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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

28 May 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Communist Reactions to the Entry into Cambodia of Troops
from Non-Communist Asian States

NOTE

The major non-Communist states of East Asia show increasing concern over developments in Indochina. The Djakarta meeting is one sign of this concern but not the only one, and the meeting further revealed how uncertain these states are about what to do. One possibility is that several of them might decide to take some kind of active (or more active) military role not only in South Vietnam but also in Cambodia. The following memorandum assesses (1) the availability of forces for some such role; (2) how a development of this kind would be viewed by the Communist states -- North Vietnam, China, North Korea and the USSR; and (3) what the Communist response might be.

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Communist Views

4. Whatever the extent and nature of their involvement, the presence of troops from South Korea, Indonesia, and/or Nationalist China, would be seen by Communist policymakers as an effort to implement the Nixon Doctrine -- to substitute Asian for American ground forces in Indochina and so permit indefinite continuation of armed opposition to Hanoi. The prospect of carrying on a protracted war in the newly enlarged Indochinese theater against a more aggressive ARVN plus fresh troops of additional populous countries would be a grim prospect. Both Hanoi and Peking would fear a broad rallying of Asian forces was developing against Communist aspirations in Southeast Asia.

5. The introduction to Cambodia of South Korean forces alone, however, would probably not be seen as having such broad significance. ROK units are already heavily committed in South Vietnam and their appearance in Cambodia would be militarily worrisome but essentially an extension of the

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situation in South Vietnam. The entry of Chinese Nationalist troops would be viewed with extreme seriousness and seen as confirmation of United States willingness to move more boldly in Indochina, accepting the risk of a sharp reaction by Peking. The entry of hitherto neutral Indonesia into Cambodia would also suggest to Hanoi and Peking that major changes, detrimental to the Communist side, were occurring in the shape of the struggle in Indochina. The Communist response to the political and psychological implications of this development would be intense. They would try by every means to discredit the Asian character of the moves into Cambodia and to label the countries involved as puppets and dupes of the United States.

Possible Communist Reactions

6. Token third-country forces which served primarily to provide garrison security to Phnom Penh and key lines of communication from Sihanoukville or the Thai border would not, in Hanoi's view, greatly complicate the Communist position in Cambodia, which depends mainly on the territory east of the Mekong. But effective combat forces operating in the eastern Cambodian countryside against Communist troop concentrations, base areas, and supply routes would be an entirely different matter. Hanoi would not, at least in the first instance, look to Peking for direct assistance, but would attempt to cope with its problems, as before, by reinforcing VC/NVA units in Cambodia, strengthening defensive positions in key strategic areas, and, perhaps, by diversionary attacks in South Vietnam.

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7. If South Korean forces were introduced, Hanoi would call upon the brethren in North Korea to re-open their 1967-1968 campaign of armed harassment of South Korea in hope of deterring further ROK troop movements into Southeast Asia. Pyongyang would probably oblige, by some measures calculated to heighten tensions in the Korean peninsula, though it would want to avoid provoking major military counteraction.

8. As for Indonesia, the Communists probably would not anticipate that the entry of its forces would significantly affect the military situation in Indochina. And, in any case, Indonesia is beyond the reach of their physical retribution. The Communists' powers would, however, use such assets as exist in Indonesia and the still potent leftwing in that country to fan anti-war and anti-regime sentiment.

9. If Chinese Nationalist troops were to be sent to Cambodia, Hanoi in cooperation with Peking would invoke the threat of some kind of Chinese Communist military response. Hanoi would probably not, however, press for any large influx of Chinese into Indochina lest this threaten Hanoi's own predominance in the area and produce the escalation of Allied effort Hanoi would hope to avoid.

10. In Peking, a Nationalist deployment into Cambodia would raise concern regarding the possibility of a subsequent move by Taipei into

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neighboring Laos and thus close to China's own border. More broadly, Peking would consider it a most provocative move simply because of Taipei's involvement. It would also see it as confirmation of an unalterable United States hostility toward Communist China. Peking would believe it essential to respond with more than propaganda, but in such a way as to minimize the risk of direct confrontation with the United States. Peking's actions might include: overt troop and aircraft deployments to coastal areas opposite Taiwan; harassment of GRC air and sea units in the Taiwan Strait area; and shelling of the Offshore Islands. In addition, the Chinese Communists would reinforce their forces along the Laos border and might add to their forces already in Laos.

11. The primary Soviet concern in the event of a Chinat deployment into Cambodia would be that the situation was evolving into one in which Moscow could exercise little or no influence. The Soviets would also perceive the likelihood of further losses in their competition with Peking for influence in Hanoi, particularly in view of their continuing diplomatic presence in Phnom Penh. They would view the enhanced possibility of a Sino-United States confrontation with mixed feelings. While delighted at the vanishing chances of a Sino-United States rapprochement, the USSR would be apprehensive concerning the general repercussions of any direct hostilities between China and the United States.

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