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MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

INFORMATIONSECRET/SENSITIVE

September 21, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: John H. Holdridge

SUBJECT: A New Estimate of Communist Supplies Delivered
Through Sihanoukville

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CIA has issued a memorandum revealing new evidence on the delivery of Communist military supplies to Sihanoukville from December 1966 through April 1969 (Tab A). In short, this evidence indicates that at least 22,000 tons of military equipment reached the port during this period, an amount far higher than previously estimated. (In March of this year, CIA estimated a total of about 11,800 tons.)

CIA notes that this must be considered a preliminary figure, since all the new evidence has not yet been analyzed. At present, there are two important loose ends. The 22,000 tons is based on deliveries made by nine Chinese ships; it is possible that there were additional ships, in which case the total will be even higher. On the other hand, the Cambodians retained some of this material for themselves (probably about ten per cent), and this must be deducted before the total amount actually reaching the VC/NVA can be calculated. Because of the mass of documents involved, it will probably be at least a month before a firm total is produced.

Comment. The new evidence was obtained recently in Phnom Penh, and is solid. It is a virtually complete Cambodian record of the delivery and distribution of Communist supplies. It contains not only bills of lading and packing lists from the Chinese ships, but detailed inventories and destinations of the truck convoys which delivered the supplies to the VC/NVA near the South Vietnamese border. A quick look at the material indicates that there were some 10-20 of these delivery points along the border, and it may be that some additional caches near the border could be uncovered by searching the immediate areas. We understand that CIA is planning to send this information to the field as soon as it can be assembled.

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Aside from revealing the inadequacy of previous estimates of Communist supplies arriving at Sihanoukville, the new evidence also poses a thorny intelligence problem. In effect, the Communists received far more military equipment through Sihanoukville than previously believed. This raises the question of where the extra material is now. There are really only two possibilities. It may be cached in Cambodia and South Vietnam. If so, the Communists' immediate logistical problems caused by the cross border operations would be diminished. The other possibility is that the Communists have been consuming a greater amount of military supplies than previously estimated. If this is the case, then the loss of Sihanoukville would be an even greater blow to the Communists.

We understand that CIA plans to re-evaluate its approach to the entire question of Communist logistics, including rates of consumption. This will probably be a long process, but the results should give us a better understanding of what may have happened to the unaccounted supplies.

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