

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

September 1, 1970

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *HAK*

SUBJECT: The Current Military Situation in Cambodia

In response to your request of August 25, 1970 for an urgent assessment of the military situation in Cambodia, I tasked the JCS, the CIA and Mr. Ladd at our Embassy in Phnom Penh for their estimates of the situation. The JCS response includes a CINCPAC assessment. All are agreed that the Cambodian Government is in no danger of being toppled by Communist military attack. They do not believe the enemy intends to launch a major military attack on Phnom Penh in the near future. In sum, they believe the military situation in Cambodia to be no worse, and perhaps somewhat better, than at any time in the past few months. Mr. Ladd states that the military situation is better for the Cambodians today than it has been since he has been there. The JCS memorandum is at Tab A; CIA's is at Tab B and Mr. Ladd's views are at Tab C.

JCS review completed.

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The Overall Military Situation

The JCS and CIA note that the Communists' main immediate objectives are to re-establish a secure LOC system in Cambodia, to re-establish border bases for sustaining the struggle in South Vietnam and to develop a Khmer-based insurgency. They both agree that at least through the rest of the rainy season, which ends in October-November, the Communists will probably try to keep FANK forces tied down in defending key population centers in an effort to maintain their own relative freedom of movement in rural areas. The JCS note that FANK does not have the capability to conduct sustained offensive operations but that it does have a limited defensive capability to defend key population centers and lines of communication. CIA and the JCS, however, stress the importance of allied military support, particularly cross-border operations and tactical air strikes, to this FANK capability.

It is CIA's view that the Cambodians are holding their own in most populated areas of the country and that the situation is not likely to change greatly in the near future. The JCS and CIA are agreed that the Communists are practicing a protracted war strategy in Cambodia. They believe the enemy

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JCS completed review for PACOM

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hopes to wear down the Cambodian army and government over a long period of time during which they intend to develop a Communist infrastructure to control the population. They do not believe the Communists can or intend to destroy the Lon Nol Government by direct military attacks in the near future.

### The Situation Around Phnom Penh

Neither the JCS, Mr. Ladd nor the CIA believe a major enemy ground attack on Phnom Penh is likely in the next few months. All three, however, note the possibility that the Communists could harass Phnom Penh without warning with small scale ground probes and mortar or rocket attacks. They agree that one of the enemy's major aims is to isolate Phnom Penh both to facilitate Communist control over the countryside and to intensify pressure on the government.

### The Cambodian Government's LOC's

Mr. Ladd estimates that if the enemy chooses to use his forces in sufficient strength, he can probably block any of the LOC's for two to six days. He notes, however, that FANK or FANK/ARVN would be able to reopen them. The JCS state that it is clear that the enemy is willing to spread his forces thin in order to maintain pressure on provincial capitals and key route junctions. The enemy, however, does not appear to have sufficient assets to enable him to keep key LOC's closed.

### Enemy and FANK Military Strength

There is general agreement that the enemy combat force in Cambodia and along the border totals approximately 24,000 men, with an additional 25,000 - 30,000 administrative service troops. There are an additional 7,000 to 10,000 Cambodian dissidents. Arrayed against this enemy force, FANK has a main force of better than 110,000 personnel, up from 35,000 in March 1970. The Cambodian Air Force has 80 qualified pilots and 25 more in pilot training status. FANK has shown improvement in several areas, according to CINCPAC, and still further improvement is anticipated as the combination of combat experience, improved communications and logistics and the infusion of newly trained troops take effect.

Attachments

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August 27, 1970

FROM: Mr. Ladd, Phnom Penh

TO: Brig. Gen. Haig, White House

1. Many individual journalists in private conversations with me have expressed their admiration for the surprisingly good job FANK has done to hold off the enemy and its organized approach to its problems. Most of the journalists are neither professionally qualified to make sound military assessments nor do they have access to the information statistics, planning factors or tactical situation data necessary to form a basis for a sound military assessment. Some are simply totally irresponsible so far as factual reporting is concerned and I expressed this opinion to Maynard Parker at luncheon just day before yesterday.

2. I realize the press reports are serious factors with which you must deal and I do my best when with them to present the picture in its true perspective. I also always point out that my views are only impressions as I am not directly involved in anything other than logistical situation. It is my conviction that three major factors influence the gloomy press presentation of the military situation in Cambodia. First is the inability of the journalists to make a responsibly sound and professional assessment. In many cases over here, this is tied quite closely with a certain degree of immaturity. Second is the probability that their publishers or editors pressure them to find and report upon any weaknesses (Cambodian or US) that can be used to reflect unfavorably on any aspect of the situation so far as the US effort is concerned. Third is the fact that many of these journalists have previously predicted that the present government didn't have a chance for survival and they seek to find or create any evidence whatsoever that will lend credence to their previous predictions.

3. I was in Saigon when I received your message and was working with MACV/CINCPAC to assist them in responding to a JCS requirement for an assessment of the situation and friendly and enemy capabilities. I concurred in their rather lengthy report and assume you will have access to it or a JCS version of it.

4. There are some factors I consider particularly pertinent and which I feel might be helpful to you. The first is the intangible but most important fact that the Cambodians have the will and desire to

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fight and defend their country. Secondly, I do not believe there is any significant threat of the development of a Khmer infrastructure which would constitute a challenge to the GOC in the immediate future. Thirdly, a careful analysis of the MACV/CINCPAC message will, I am sure, uphold my conviction that for the next few months the prospects look quite good for Cambodia. The enemy has many problems to include the wet season and flooded areas hampering him seriously in both the logistical and tactical areas. This condition will, of course, abate with the end of the monsoon season but in the meantime, FANK accrues assets such as experience, almost 14,000 additional newly trained and equipped forces from the Vietnamese training centers, improved logistical capability and the development of a phased plan to commence limited offensive operations against enemy forces now within the defended area of Cambodia.

5. Lon Nol and the FANK staff are developing their national military strategic plan along the following lines:

A. Phase I (current): Defensive operations and preparation for initial offensive operations.

B. Phase II: Continue defense and conduct offensive operations in coordination with the South Vietnamese to destroy the enemy in the area between the South Vietnamese/Cambodian border and Route 4.

C. Phase III: Continue defense and conduct coordinated offensive operations to destroy the enemy or drive him out of the area north and east of the Mekong River to a line from Kompong Thom to Prek Kak thence generally eastward to the border (rubber plantations).

D. Phase IV: Offensive operations against the enemy eastward from Siem Riep and northward along the Mekong to recapture Kratie.

E. Phase V: Offensive operations to recapture Stung Treng and the Northeast area along Route 19.

6. I realize the concept of the strategic military plan is quite optimistic but I do consider that Phase II could be undertaken possibly two or three months from now with a reasonable chance of success. My concern is that with the end of the wet season, at about the turn of the year, the enemy will be able to substantially increase the flow of both men and supplies into Cambodia from Laos. This however is not the time for me to go into greater detail on that consideration.

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7. In summary, I consider the military situation is better today than it ever has been for the Cambodians since I have been here and I believe their capability to defend themselves against the current enemy threat will increase for the duration of the wet season as the trained troops strength grows. I do not believe there is a serious military threat against Phnom Penh at this time but the enemy is capable of harassing Phnom Penh outskirts with ground probes and mortar or rocket attacks.

8. The LOC's, both ground and water, will remain subject to interdiction and if the enemy chooses to use forces in sufficient strength he can probably block any of the LOC's for two to six days. FANK or FANK/ARVN operations against such enemy courses of action would be able to open the LOC's.

9. This is the situation as I see it now. We have many problems but things at this time are getting better for FANK. The enemy also has many problems but for the time being things are not getting better for him.

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