

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

July

DIA, ARMY, DOS reviews completed.

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ON-FILE NSC
RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS
APPLY

*There are old B/Ps
which HAK threw in
but has a couple of weeks
ago but which you might
like to follow up.*

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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May 25, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *HK*
SUBJECT: Situation in Cambodia

Attached are two cables from General Haig describing the military and political situation in Cambodia, his conversations with Cambodian leaders and recommendations for actions which should be taken to shore-up the Cambodians.

Haig reports (Tab A) that the military situation is not bright and that:

- Most of the Northeast is under NVA/VC control and the enemy is infiltrating west across the Mekong. Only in the south has the situation stabilized as a result of ARVN cross-border operations.
- The Cambodian army is faced with conducting a war while at the same time developing a command and control structure, training existing forces, and equipping and training additional forces without a source for logistics.
- The inexperienced Cambodian army:
 - consists of some 60 battalions, of which about 2/3 are marginally effective.
 - critically needs tactical communications equipment, small arms, and trucks.
 - has an extremely weak intelligence capability, logistic system and training capacity.

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Although political weaknesses exist the situation is not as immediately threatening as the military one. Haig reports (Tab B) that:

There is no solid political opposition yet. The pro-Hanoi movement has not gotten off the ground. However, there is potential for conflict between younger reformers and the older political leadership, as well as the potential for factionalism within the army.

-- Few individuals in the government realize that the war will be long and there is a false optimism that massive American help and a few months training will allow the Cambodians to route the invaders.

-- Cambodians at all levels distrust the Vietnamese.

-- The basic political deficiencies stem from uncertainty of purpose and inexperience in governing.

As a result of his meetings with Lon Nol, General Pokse (Nol's Chief of Operations) and with General Matak and his assessment of the military and political situation (Tab C), Haig believes that:

-- The situation is grave but not altogether hopeless.

-- We must recognize the seriousness of the Cambodian plight with an even greater sense of urgency.

-- We should take the following steps:

- Move Colonel Ladd to Phnom Penh as soon as possible to assist the government of Cambodia in establishing priorities for shipments of additional equipment, to coordinate with MACV and a representative of the GVN who should be sent to Phnom Penh, and to serve as our liaison with a combined coordinating staff from donor Asian states.
- Begin shipment of light weapons and individual equipment up to a total of 30,000 and ship immediately.

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Handwritten notes:
- go ahead
- follow up
- call on these items

Begin tactical and B-52 sorties in North East Cambodia (Lon Nol would warmly welcome this and the area for the most part is sparsely settled).

Commence periodic GVN convoys and patrols along the Mekong River to Phnom Penh.

Expedite the rehabilitation of Cambodian T-28s and urge Thailand to furnish up to 10 T-28s on a loan basis with a US replacement guarantee. The planes could initially be based in Thailand.

Urge the South Vietnamese and Thais to send as many Khmer battalions as possible.



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Send a high level US delegation to friendly Asian capitals to urge increased military and economic assistance.

On the basis of his trip thus far, Haig concludes that:

-- Without all or most of the above recommended steps the Lon Nol governments' chances of surviving are dim at best.

-- The Cambodian government can be expected to fight the NVA/VC to the best of its limited capability.

-- The enemy appears to be taking a desperate gamble designed to offset blows to his sanctuaries by setting up a liberated area in the north-east or by liberating the entire country. The enemy is undertaking a campaign without prepositioning supplies or utilizing pre-established political cadres and political themes to motivate its forces.

-- The enemy will remain inactive for an extended period in II, III and IV Corp. We should complicate his problems in Cambodia by helping the Cambodian government as much as possible while we press in South Vietnam to take advantage of the improved security situation.

-- The conflict in Southeast Asia has changed fundamentally. Hanoi's deep involvement in Cambodia has seriously weakened its capacity to exert main force pressure on the South Vietnamese.

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From Brig General Haig
To The White House, For Dr. Kissinger

There follows a summary of the military and political situation.

Part One. Military Situation, Cambodia - 23 May 1970

1. (TS) Tactical Situation:

A. With the fall of Stung Treng Town, the northwest is under enemy control except for the Bunglung - Ba Kev - Lomphat triangle in which six Fank Bns are deployed. This triangle is cut off from Phnom Penh by road and poor communications exist. Air resupply for food and munitions is limited to flights of eight available air force C-47 Aircraft.

B. Enemy infiltration continues west across the Mekong via Kompong Cham and Kratie. Fank fears infiltrations will continue to west in the direction of Kompong Thom toward Tonle Sap region. The large population of Vietnamese in Tonle Sap region would be likely target to organize and arm. Activity west of Mekong in past week included:

(1) Friendly patrol was fired on 25 KMS east north east of Kompong Thom Town.

(2) A bridge on Route 6 southeast of Kompong Thom was damaged. Fank speculates possible 2,000 VC/NVA have infiltrated across the Mekong and a potential headquarters location to control enemy operations in the area would be vicinity Hill 2254 (WV7128).

C. Kompong Cham Town remains in friendly hands but under enemy pressure. Fank forces have been reinforced with three Khmer Krom BNS. Total Fank strength at Kompong Cham now consists of three brigades, a total of nine battalions. Fank considers situation at Kompong Cham serious. Estimated strength of enemy in the vicinity of Kompong Cham is two regiments.

D. Infiltrations are expected to continue to area vicinity Route 4 and north across Route 4 west of Phnom Penh (Cardamones Mountains). Activity in area may depend on pressure applied by SVN forces in the operations in and around Takeo Town and Kampot Province.

2. (TS) Readiness of Fank:

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A. Lon Nol has grand dreams of armed forces totaling 400,000. Cambodia does not have resources to support such forces nevertheless, he keeps pushing his staff proceed along these lines. I will furnish you separately the results of my two hour and fifteen minute meeting with Lon Nol.

B. Fankhas approximately 60 battalions of equipped forces. These approximate strength of 400. Toe is 607. Estimated that two thirds of these are marginally effective; equipment is a heterogeneous bundle consisting of equipment of U.S. Communist and Communist Bloc origin. Communications lacking below the battalion level. Other battalions, newly activated, exist on paper with some personnel and little equipment.

C. Training was not emphasized in Sihanouk days. As a result, all units are lacking in readiness from a training standpoint. Fank does not have the capability to either arm and equip rapidly expanding army or train troops of vast numbers. Shortage of qualified officers and NCO's is even more pronounced when the army is rapidly expanded.

D. Logistics. Fank logistics system has neither head nor tail; result is lack of capability to support present forces and forces emerging in expansion.

E. Communications. Communications equipment for tactical units is lacking. Spare parts to maintain existing equipment are almost non-existent. Air-Ground communications for tactical operations does not exist. Fank depends on existing commercial facilities as backup for tactical communications.

F. Transportation. Vehicular transportation to support armed forces is in critically short supply. Commercial vehicles are used. No helicopters are available to provide trooplift for quick reaction forces. Forces. Movement of troops solely by trucks, if available, makes movement totally vulnerable to enemy activity on roads and bridges which are subject to sabotage along entire span. I note the Presidentially approved FY70 Aid Package for Cambodia suggests existing trucks are adequate. I would question this from my observations and add trucks to communications and small arms as most critical needs.

G. Fank intelligence capability is extremely weak. Intelligence officers have either been unwilling or unable to provide detailed information on the enemy in country. I believe they do not know the situation themselves. In early May, Fank estimated 54,500 VC/NVA in country. They have not provided current information to update estimate to take into consideration impact US/ARVN border operations. I will carry this with me to Washington and share with General Abrams and Admiral McCain enroute.

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3. (TS) Assessment:

A. Military situation in Cambodia does not present bright outlook -- all negatives and no positives. Fank is faced with problem of conducting war and at same time develop a command and control structure, train existing forces, and equip and train additional forces; all without a source for logistics.

Part Two. Political Situation

The Government's political weakness is not so immediate and threatening as its military vulnerability, but it exists and is even less susceptible to outside help.

There is no present sign of any organized opposition within the armed forces; though undoubtedly some Sihanouk sympathizers remain. Nor is there any organization in the countryside, or any regional or local political bases, which could threaten the government's hold except for the pro-Hanoi movement which the VC/NVA are just beginning to organize. This will take time -- perhaps many months--to get off the ground even as an outright Vietnamese Communist puppet. Although no obvious or visible strains have yet appeared within the government structure, the potential is there. There is possibility for conflict between reform-minded younger intellectuals and politicians and the rather shopworn politicians who occupy most of the top positions in the government. There is a possibility for the enlarged army, with its new-found importance, to splinter into cliques as ambitious generals and colonels maneuver and plan coups for personal advantage. This kind of factionalism could be reinforced if the old political cliques, which Sihanouk superseded, begin to re-emerge.

It does not look as if the government or the public has quite grasped yet what lies ahead. There is a touching confidence that massive infusions of American equipment, and if necessary American troops, will arrive and will quickly save situation and put an end to the VC/NVA presence. There is also an assumption that with new arms and a few months training the Cambodian army will put the invaders to flight. A few individuals in the government may realize that the war will be a long hard one, but the propaganda boasts of government victories conceal the fact from most. It is impossible to tell just what the reaction will be when the situation comes to be understood, but a reaction against the deterioration of conditions is one possibility.

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Cambodians at all levels emphasize their distrust for all Vietnamese -- including the GVN. This is another reason for the high hopes of U. S. and third-country aid. The Cambodians hope we will dissuade the GVN from any designs it may have on Cambodian territory and ensure better ARVN troop behavior.

Observers in Phnom Penh are not impressed with the government's ability to explain itself, either at home or abroad, to formulate an effective program of reform, or to organize and coordinate any adequate defense against a VC/NVA military and political offensive.

The basic deficiencies which exist are not shortcomings of technique which could be corrected with the help of foreign advisors. They come from uncertainty of purpose (now that Sihanouk's overthrow has been accomplished) and from inexperience in governing. For fifteen years Sihanouk governed Cambodia. He delegated no authority and allowed none of his subordinates any room for initiative. There is a real question whether, suddenly on their own, they can develop the confidence and sense of authority necessary to replace him. These qualities cannot be implanted directly by foreign advice or help, although victories made possible by foreign aid, or the acquisition of new troops and equipment from foreign sources, may contribute to their growth and to the government's psychological strength.

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To White House, Dr. Kissinger

From Brig General Haig

I met with Lon Nol for 2 hours and fifteen minutes this A.M., his Chief of Operations General Pokse Mon for one hour this afternoon and with General Matak for an hour and one half this evening. These meetings served to convince me that the situation in Cambodia is grave but not altogether hopeless. I have provided you by separate message a more detailed assessment of the military and political situation as I have been able to assess it in this brief period. In sum, Lon Nol and his generals are shaken by the gravity of the military situation which suggests that all of North Eastern Cambodia with the exception of a network of three strong points some 50 KMS from the border due west of Pleiku has been overrun by the enemy. There are indications that the enemy is moving north west toward the Cardamones mountains to link up with elements of the Khmer Rouge situated there. There are also elements (reportedly 1000-2000) of the VC/NVA who have crossed the Mekong north of Phnom Penh in a possible move toward the Tonle Sap region which contains a large Vietnamese population, as well as, ample supplies of rice and fish. Only in the south has the situation stabilized as a result of ARVN cross border operations. All this has shaken the Cambodian leadership especially Lon Nol and his generals. Matak appears somewhat more confident that the enemy's dispersed deployments also present some opportunities over time if Cambodian resistance and the loyalty of the Cambodian people can be sustained.

I am now convinced that we must recognize the seriousness of Cambodia's plight with an even greater sense of urgency and would strongly favor the following steps to shore-up what could become another most regrettable lost opportunity. In my view the measures enumerated can be undertaken within the conceptual parameters already announced by the President:

1. Move Col Ladd to Embassy Phnom Penh as soon as possible to work with the Cambodian government in establishing priorities for the shipment of additional light weapons and individual equipment to Cambodia. I recommend Ladd work through Macthai for Map items and MACV and its liaison offices for operational support from US forces in South Vietnam. I also recommend that he establish contact with an equivalent GVN representative who should also be stationed in Phnom Penh with compatible authority from the Thieu government. Ladd would also ultimately become our liaison with a combined coordinating staff from donor Asian states who could be located here or alternately in Thailand.

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2. Commence immediate shipments, based on Ladd's recommendations, of up to 30,000 light weapons and individual equipment to Cambodia under the FY 70 MAP. (Less items already shipped. [redacted])

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3. Grant immediate authority to MACV to commence tactical and B-52 sorties in NE Cambodia east of the Mekong based on ARDF and VR and immediate coordination with the Cambodian high command here in Phnom Penh. I was assured by Lon Nol and his generals today that they would warmly welcome such support and was reassured that the entire area is sparsely populated by tribesmen except for the triangular strong points at Bung-Lung-Ba Kev - Lomphat.

4. Authorize MACV to coordinate with the JCS in consultation with Ambassador Bunker to urge continued periodic convoys and patrols along the Mekong River to Phnom Penh.

5. Expedite rehabilitation of all salvageable Cambodian T-28 aircraft through Macthai as a matter of the highest priority. Urge Thailand to furnish up to 10 T-28 aircraft on a loan basis to Cambodia with a US guarantee to replace losses. Initially aircraft could be based in Thailand and Cambodian pilots and maintenance personnel trained and operated from there.

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6. Authorize MACV to coordinate with the JCS in consultation with Ambassador Bunker and President Thieu with the view toward assembling all remaining Khmer (CIDG) forces in south Vietnam for additional equipping and training as necessary and the earliest possible deployment to Cambodia.

7. Create immediately an air detachment with appropriate observation aircraft to support the defense attache at the US Embassy in Phnom Penh. (At the present time attache personnel are prohibited by the charge from travelling outside of the capital and are totally dependent on a morning briefing from the Cambodian government for intelligence on the enemy situation. This constitutes the blind leading the blind and has resulted in a complete void of information on enemy activity here.)

8. Consider sending a high level US delegation to appropriate Asian capitals to urge immediate military and economic assistance for the

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Cambodians. We have been patiently awaiting the outcome of the Asian Conference to keep the initiative in the Asian's Court. They all have the picture now and I am convinced it's time for a strong expression of US support to capitalize on the momentum which the Conference started. This should be done quietly leaving maximum initiative to the Asian states. Nevertheless it is true that the US Government exercised some role in this affair which may well flounder for lack of leadership and positive US interest.

My trip thus far has shaped some definite impressions which have led me to the foregoing recommendations.

A. Without all or most of these steps the chances of the Lon Nol government's survival are dim at best.

B. Even with these steps the Lon Nol government may not survive. However I am convinced that its leadership at least has burned its bridges and can be expected fight the NVA/VC to the best of its limited capability.

C. Intelligence here - intelligence which urgently needs refinement confirms that the enemy has moved rapidly and decisively to control all of North East Cambodia and deployed his limited main forces into the western provinces of Cambodia with the view toward swiftly toppling the Lon Nol regime despite the fact that he has had to move considerable distances away from his disrupted bases of supply. All this suggests that the enemy has taken a desperate gamble designed to offset the blows to his sanctuaries by either setting up a liberated area in North East Cambodia or attempting to liberate the entire country. In either event, these operations should have a most serious impact on his ability to conduct main force operations in South Vietnam over the coming months in large measure we will be able to exploit this advantage to the extent that we can contribute to the continued viability of the Cambodian government. Even if the effort fails, the price is cheap when compared to our investment in South Vietnam and the benefits we gain from even a temporary extension of what has become for Hanoi a most complex campaign on three fronts. A review of MACV's incident rate in II, III and IV Corps has convinced me that the enemy will remain inactive for an extended period in these Corps areas at least. It only makes sense for us to complicate Hanoi's life in Cambodia to the limits of our ability while we press in South Vietnam to take advantage of the improved security his continuing problems in Cambodia must create.

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D. For better or worse the conflict in SE Asia has fundamentally changed. Hanoi is deeply involved in Cambodia and although she is meeting little resistance from Fank forces she nevertheless has seriously weakened her capabilities to exert main force pressure on South Vietnam. Furthermore she has undertaken a campaign in Cambodia without having had an opportunity to prepare the battlefield with supplies or to erode the fabric of the Cambodian society with pre-established political cadres and without even a viable rallying theme to assist its military forces. Thus Cambodia could well turn Mao on his head by constituting its own insurgency against an enemy invader who lacks all the advantages on which he has doctrinely relied. I will return tomorrow to Saigon where I hope to visit the Cambodian sanctuaries and see President Thieu. There were some other very interesting outcomes of my meetings today which I will forward by message in the morning.

Best regards.

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