

M/H SNIE 57-1-73

**The Short-Term Prospects for
Cambodia Through the Current Dry
Season—May 1974**

31 January 1974

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MEMORANDUM TO HOLDERS

**SPECIAL
NATIONAL
INTELLIGENCE
ESTIMATE**

The Short-Term Prospect for Cambodia
Through the Current Dry Season—May 1974

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SNIE 57-1-73
31 January 1974

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The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State and Defense, and the NSA.

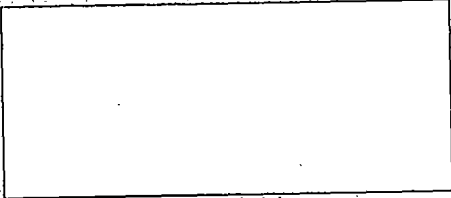
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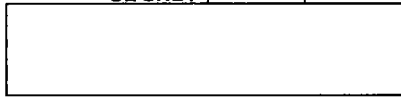
- The Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, the subject being outside of his jurisdiction.

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MEMORANDUM TO HOLDERS OF
SNIE 57-1-73

THE SHORT TERM PROSPECT
FOR CAMBODIA THROUGH THE
CURRENT DRY SEASON—MAY 1974

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THE SHORT TERM PROSPECT FOR CAMBODIA THROUGH THE CURRENT DRY SEASON—MAY 1974

PRÉCIS

The key judgment of SNIE 57-1-73 was that the Phnom Penh Government would survive communist military action during the current dry season, although the margin of survival would be very narrow. An examination of subsequent evidence leads the Intelligence Community to reaffirm this judgment.

In the eight weeks since the Estimate was published, the momentum of the Khmer Communist (KC) campaign has been slow to develop, giving the government some much-needed breathing room. We believe, however, that the KC, partly as a result of renewed logistic assistance from North Vietnam, will be able to sustain heavy combat through midsummer. The level of communist activity is likely to intensify in the next few weeks. The government's ability to withstand a major KC dry season offensive without the support of US air power is untested. The KC's ability, however, to plan and implement the coordinated heavy attacks that could lead to the government's defeat is suspect. Although the military situation has not reached a conclusive stage, we believe the government will survive the dry season—but with its military forces on the defensive and KC control outside Phnom Penh extended and tightened.

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THE ESTIMATE

1. The key judgment of SNIE 57-1-73 was that the Government of the Khmer Republic (GKR) would be able to survive Khmer Communist (KC) military action during the current dry season. The Intelligence Community agreed, however, that the uncertainties of the situation were such that the odds in favor of the GKR's survival were very close. It was also concluded that the KC would avoid, at least initially, a direct all-out attack on Phnom Penh in favor of a more deliberate but still major "strangulation" campaign. This strategy would involve the interdiction of the capital's supply lines, conventional attacks on the city's outlying defenses, and pressure against government provincial strong points in an effort to force the GKR's collapse. In the following paragraphs we re-examine the validity of these conclusions in the light of developments over the past eight weeks.

2. *A Slow Start.* The dry season campaign has unfolded generally along the lines forecast by the Estimate. The KC have kept Route 4 between Phnom Penh and the seaport at Kompong Som closed almost continuously;

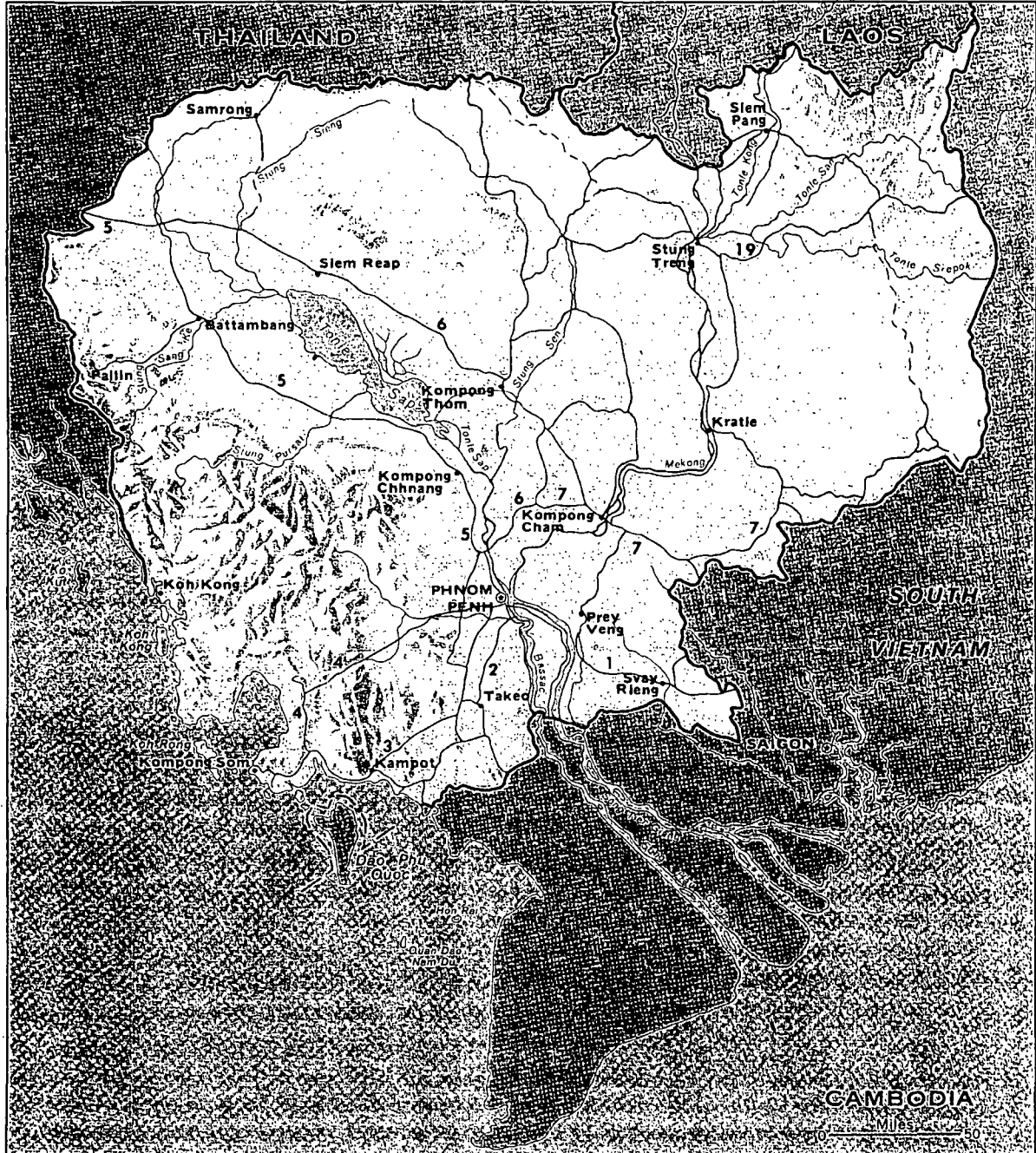
Route 5 has also been closed since early September, thereby denying the GKR access to sizable rice stocks in the northwest.* But the KC have yet to mount a serious effort to interdict supply convoys on the Mekong—the GKR's principal logistic lifeline for rice and POL and a major KC target during last year's fighting. The KC have gained some territory on the east bank of the Mekong opposite Phnom Penh and have put heavy pressure on the capital's northwestern defenses. Their new footholds in these areas have allowed them to intensify artillery and rocket attacks on Pochentong Airport and on Phnom Penh. They have increased pressure against the capital's outlying defenses, but have so far failed to mount a general coordinated ground offensive. This has allowed FANK to concentrate and maneuver sufficient forces to contain piecemeal KC attacks. Finally, most government provincial strongholds have not yet faced the heavy pressure foreseen in the Estimate.

3. It is clear that KC deficiencies in planning and execution have carried over into the

*See map for Cambodia's principle LOCs.

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current dry season and that the KC have not been able to offset fully last year's heavy loss of combat-hardened personnel. Nonetheless, they still appear determined to try for a decisive military victory this year, and the government's military forces (FANK) have not yet faced the brunt of the KC effort. The KC will maintain pressure on Phnom Penh's lines of communication and can be expected to make a more strenuous attempt to close the Mekong. But it has become evident that the KC intend to direct the major part of their military effort against the four FANK divisions manning the capital's outlying defenses. Evidence is accumulating that attacks against Phnom Penh itself are being planned. But a major thrust into the heart of the city is not likely to succeed unless the KC can first inflict a serious defeat on FANK forces around the capital. In the meantime, the KC may keep up attacks by fire and mount small-scale raids into Phnom Penh, possibly in conjunction with heavier attacks against the capital's defensive perimeter. We believe that government forces in and near the city with their advantages in firepower and maneuverability can contain KC forces in the Phnom Penh area.

4. *An Improved KC Supply Situation.* The most significant development of the past weeks has been Hanoi's renewed and substantial logistic assistance to the KC. In late December, the North Vietnamese began to transfer 900 tons of military equipment and 296 vehicles to KC authorities in northeast Cambodia and apparently are assisting in the distribution of these supplies. So far, we have observed at least 150 tons of supplies delivered to the KC. Our lack of precise information on the former KC supply situation and level of North Vietnamese assistance makes it difficult to assess the impact of this new aid on the military balance in Cambodia. We do not

know for certain when delivery will be completed, or if some new friction could arise with the North Vietnamese which would delay or prevent completion of delivery. There is evidence that agreement on the aid was reached only after hard bargaining. Nonetheless, we believe that with their existing stocks and other sources of supply, the KC will shortly have on hand sufficient war materiel to sustain heavy combat well beyond the end of the dry season in May—assuming the materiel can be distributed effectively.

5. The KC are allocating some of the new arms and ammunition to units around Phnom Penh that have suffered from persistent supply shortages. They also plan to use some of the materiel to arm a substantial number of new troops which they are attempting to recruit in the countryside. The KC leadership cannot count on these recruits to be reasonably combat effective until later in the dry season.

6. *The GKR.* The failure of the KC to interdict the Mekong during the critical supply buildup period has given the GKR some much-needed breathing room. Not counting any rice stocks which may be delivered from Kompong Som to the capital, there should be at least a month's supply of rice in government warehouses in Phnom Penh at the end of January. Other foodstuffs, however, will continue in short supply, and this will contribute to rapid inflation and consumer discontent in Phnom Penh. Barring destruction of storage facilities, no shortage of military POL products is expected for the next two to three months, although there may be some shortage of civilian supplies since one of the GKR's major suppliers has defaulted on its contract.

7. On the military front, FANK's performance this dry season has been spotty and defensive. The GKR's failure to meet its conscription goals means that FANK must con-

tinue to live with its manpower shortage this dry season. Moreover, FANK's ammunition supply is critically dependent on the continued availability of the Mekong River and Pochentong Airport. The Phnom Penh Government and its military forces are also critically dependent on the continued availability of US assistance at least at present levels.

8. There have been some bright spots in the GKR's military performance. The Khmer Air Force has put in a stronger performance than anticipated in providing tactical support. The effective operations of the Cambodian Navy and the successful deployment of naval infantry units along the Mekong corridor offer new hope that supply convoys will be able to make the run to Phnom Penh without heavy losses for the remainder of the dry season. And FANK, despite its shortcomings, has demonstrated resiliency as a fighting force, particularly when its back is to the wall.

9. Politically, the GKR, although still fragile, appears in better shape than at any time during the past year. Prime Minister Long Boret has brought a new measure of competence to the government. His cabinet, despite its coalition nature, is more unified than its predecessor. Nevertheless, the severity of economic conditions in the capital, especially the chronic inflation and shortages, will continue to cause popular unrest in Phnom Penh.

10. *Negotiations and the Parties Involved.* The basic judgments of SNIE 57-1-73 in this area remain valid. On the GKR side, there have been signs of more serious interest in a settlement. Recent GKR peace feelers, however, have been essentially irrelevant in the face of KC intransigence. The KC continue to show no sign of interest in moving toward a direct dialogue with the GKR or in using Sihanouk or their major allies to explore settlement possibilities. Instead, the KC leaders re-

main committed to a military solution. Given the KC's improved logistic position, we believe the chances of a breakthrough on the negotiating front before the end of the dry season are extremely slim. If the KC see their military effort beginning to fail, they may reconsider the possibility of negotiations, but as long as FANK remains bottled up in Phnom Penh on the defensive there would probably still be little incentive for the KC to negotiate.

11. There is no sign that the KC are under pressure from their allies to negotiate. North Vietnam's provision of logistic aid for the KC dry season campaign seems to signal that Hanoi is not prepared to take a major initiative on its own to bring the KC to negotiations. North Vietnamese aims in providing the aid probably include a desire to reaffirm support for KC objectives, improve relations with KC, and retain some ability to influence future KC policy. We do not know whether the North Vietnamese consider their new aid enough to alter dramatically the military balance in Cambodia.

Conclusion

12. The GKR's principal logistic lifeline—the Mekong—has been kept open and the KC military effort has been slow in gaining momentum. These encouraging developments, however, may have been more than offset by the KC's improved supply situation which will allow them to sustain a high level of combat well beyond the dry season. The outcome will hinge in part on the KC's ability to bring their new war material effectively to bear against FANK. More important, they will also need to eliminate the military deficiencies which have so far prevented them from mounting well-coordinated sustained offensive on several fronts.

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13. In any event, the KC military effort will intensify in the next few weeks. Although FANK has demonstrated resiliency, its ability to withstand a sustained KC dry season offensive without US air support is untested. But we doubt that the KC can improve their own battlefield performance sufficiently to tip the balance in the critical sector around Phnom

Penh where FANK firepower and maneuverability are greatest. Thus, we believe FANK will make it through the dry season, hurt but unbroken. In these circumstances, however, the KC will tighten their hold on the countryside, perhaps taking one or more provincial capitals, and extending their control along main communications routes.

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