

MEMORANDUM

6156

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

~~(SECRET SPOKE ATTACHMENT)~~

INFORMATION

SECRET

December 17, 1974

OSD and NSA reviews completed

MEMORANDUM FOR: GENERAL SCOWCROFT (over)

FROM: WILLIAM L. STEARMAN

SUBJECT: U.S. Response to Khmer Communist Interdiction of the Mekong River

On November 11, you sent a memorandum (Tab C) to Major General Wickham asking Defense to explore possible U. S. responses to an interdiction of the Mekong River by the Khmer Communists. At Tab A is Defense's reply to your request.

Their analysis includes the following key points:

-- It seems unlikely that the Communists will attempt a concerted interdiction of the Mekong;

-- An attempted interdiction could probably not be sustained to the point of forcing the government's downfall. The reason for this is the present relatively low state of Communist preparedness as well as FANK's superior firepower and improved tactical air and naval support;

-- The most useful short term U. S. response to any interdiction effort would be to ensure that stockage levels of combat supplies are adequately maintained. Defense is currently doing this within the tight constraints of the budget for military assistance to Cambodia.

-- For the longer range, selected investment items will have to be funded to ensure the maintenance of Cambodian LOC's. To this end an airlift self-sufficiency package which included 16 C-123K transports is in the final stages of DOD review and approval. Other studies of possible additions to the Cambodian naval forces are also being considered.

The DOD analysis, however, is partly contradicted by a December 17 assessment in the National Intelligence Bulletin (Tab B). This latter item states that the Khmer Communists apparently intend to make a major

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effort to interdict the Mekong River during the next few months. All indications are that this will be the most concerted attempt since their spring 1973 effort. Analysis of recent intercepted messages show that the Communists will commit over 10,000 troops to a series of attacks against FANK strong points along the river.

Cambodian army commanders are aware of the Communist intentions and are sending reinforcements to this area. This will raise the government troop strength along the river to over 8,000.

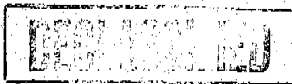
*This is a pretty relaxed
view - from DDD and you.
Don't get so sanguine. You
should at least crank it in to
the WSAG - we will have talk in Jan.
BO*

SECRET



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

*copy upstairs to
head for Security
NSC 6186*



14 DEC 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DEPUTY ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR NATIONAL
SECURITY AFFAIRS

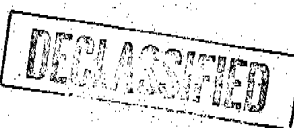
SUBJECT: Cambodian Assessment (U)

(C) In your memorandum of November 11, 1974, you suggested that it might be useful to explore possible US responses to the threat of a concentrated Khmer Communist (KC) interdiction effort on Cambodian Lines of Communication (LOC).

(S) While it is still too early to predict what actions the enemy intends to follow during this dry season, Cambodian analysts agree the KC will most probably continue their provincial strategy, coupled with rocket attacks against the capital and its airfield and attempt the interdiction of the major LOCs such as the Mekong and Tonle Sap Rivers and Routes 4 and 5. Although significant KC forces are available east of the Mekong, their commitment to a concerted interdiction seems unlikely. The risk of a loss in these areas would far outweigh the success achieved by interdicting the Mekong which in all likelihood could not be sustained to the point of forcing the government downfall. During the course of this wet season initiatives by government armed forces (FANK) continually disrupted enemy plans. Consequently, the enemy has had little opportunity to rest and refit or to conserve its manpower and ammunition. In comparison to last year the KC appear less prepared both physically and psychologically. These factors, together with the FANK 2:1 force advantage over the KC, its fire power advantage, improved tactical air support and strong riverine forces, limit the chances of any near-term KC success.

(S) On the other hand, FANK has also been unable to rest and refit during the wet season. For example, while the 2d Division, which has been committed to the Bassac Operation since August 21, has been able to inflict serious losses on the enemy forces, the division is too weak to exploit these opportunities. Other trends, however, indicate favorable FANK progress. Along the Cambodian-South Vietnam border, combined efforts of the FANK and the South Vietnamese have reduced the vulnerability of Mekong convoys at that point while centralized command of the Mekong corridor under the Khmer Navy (MNK) has simplified control and coordination for convoy security within Cambodia. The KAF has shown steady improvement in the application of close air support and it should be noted that this progress results from actions undertaken as a part of the KAF Tactical Air Improvement Plan approved in Washington a year ago.

Classified by ASD/ISA
SUBJECT TO GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION SCHEDULE OF
EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652. AUTOMATICALLY DOWNGRADED
AT THE YEAR INTERVALS. DECLASSIFIED ON 31 DEC 82



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During the wet season which is just ending, KC forces were able to interdict Routes 4 and 5 at various times. However, once FANK responded to the threat, the KC were unable to withstand government forces and withdrew. Enemy personnel losses resulting from these operations are believed to have been severe and are expected to have a deleterious effect on KC efforts in this dry season.

(S) It would appear the most useful US response to KC interdiction efforts would be to insure that present stockage levels in combat consumables for FANK are adequately maintained. Within the limits of his tightly constrained budget, Chief MEDTC has done and is doing exactly this. Ammunition requirements for the first two quarters have been fully funded, however the status of funding beyond this will remain vague until Congress completes action on Foreign Assistance Bill for FY75. For the longer range, selected investment and attrition items will have to be funded to insure the continuity and maintenance of the Cambodian LOCs. A KAF Airlift Self-sufficiency package, designed to make the KAF self-sufficient in airlift capability by July 1975 is in the final stages of DOD review and approval. It will provide the KAF an airlift capability of 16 C-123K transports and should allow the phasing out of the current civilian contract C-130 flights by July 1975. A second area of concern has been the combat attrition of riverine craft. Since January 1974 a total of 15 craft have been lost to enemy action. To offset these losses, actions are underway by DOD to provide additional riverine craft to MNK. Provision of additional craft is contingent on having available funds, and the approval of Congress to implement the transfer. If successful, these craft should be available for release to Cambodia in February 1975. The key however, will continue to be adequate funding of Cambodia MAP. It is appropriate to reiterate that the purpose of these steps is to support a level of military parity under which both sides can be brought to negotiate a settlement.

W. Wickham

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National Intelligence Bulletin

December 17, 1974

CAMBODIA

The Khmer Communists apparently intend to mount a major effort to interdict the Mekong River south of Phnom Penh during the next few months. The scope of planning and preparation suggests that this will be the most concerted attempt since the spring of 1973 to cut this vital supply route.

Although insurgent elements have already begun pressing some government positions along the Mekong, many units scheduled to participate in the interdiction effort are still engaged in fighting along the Bassac River near Phnom Penh and around the provincial capital of Svay Rieng. These units will probably have to rest and refit before they can be committed to new battlefronts. Insurgent commanders may also want to wait until water levels drop further and riverside terrain dries out before implementing their attack plans. Details on the timing of the campaign may be revealed when several tactical planning conferences now under way have ended.

Cambodian army commanders, aware of Communist intentions, plan to make 1,700 reinforcements available to help man defenses along the Mekong. This will raise government troop strength along the river to over 8,000. The air force and navy will remain heavily committed both to escorting river convoys and to supporting ground units along the Mekong.

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