS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS SHARED MG HOU HANGSIN. US HIS BELIEF THAT LON NOL'S DEPARTURE IS A PREREQUISITE FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE MILITARY SITUATION AND EVENTUAL PEACE NEGOTITIONS. HE HAS EVINCED TOLERATION BUT NOT ENTHUSIASM FOR GENERALHSOSTHENE FERNANDEZ. HE HAS INDI-CATED GENERAL OPPOSITION TO CIVILIAN POLITICIANS NOW IN THE GOVERNMENT WHILE PROFESSING SOME SYMPATHY FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY. HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL MEMBER CHENG HENG TELLS US, HOWEVER, THAT HE HAS DIEN DEL'S SUPPORT AND BG UN KAUV CONFIRMS THAT THERE ARE SOME TIES BETWEEN

THE TWO. SEVENTH DIVISION COMMANDER BG UN KAUV RECENTLY SHARED WITH AN AARMA VIEWS VERY SIMILAR TO THOSE OF DIEN DEL, A FELLOW KHMER KRON, AS REGARDS LON NOL AND HOU HANGSIN. UNLIKE DIEN DEL HE HAS RECENTLY REQUESTED AND BEEN GRANTED AUDIENCES WITH THE PRESIDENT AND THE ALIENATION HERE MAY

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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2939

CONTROL: 1 8 4 1

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NOT BE AS GREAT AS DIEN DEL'S UN KAUV IS VIOLENTLY OPPOSED TO HOU HANGSIN, ON THE OTHER HAND, WHO HE

PPARENTLY BELIEVES HAS TRIED TO HAVE HUM KILLED. HE LOOKS BENIGNLY BUT NOT ADMIRINGLY ON SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ, CONSIDERING HIM, AS DO MANY OTHERS, AS SEPARATED FROM AND THUS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE LON NOL-HOU HANGSIN

CHAIN OF COMMAND. UN KAUV HAS HAD RECENT FRIENDLY VISITS WITH PRIME MINISTER IN TAM AND HAS EXPRESSED TO US SUPPORT FOR CHENG HENG.

- C. THIRD DIVISION COMMANDER BG NGUON LY KHEANG HAS, ASIDE FROM INDICATING DISTRUST OF CIVILIAN POLITICIANS IN GENERAL AND STRONG DISTASTE FOR GENERAL HOU HANGSIN, KEPT HIS POLITICAL INCLINATIONS TO HIMSELF. ALTHOUGH HE WAS THE PRESIDENT'S CHOICE TO HEARD HIS BROTHER LON NON'S DIVISION, THE TACTICAL SITUATION WAS ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL AND LY KHEANG CANNOT BE CLASSED AS A LON NOL MAN, AND UN KAUV HAS IN CONVERSATIONS WITH AARMA DESCRIBED HIM AS LEANING TOWARD THE OPPOSITION CAMP. LY KHEANY HAS, HOWEVER, NOT YET TURNED THE THIRD DIVISION INTO HIS ORGANIZATION, IS BEING CLOSELY WATCHED BY THE MARSHAL AND MAY THEREFORE NOT SHOW HIS HAND UNTIL ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.
- D. FIRST DIVISION COMMANDER BG ITH SUONG'S FATE IS TIGHTLY LINKED WITH LON NOL'S. HE WOULD FIGHT FOR THE PRESIDENT AGAINST A COUP VEFFORT AND HIS FORCES WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY FORM THE NUCLEUS OF ANY COUNTER-COUP PREEMPTIVE BID LON NOL MIGHT MAKE.
- E. PHNOM PENH SPECIAL REGION COMMANDER BG DENG LAYOM IS ALMOST AS CLOSE-MOUTHED AS LY KHEANY. LIKE DIEN DEL AND LY KYEANG, DENG LAYOM HAS INTIMATED THAT HE MIGHT FAVOR MILITARY DISPLACEMENT OF CIVILIANSPOLITIKIANS IN GENERAL; & CBUT SEVERAL FANK GENERALS HAVE SAI

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THIS). HE HAS SHOWN STRONG IRRITATION WITH LON NOL'S MEDDLING IN MILITARY MATTERS BUT IT IS NOT CLEAR THAT THIS REFLECTS A BASIC ANTAGONISM. HE SEEMS TO BE ON BETTER TERMS WITH HOU HANGSIN THAN MOST OTHER FIELD COMMANDERS. IT SHOULD BE NOTED IN THIS RESPECT THAT HE SERVED WITH LON NOL AN HOU HANGSIN IN BATTAMBANG IN 1953, AN EXPERIENCE WHICH FORMED STRONG BONDS AMONG OTHER OFFICERS.

ARMORED CALVARY COMMANDER COL YAI SINDY IS PLACED BY UN KAUV IN THE ANTI-LON NOL CAMP. WE CANNOT CONFIRM THIS AND ARE ATTEMPTING TO GET TO KNOW HIM BETTER. A. PARABRIGAD COMMANDER COL. OUM PJASITH HAS BEEN MENTIONED BY YOU HANGSIN AS RESPONSIVE TO HIS COMMAND. WE WOULD NOT EXPECT HIM TO JOIN AN EFFORT TO UNSEAT LON NOL BUT NEITHER WOULD WE AT THUS STAGE INCLUDE HIM AMONG THE PRESIDENT'S FAITHFUL. FORMER PARA BRIGADE COMMANDER SREY YAR IS, ACCORDING TO UN KAUV, AMONG THE ANTI-LONG NOLISTS BUT IT IS UNLIKELY THAT HE IS CAPABLE OF GALVANIZING ANY LOYALTIES WITHIN THE BRIGADE. HE HAS JUST BEEN RELIEVED AS COMMANDER OF THE FIRST MILITARY REGION.

H. 13TH BRIGADE COMMANDER BG CHANTARANGSEY WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY WELCOME LON NOL'S DEMISE BUT HE IS A LONER WHO IS UNLIKELY TO COOPERATE WITH DIVISIONAL COMMANDERS IN A COUP PLOT. HE IS PROBABLY CLOSER TO GENERAL SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ THAN ANY OTHER OFFICER MENTIONED HERE. BUT CHANTARANGSEY'S PERSONAL AMBITIONS ALSO PLACE LIMITS ON THIS LOYALTY. IN ANY MILITARY ACTION NOT AIMED DIRECTLY AT HIM WE SEE HIM RESERVING HIS TROOPS TO PROTECT HIS OWN PERSONAL INTERESTS.

I. 28TH BRIGADE COMMANDER COL. PHENG UON'S POLITICAL INCLINATIONS ARE UNKNOWN TO US ALTHOUGH WE HAVE ON OCCASION FOUND HIM TO BE UNHAPPY WITH HOU HANGSIN. FOR THE MOMENT. WE WOULD PUT HIM AMONG THE NEUTRALS.

J. AIR FORCE COMMANDER BG PENN RANDA SHOULD PROBABLY BE CLASSIFIED AS A CAUTIOUS NEUTRAL. WE HAVE OBSERVED HIM NODDING ASSENT TO SOME VERY STRONG ANTI-NOL STATEMENTS FROM DIEN DEL AND KOMPONG CHHNANG COMMANDER YONG YOC HANG. BUT UN KAUV BELIEVES HIM STILL LOYAL TO THE PRESIDENT.



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AN ANTI-LON NOL MOVE MIGHT, HOWEVER, GET SOME SUPPORT FROM ISOLATED AIR FORCE ELEMENTS, IN PARTICULAR THE RELATIVELY DYNAMIC COMMANDER OF THE KOMPONG CHHNANG AIR BASE LT. COLONEL SOK SAMBAUR.

K. NAVY COMMANDER COMMODORE VONG SARENDY STAYS
RELATIVELY CLEAR OF POLITICS BUT WE BELIEVE HIM TO BE
BASICALLY LOYAL TO THE PRESIDENT. WOULD PROBABLY
REMAIN NEUTRAL IF THERE WERE A COUP OR COUNTER-COUP ATTEMPT.;

4. GOALS. WHILE SOME COMMANDERS, UN KAUV AND DIEN DEL IN PARTICULAR, HAVE BEEN VERY EXPLICIT ABOUT THEIR OPPOSITION TO LON NOL, THEY HAVE BEEN EXCEEDINGLY VAGUE AS TO THE NATUREOF A SUCCESSOR GOVERNMENT. IT IS DOUBT-FUL THAT ANY DISCONTENTED COMMANDERS HAVE A CONCEPT OF A POST-LON NOL REGIME WHICH WOULD HELP COALESCE DISPARATE OPPOSITION ELEMENTS INTO A MOVEMENT.

A. NONE OF THE COMMANDERS WE HAVE MENTIONED, LEAST OF ALL DIEN DEL AND UN KAUV, WHO ARE BOTH YOUNG AND KHMER BT #9577



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R 101425Z SEP 73 FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2940

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KROM, CAN ASPIRE TO NATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEMSELVES. B. ALTHOUGH UN KAUV AND DIEN DEL MAY HAVE FOUND A FRIEND IN CHENG HENG, THEY HAVE NOT FOUND IN THE FORMER CHIEF OF STATE A CREDIBLE STANDARD BEARER FOR AN PPOSITION MOVEMENT AS HE HAS NO POPULAR BASE. THROWING IN THEIR LOT WITH THE NATION'S MOST POPULAR LEADER, PRIME MINISTER IN TAM, IS NOT ALTO-GETHER APPEALING AS IN TAM'S APPARENTLY IRRECONCILIABLE FEUD WITH FANK COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SOSTEHE FERNANDEZ CAUSES DIFFICULTIES AND HIS INDECISIVENESS AS PRIME MINISTER IS NOT REASSURING. SIRIK MATAK WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE THE MOST CONGENIAL ALLY AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL FOR THE MILITARY IN GENERAL BUT HE WOULD NOT BRING WITH HIM A POPULAR FOLLOWING, HE WOULD NOT AT THIS STAGE SYMBOLIZE A CLEAR BREAK WITH LON NOL AND HIS RIGHTIST ORIENTATION WOULD SEEM TO WORK AGAINST AN UNDERSTANDING WITH THE STUDENTS AND THE LEFT, WHICH SOME DISSIDENT GEMERALS PROBABLY CONSIDER A PREREQUISITE FOR ENDING THE WAR. WE HAVE NO RECENT INDICATIONS OF CONTACTS BETWEEN SIRPK MATAK AND DISCONTENTED GENERALS BUT THER HAVE IN THE PAST BEEN TIES BETWEEN HIM AND DIEN DEL.

E. A MILITARY GOVERNMENT HAS OBVIOUS APPEAL FOR MOST OF THE COMMANDERS WE HAVE MENTIONED, AND SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ MIGHT PERHAPS BE A WILLING CANDIDATE TO SOSTHENE HAS MANY FRIENDS BUT FEWHTRUE ADMIRERS HEAD IT. AMONG THE AFOREMENTIONED OFFICERS. RIGHTFULLY OR WRONG-FULLY, HE IS PICTURED AS A NOT VERY EFFECTIVE COUNTERWEIGHT TO THE LON NOL-HOU HANGISH COMMAND CHANNEL AND THIS IMAGE WOULD APPEAR TO WORK AGAINST HIS BEING HOISTED UPON A WHITE HORSE.

IN SUM, THE DISCONTENTED GENERALS HAVE AS YET ONLY NEGATIVE GOALS. VIRTUALLY ALL OF THEM WISH TO OUST HOU HANGSIN AND THUS WEAKEN THE PRESIDENT'S CONTROL

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OVER FANK AND SEVERAL OF THEM WOULD OUST THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF. THEY HAVE NOT GOTTEN AROUND TO SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING HIS REPLACEMENT, HOWEVER,

POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION SHOULD UN KAUV AND DIEN DEL DECIDE TO MOUNT A COUP, THEY MIGHT HOPE FOR MORE SYMPATHIZERS THAN ACTIVE THESE ODDS ARE. OPPONENTS AMONG THEIR COLLEAGUES. HOWEVER, ALMOST CERTAINLY NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR THESE THERE IS NO REASON TO EXPECT COMMANDERS. THAT THEY WOULD DISPLAY LESS CAUTION IN THIS HIGH RISK VENTURE THAN THEY HAVE ON THE BATTLEFIELD, AND THEY HAVE CUSTOMARILY INSISTED ON ASSEMBLING A CLEAR PREPOSIDERANCE OF FORCE BEFORE MOVING. THEIR OPEN TALK OF UNSEATING LON NOL IS PERHAPS DESIGNED TO START A SNOWBALLING EFFECT WITHIN FANK BEFORE WHICH HOU HANGSIN AND PERHAPS THE MARSHAL WOULD HOPEFULLY CRUMBLE WITHOUT THE NEED TO RESORT TO FORCE. U.S. SUPPORT OF AT LEAST ACQUIESCENCE IS ALSO PROBABLY SEEN AS MECESSARY, AND THE CONFIDENCES THESE GENERALS HAVE SHARED WITH US WERE UNDOUBTEDLY DESIGNED TO ELICIT IT. WE HAVE INSTEADSTATED THAT ANY COUP ATTEMPT WOULD PROVOKE THE FINAL COLLAPSE OF U.S. PUBLIC AND CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR CAMBODIA AND PUT CONTINUED U.S. ASSISTANCE AT RISK. QUR NON-ENGAGEMENT SHOULD IN MOST CIRCUMSTANCES BE AN EFFECTIVE DETERRENT. C. IF THE DISCONTENTED GENERALS CAN REMOVE HOU HANGSIN FROM THE GENERALHSTAFF, THIS WOULD PROBABLY LESSEN FOR A TIME THE NUMBER AND DEPTH OF COMMITMENTS LON NOL ON THE OTHER HAND, MAY NOT TO UNSEAT LON WOL. PERMIT HOU HINGSIN'S BEING REPLACED BY A MAN LESS LOYAL TO THE MARSHAL, WHICH WOULD CONSISTITUTE AN IMPORTANT AND IN THE LONG RUN POTENTIALLY CRITICAL LOSS OF CONTROL OVER THE MILITARY. D. SHOULD LOW NOL FEEL THAT A PREEMPTIVE MOVE IS REQUIRED AND SHOULD THIS MOVE APPEAR DIRECTLY TO THREATEN THE LIVES OF DIEN DEL AND/OR UN KAUV, A COUP ATTEMPT COULD BE TRIGRERED. LON NOL CUSTOMARILY DOES NOT ATTEMPT TO PIN HIS OPPONENTS INTO A CORNER, HOWEVER, AND WE IMAGINE HE WILL USE UIMOST CARE IN DEALING WITH THIS DISCONTENTED GENERALS. HE HAS IN THE PAST DEMONSTRATED CONSUMMATE SKILL IN HANDLING HIS SUBORDINATES. IN SHORT WE DO NOT FEEL THAT AMILLTRY POWER PLAY

THE AUTHORIZATION OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY NOT I No Objection to Declassification in Part 2010/08/16: LOC-HAK-39-3-24-9

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IS IN THE IMMEDIATE OFFING. MUCH OF THE TALK WE ARE HEAR-ING TODAY FROM DISCONTENTED GENERALS IS NO DIFFERENT FROM WHAT THEY TOLD US A YEAR AGO. H THE INTERLOCUTORS ARE NOW MORE NUMBEROUS BUT THE SUBSTANCE OF THE COMPLAINTS, HAS CHANGED BUT LITTLE. THE COUNTRY'S NEAR TERM MILITARY AND POLITICAL FUTURE MIGHT. HOWEVER, CONTAIN SOME UNSETTLEING EVENTS (THE LOSS OF KOMPONG CHAM. FOR EXAMPLE, OR THE FAILURE TO RENEW THE MANDATE OF THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL) WHICH COULD SET LONG TALKED ABOUT PLANS INTO MOTION. WE ARE, THEREFORE, MAKING SURE THAT THOSE WHO TALK OF CHANGING THE NATIONS'S LEADERSHIP THROUGH MILITARY FORCE ARE REMINDED OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF SUCH AN ACTION. ENDERS BT

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