

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY~~

May 26, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger
SUBJECT: Situation in Cambodia

Attached is a cable from General Haig reporting on various aspects of the situation in Cambodia. He makes the following points of particular interest:

- There have been no signs yet that the enemy has started moving supplies along the routes available to it in Northern Cambodia. If such a movement develops interdiction will not be difficult because of the small Cambodian population in the area.
- The Commander of the 7th Air Force states that we are going to move toward using Thai or South Vietnamese pilots in Cambodia and we should move immediately to prepare forward air control aircraft for Cambodia, including the joint pilot teams needed to operate them.
- Preparations for tactical air support are moving much too indecisively and slowly to be of much use to the Cambodians in the period of their greatest danger. Firm direction from Washington in the next few days is needed.
- According to the VC Deputy Commander of the Sub Region-2 Area who rallied to the GVN on May 20, COSVN had prepared a plan for attacking Phnom Penh on May 3. The plan was broken when US forces entered the Fish Hook on May 1 and COSVN signaled its subordinate units that further orders should be awaited. If this testimony is verified it indicates that the NVA/VC intended to install a new government by force in the capital.

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DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12958, as amended, Sect 3.5

NLN 03-40/1 per ltr 24 Sept 2008

By CIM NARA, Date 29 Oct 2008

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- Because of scattered looting and some indiscriminate bombing by South Vietnamese forces, some immediate steps are necessary to sustain the existing unity of purpose between the GVN and the Cambodians.

- Because of disruption to rubber plantations in the Fish Hook it will probably not be possible to secure the area or keep the plantations working after US forces leave. We should consider the possibility of evacuating the unemployed workers to prevent their recruitment by the enemy.

- Evidently, the VC/NVA program of recruiting a Cambodian "liberation army" in Sihanouk's name has made little progress so far.

Attachment

03/10/11

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FROM: General Haig

TO: The White House, Attention Dr. Kissinger

Returned to Saigon on Sunday, May 24 at 1600. Went immediately to see General Brown, the Commander of 7th AF here, to investigate the problem of tactical air support for Cambodia's forces and interdiction of enemy supply routes in Northeast Cambodia.

First, I informed General Brown of President's wish to have the Cambodians supported by U.S. tactical air power in N.E. Cambodia to the extent possible. General Brown responded that the previous week the 7th had developed a list of 30 to 40 targets in Northeast Cambodia but had recommended to General Abrams that no strikes then be placed on them because, in General Brown's words, "our target interdiction was lousy." To remedy this situation, Brown has taken steps to prepare for an interdiction campaign against enemy supply routes leading from Southern Laos into Northeast Cambodia, particularly against Binh Tram 38 and its subordinate units along the Se Kong River that might be expected to become active if the enemy started moving supplies to the Mekong in Cambodia. Strings of Igloo White Sensors have been seeded in this area south of Attopeu. Authority has been sought and received from Ambassador Godley to hit targets in the unpopulated areas of South Laos and Northern Cambodia. An intensive intelligence effort, in addition to the sensors, has been started with 24 hour ARDF, SLAR, TR, and VR to fix targets as they develop. General Brown said, however, that their efforts had so far borne little fruit. The enemy had kept the 559th Transportation Group in Laos and accelerated movement of supplies en route around the DMZ area but there had been no sign that the enemy had started moving supplies along the routes available to it in Northern Cambodia. If such movement should develop, however, Brown saw no problem in interdicting these routes because except for Montagnards and the small triangle still held by the Cambodians, Northeast Cambodia was either unpopulated or held by the Viet Cong. General Brown had not up till now considered the even more urgent problems of close air support to Cambodian forces beyond 30KM Zone.

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Regarding close support of the Cambodian ground forces, Brown thought the Cambodians could do much more if given some support. In particular, they have enough pilots (28 qualified) and planes to do some damage and certainly to project the central government's power to the countryside if these planes can be made operable. In this regard, Brown mentioned that he had located a skilled U.S. civilian mechanic now working in Thailand with years of experience in Cambodia. While the Cambodian planes could probably be serviced in Thailand or SVN, Brown thought that this American might form the nucleus for a civilian team of U.S. and SVN or Thai mechanics and communications experts that could greatly assist the Cambodians. Even with this assistance, Brown thought we would certainly need to help the Cambodians in other ways. The Thais have one squadron of T-28s based at Udorn that could be painted with Cambodian marking and possibly forward based in Pakse within Cambodia where adequate facilities are located. Also Thai forces might provide direct air support in central and Northwest Cambodia. Likewise, enough Lao pilots to man several squadrons were now in training in Thailand under USAF control. They could be freed from their training duties - a number are ready for combat - and also deployed at Pakse in support of the Cambodians. We are going to move toward using Thai or SVN pilots in Cambodia, particularly its populated area. Brown thought that we should move immediately to prepare Forward Air Control Aircraft for Cambodia and the joint pilot teams, including one Cambodian, that are needed to fly them. Little action has yet been taken for this step, essential if necessary coordination is to be achieved. My General impression is that these preparations for tactical air support are moving much too indecisively and slowly to be of much use to the Cambodians in the period of their greatest danger unless we provide firm direction from Washington in the next few days.

This apprehension has been heightened by the first direct evidence here that the enemy intended in early May to move swiftly against the Lon Nol Government to overthrow it and reinstall Sihanouk rather than merely securing their base areas by moving to the Mekong. The VC deputy commander of the SR-2 area, who rallied to the GVN on May 20, reports that the overthrow of the Lon Nol Government was the objective of COSVN's "Toan Thang" plan which he learned about directly on April 27 when he was present at a large COSVN planning meeting held in Cambodia. The essential elements of this plan were for the NVA 9th Division to move directly against Svay Rieng on May 2 and after taking it, seize all the vehicles there for use in transporting troops and materials to attack Phnom Penh on May 3.

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In connection with this plan, the NVA 5th Division was to have taken Mimot, acted as a screen for the 9th's activity and then also presumably moved west to join in the attack. Of course, this plan was broken when U.S. forces entered on May 1 and the VC reports that COSVN almost immediately signalled its subordinate units that further orders should be awaited. If this testimony holds up (the Deputy Commander's bona fides have yet to be established), it means that prior to the allied cross-border operations, the NVA/VC forces not only planned to set up a liberation movement within Cambodia, as previously reported, but that they intended to take Phnom Penh by force to install this government in power.

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FROM: General Haig

TO: The White House: Attention Dr. Kissinger

Following our visit with Brown, we spent Monday taking an extensive look at our military operations in Cambodia opposite CTZ III. I will report on the results and overall implications of these operations when I return, but before then I think you should be apprised of the considerable problems associated with RVNAF activities in Cambodia and their treatment of the civilian population there. This problem is potentially troublesome and I fear that unless immediate steps are taken by the GVN, serious damage may be done to the unity of purpose of the GVN and Cambodians that now exists. The immediate problem is the result of the following actions by RVNAF:

1. Scattered looting in Cambodian towns, particularly when ARVN forces are fired upon and conclude therefore that the town is VC, such as Mimot.

2. Some indiscriminate bombing by VNAF, sometimes in areas where they are not supporting troops in contact. We saw some evidence of these attacks at Mimot but the damage appeared fairly limited. Nevertheless, these incidents, especially as received in Phnom Penh, could be exploited by the VC/NVA in Cambodia. I intend to raise this problem with Ambassador Bunker and President Thieu during our meeting scheduled for later this a.m.

So far, we believe that U.S. forces have not created any significant problems of this sort and their relations with the few Cambodians contacted appear to have been quite good.

In the sanctuary areas entered by U.S. troops, the population, if any, disappeared before the arrival of U.S. forces. Over the following days, however, many began to return to their homes. In most, but not all areas, commanders said the Cambodian population has been friendly and relatively cooperative. There have been a number of cases of their giving information about VC/NVA caches (though villagers have no knowledge of important ones) or about the presence of enemy troops nearby.

A special problem exists in the rubber plantation of the Fish Hook. The departure of the French staffs, and the lack of means to evacuate any output, has left the workers unemployed, without income and generally without land where

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they might revert to a subsistence economy. They will thus provide a recruiting ground for the NVA and whatever pro-Sihanouk armed force it is establishing. Unfortunately, no one believes it will be possible to secure the area or keep the plantations working after U.S. forces leave. We should consider whether it would be feasible or desirable to try to evacuate the non-farming population.

No Cambodian officials or administrative presence remain in the area. The Embassy in Phnom Penh will explore the possibility of getting a token presence back, at least until U.S. forces withdraw. Commanders indicated they would be glad to have such a presence to assist the civil affairs teams, improve communication with the local population, and hopefully elicit more information on VC/NVA caches and whereabouts. Two officers supplied by the Cambodian army as knowledgeable about caches have succeeded in locating several, and U.S. commanders are anxious for more such sources. The Embassy in Phnom Penh will seek to locate some.

Only two instances of Cambodians fighting with the NVA were reported. A U.S. unit near Snoul found some Cambodian bodies and one prisoner after an action near Snoul. The prisoner said he and other villagers had been conscripted by the NVA. The ARVN III Corps Commander, General Tri, also said his troops had captured about 20 Cambodians south of Chup. Evidently the VC/NVA program of recruiting a Cambodian "liberation army" in Sihanouk's name has made little progress so far. VC/NVA operations in Cambodia will be hampered both by the lack of protective political coloration which such a force could provide, and by the lack of local guides and cadres to help keep the VC/NVA under cover.