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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

Communist Military Aid to Cambodia, 1963-66

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Photograph

Prince Sihanouk Inspects a MIG-17 Jet Fighter Received from
the USSR

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COMMUNIST MILITARY AID TO CAMBODIA*
1963-66

Summary

During the past four years, Communist countries have supplied Cambodia with military aid amounting to nearly \$15 million, four-fifths of it in the form of grants. Delivery already has been made of nearly all of the aid. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Although the ability of the armed forces to safeguard Cambodia's internal security has improved, they remain small and probably could withstand only briefly a serious attack [REDACTED]

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The overriding foreign policy objective of Chief of State Norodom Sihanouk remains the strengthening of Cambodia against possible encroachments by Thailand and Vietnam. To this end, he probably will continue to welcome military aid from Communist countries and France. At the same time, Sihanouk may find an accompanying program of US aid increasingly acceptable because of mounting economic problems, growing dissatisfaction among conservative elements, and continuing disarray in Communist China. His interest in military aid probably would be stimulated by the end of the war in South Vietnam.

* This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Research and Reports and coordinated with the Offices of Current Intelligence and National Estimates; the estimates and conclusions represent the best judgment of the Directorate of Intelligence as of May 1967.

1. INTRODUCTION

The interest of Cambodia in recent years in obtaining Communist arms, like its earlier willingness to accept arms from the United States, stems from anxiety over national survival. Although military aid agreements negotiated by Cambodia have had the practical aim of building up the country's military strength, the choices among potential donors naturally have had a political coloration. Prince Sihanouk, the chief of state and leading political figure, has long been obsessed with fear of territorial annexations by Cambodia's larger and stronger neighbors and ancient enemies, Thailand and Vietnam. This fear has outweighed his apprehension about Communist China's aggressive designs in Southeast Asia, which appeared to be a less immediate threat and which in any case could hardly be resisted by so small a country as Cambodia. For this reason, and as part of a delicate balancing act, Sihanouk cultivated relations with China even in the years of his closest association with the United States and has sought Chinese support for Cambodia's independence and national security.

For a decade after gaining its independence from France in 1953, Cambodia relied mainly on the United States for military, economic, and political support. By 1963, when Sihanouk ended US aid, Cambodia had received about \$97 million in military assistance, as well as some \$265 million in economic assistance -- a sizable total for a nation of only 6 million people. US military aid had equipped nearly all of the Cambodian army and had provided the air force with a small reconnaissance and transport capability.

During the first decade of independence, France also was a major supporter of the Cambodian armed forces. This support consisted of the transfer of equipment left behind when French forces pulled out of Indochina, supplementary deliveries from France, and the training activities of a French military mission numbering about 650 men in 1965. French aid has continued since the end of the US program. A French extension of \$11 million in July 1964 covered aircraft and ground equipment, and an extension of nearly \$6 million in August 1965 was earmarked for vehicles. Most of the equipment under these agreements -- including 23 piston-engine fighter-bombers previously supplied to France by the United States -- has been delivered, and the remainder probably will be delivered by the end of 1967. A French training mission of some 300 men also continues to assist the Cambodians.

With the growing power of the Viet Cong in South Vietnam, Sihanouk apparently had doubts as early as 1961 about the efficacy of his policy

[redacted]

of maintaining close relations with the United States. His persistent efforts to convene a Geneva type of conference of leading powers in order to "neutralize" South Vietnam and guarantee the integrity of Cambodia's borders failed. Consequently, Sihanouk began laying the groundwork for closer relations with Communist countries and a swing away from the United States. Working within a basic framework of neutralism, Sihanouk decided in 1963 to rely partly on Communist countries for military aid because of his changing assessment of great-power relationships in Southeast Asia and of necessary Cambodian adaptation to them. One of the concrete early signs of the shift was the negotiation of a military aid agreement with the USSR in April 1963.

The fall of the Diem government in South Vietnam in November 1963 brought matters to a head. This event apparently made Sihanouk fear a rapid deterioration of anti-Communist strength in South Vietnam and, since he suspected US complicity in the murder of Diem, greatly heightened his apprehension about US interference in Cambodian internal affairs. Sihanouk's reaction was to terminate the entire program of US aid to Cambodia and inaugurate an era of bad feeling that led a year and a half later to the severance of diplomatic relations with the United States. The Communist countries responded to Sihanouk's solicitation of new aid offers in the hope of persuading him to give increased support to Communist policies in Southeast Asia. Also important for the USSR and China individually was the aim of countering the other's presence and influence in Cambodia.

2. COMMUNIST PROGRAMS OF MILITARY AID

During the past four years, the USSR and Communist China have each concluded three military aid agreements with Cambodia, and Czechoslovakia, one. Extensions of aid to Cambodia under these agreements have amounted to nearly \$15 million [redacted] The USSR and Communist China each extended roughly one-half of this aid, Czechoslovakia's extension being of negligible amount. About \$12 million of the aid has been provided as grant aid and the remainder on credit. [redacted]

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[redacted] Nearly all of the equipment covered by the agreements has already been delivered.

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3. IMPACT OF THE SHIFT TO COMMUNIST MILITARY AID

a. Armed Forces

Communist military aid to Cambodia -- although small compared with the earlier program of US aid -- has permitted a significant expansion and modernization of the Cambodian armed forces. Valued at US prices [REDACTED] Communist aid is estimated to equal between 20 and 30 percent of US aid during 1954-63. To some extent, Communist equipment has become important in the Cambodian inventory simply because it is the newest and (in certain instances) the most advanced equipment available. On the other hand, the sharp transition to new sources of supply no doubt has raised problems. Communist deliveries have been offset partly by a declining usability of weapons received previously from the United States.

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[REDACTED]

Much of the equipment delivered by Communist countries has served to substantially increase the firepower of Cambodia's army, which, although expanding, is still comparatively small. [REDACTED]

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25X1 [REDACTED]

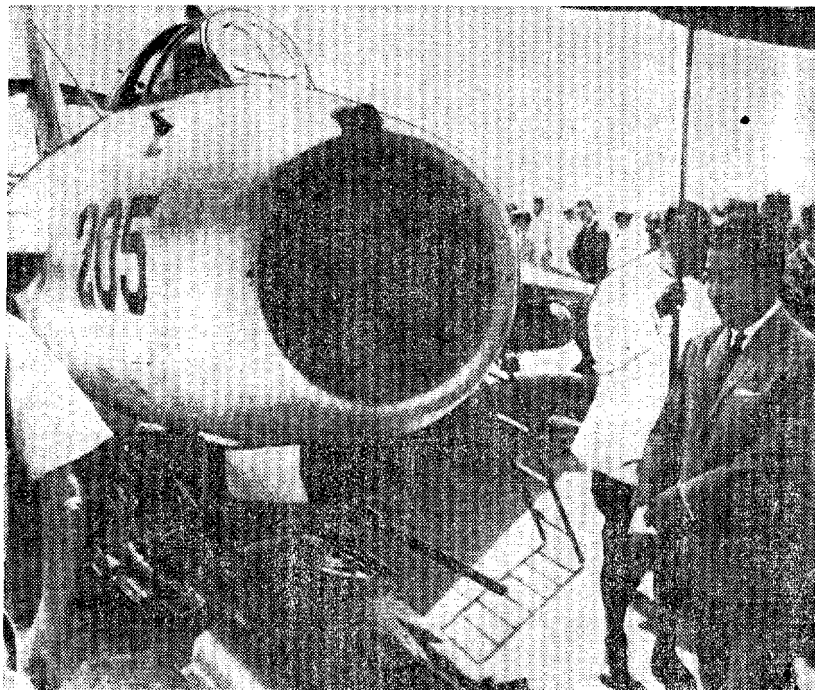
25X1 [REDACTED] Nevertheless, the army, which accounts for 32,000 out of a total of 35,000 men in the regular armed forces, is capable of little more than carrying out an internal security role. Although it is reasonably well equipped and apparently displays good morale in border areas at least, the army still suffers from a poorly developed logistical system, inadequate training, and a shortage of good officers, especially of the rank of major and higher. The army is not large enough nor sufficiently well organized and trained to resist an attack [REDACTED]

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The Cambodian navy has received little aid from Communist sources and remains a small force with only 1,400 men. It is capable of little more than coastal and river patrolling aimed at preventing smuggling and other violations of Cambodia's territorial waters.

Communist deliveries of [REDACTED] air-craft represented an important addition to Cambodia's tiny air force and must have pleased Sihanouk, considering earlier US reluctance to supply jet fighters (see the photograph). Cambodia's 1,400-man air

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PRINCE SIHANOUK INSPECTS A MIG-17 JET FIGHTER RECEIVED FROM THE USSR

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force contributes to internal security by providing air support, aerial reconnaissance, and transport and communications services for the army. The MIG's and some rudimentary radar facilities also provide a small offensive and air defense capability. The air force nevertheless has relatively few aircraft and is handicapped by shortages of jet pilots, skilled technicians, spare parts, and communications facilities.

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In mid-1965 the Cambodian government expressed the intention of promptly increasing the armed forces by 10,000 men (to some 42,000) and eventually raising these forces to 50,000 men. So far, about 3,000 men have been added to the army and 200 to the air force. Backing up the regular armed forces is a 64,000-man paramilitary defense force composed of the police, militia, and volunteer village defense units, but this force is of questionable value against a serious attack. Sihanouk himself has admitted that Cambodia "could not support a frontal or classic type of war for more than a few days." The Cambodian army could put up only a limited and brief resistance against full-scale invasion by its neighbors and probably could subsequently continue operations only by withdrawing to the interior and conducting a guerrilla campaign.

Because Communist military aid so far is small and has been provided largely as a grant, it has had little direct effect on the Cambodian economy or the country's reserves of foreign exchange. The defense budget approximated \$45 million annually during 1964-66 and declined to 22 percent of total expenditures under the national budget in 1966, compared with 25 percent in 1964.

b. Soviet and Chinese Influence

Military aid in itself has done little to increase Chinese or Soviet influence over Cambodian policy. Deliveries of equipment so far have been comparatively small and only a few Communist military technicians are in the country. France provides an alternative to Communist offers and the United States and other Western countries potential alternatives, and Sihanouk remains highly sensitive to foreign pressures and tends to react negatively to them. If the programs continue -- and as the inventory of US weapons becomes increasingly outmoded or inoperative -- growing Cambodian dependence on Communist sources will give Communist China and the USSR somewhat more leverage over Sihanouk's policies, but still not much. As in the

past, these policies can be expected to reflect Sihanouk's overall assessment of the course most in keeping with Cambodian security and maintenance of his political position.

Sihanouk has remained basically anti-Communist in his internal political policy. His support of Communist China and North Vietnam has been largely verbal, apart from his general acquiescence in the use of Cambodian territory by Vietnamese Communists -- action on the matter being inhibited both by Cambodian military capabilities and his reluctance to become actively embroiled in the Vietnamese conflict. Diversion of Communist arms from Cambodia to the Viet Cong may have occurred under local initiative, but the quantities could not have been large.

4. OUTLOOK

Sihanouk will continue to seek military aid because he no doubt feels that Cambodia's military inferiority relative to Thailand and South Vietnam must be reduced. He has unfulfilled requirements under Cambodia's present military program that he will try to satisfy somehow; sizable further receipts of arms and technical assistance will be required to build up the armed forces to 50,000 men. Cambodia would have difficulty, however, in absorbing large amounts of aid over a short period. Cambodia also will have a continuing interest in the acquisition of spare parts and technical services from the USSR and China so that the arms already received can be kept in good condition. Both China and the USSR wish to increase their influence in Cambodia and presumably stand ready to provide further aid. It seems likely, therefore, that Communist military aid to Cambodia will be sustained at a moderate level over the next few years.

Further US progress in the Vietnamese war may persuade Sihanouk to take a more genuinely neutralist position -- a move that some influential Cambodians favor and that the disarray in China perhaps makes more feasible. Sihanouk himself may be wondering whether he has not veered too far in espousing Communist policies in Southeast Asia. A more moderate neutralism probably would not presage the end of Communist military aid but could lead to overtures for both military and economic aid from the United States. An aggravation of economic difficulties may also strengthen Cambodia's incentive to solicit US aid again.

Sihanouk's determination to obtain additional aid somewhere would probably not be diminished by the prospective or actual ending of the war in Vietnam. Whatever the circumstances of victory or settlement there, Sihanouk still would be concerned about the superiority of Vietnamese as well as Thai forces. Indeed, his desire for military aid might be stimulated because he felt particularly threatened by the large Vietnamese forces suddenly freed of the distraction of internal strife.

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