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HCN 5181

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ACTION EA-13

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 NSC-10 NSCE-00 INR-05 CIAE-00 NSAE-00
PM-03 PRS-01 RSR-01 RSC-01 /049 W

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R 281150Z SEP 71

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

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INFO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

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SUBJ: OBSERVATIONS OF SIR ROBERT THOMPSON ON THE MILITARY SITUATION IN CAMBODIA

1. SUMMARY: SIR ROBERT THOMPSON VISITED PHNOM PENH SEPTEMBER 23-26 AS A GUEST OF THE BRITISH EMBASSY. ALTHOUGH NOT ON OFFICIAL BUSINESS, HE WAS RECEIVED HANDSOMELY BY THE KHMER, CALLED ON SIRIK MATAK AND OTHER OFFICIALS, RECEIVED A BRIEFING FROM FANK ON THE MILITARY AND SECURITY SITUATION, AND VISITED FANK FORCES IN THE COMBAT AREA ALONG ROUTE SIX SOUTHEAST OF KOMPONG THOM. IN VARIOUS CONVERSATIONS WITH US HE COMMENTED AS FOLLOWS ON HIS IMPRESSIONS OF THE CUHHKAAP LPP C. N. A. COMBINED WITH 345 045, 858, & 5748, & 8; 885 #345 151-155-4-89. END SUMMARY:

2. SIR ROBERT'S OVERALL ASSESSMENT WAS THAT FANK HAS MADE COMMENTABLE PROGRESS OVER THE PAST YEAR. BESIDES THE EXPECTED GAINS IN EQUIPMENT, TRAINING, AND EXPERIENCE, HE FOUND MILITARY MORALE

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State Dept. review completed

Approved For Release 2007/03/08 : CIA-RDP80R01720R001300060015-2

Si Robert Thompson

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STILL HIGH AND THE WILL TO RESIST STILL STRONG.

3. HE TOLD US THAT HE HAD NEVERTHELESS WARNED SIRIK MATAK THAT THE COUNTRY AND FANK MUST GIRD THEMSELVES FOR A PROTRACTED STRUGGLE SINCE THE NVA/VC SHOW NO SIGNS OF QUITTING. WE ASKED HIM WHETHER THIS STATEMENT IMPLIED ANY DOUBT IN HIS MIND CONCERNING KHMER ENDURANCE. HE ANSWERED IN THE NEGATIVE; HE BELIEVES THE KHMER ARE RESILIENT AND THAT BUDDHISM AND NATIONALISM REMAIN STRONG UNIFYING INFLUENCE. BUT HE THINKS IT PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT THAT FANK AVOID A PREMATURELY AGGRESSIVE COMBAT STRATEGY WHICH WOULD EXPOSE THEM TO SERIOUS REVERSES AND HEAVY COMBAT FATALITIES. IF A PROTRACTED WAR IS TO BE FOUGHT, HE BELIEVES AN ESSENTIALLY CONSERVATIVE STRATEGY MUST BE FOLLOWED. HE SAID THAT IF HE WERE IN LON NOL'S SHOES HE WOULD CONTINUE TO LET ARVN COMMIT ITS BETTER TRAINED AND EQUIPPED FORCES AGAINST THE THREE NVA/VC DIVISIONS IN THE RUBBER PLANTATION SANCTUARIES AROUND ROUTE SEVEN. IN TURN, FANK COULD TEST ITS CONSIDERABLY LESSER STRENGTH AGAINST UNITS OF THE FIRST NVA/VC DIVISION SOUTHWEST OF PHNOM PENH AND COULD EMPLOY ITS FORCES TO CONSOLIDATE ITS BASE OF CONTROL AROUND THE CAPITAL AND ALONG THE IMPORTANT LOC'S -- THE MEKONG, ROUTE ONE TO SAIGON, ROUTE 5 TO WAT KAMBANG, AND ROUTES 4 AND 3 TO THE SEA.

4. WE COMMENTED THAT ALTHOUGH THERE IS OCCASIONAL TALK, PARTICULARLY BY LON NOL, ABOUT CAMPAIGNS TO RETAKE KRATIE AND TO REPLACE ARVN UNITS ALONG ROUTE SEVEN, WE THINK THAT THE CONSERVATIVE STRATEGY SIR ROBERT HAD DESCRIBED IS GENERALLY CONGRUENT WITH FANK GENERAL STAFF PLANNING. SIR ROBERT NODDED HIS ASSENT BUT REPEATED THAT FANK MUST RESIST ANY TEMPTATION TO BITE OFF MORE THAN IT CAN CHEW.

5. WITH RESPECT TO THE SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY SIDE, SIR ROBERT OBSERVED THAT FROM WHAT HE COULD ASCERTAIN FROM AN ADMITTEDLY BRIEF VISIT, THE KHMER VILLAGERS IN OCCUPIED AREAS WELCOME THE RETURN OF GOVERNMENT CONTROL AND THAT PACIFICATION METHODS EMPLOYED IN VIETNAM WOULD HAVE ONLY MARGINAL RELEVANCE IN CAMBODIA. HE AGREED WITH US THAT KHMER HAVE BEEN SLOW TO DEVELOP MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES TO HANDLE THE RETURN OF GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION TO THE COUNTRYSIDE, BUT HE ALSO POINTED OUT THAT SOME PROGRESS HAS RECENTLY BEEN MADE. HE SAID THAT ABOVE ALL THE PACE SHOULD NOT BE FORCED BEYOND THE CAPABILITY OF FANK TO RE-OCCUPY TERRITORY AND SUSTAIN ITS PRESENCE.

6. WE INFORMED SIR ROBERT THAT WE HAVE UNDER STUDY A PROPOSAL TO

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PROVIDE MAP SUPPORT FOR A FORCE LEVEL OF SOME 250,000 MEN, POSSIBLY IN 1973, AS COMPARED TO A CURRENT SUPPORT LEVEL OF ABOUT 220,000. HE SAID THAT HE DID NOT REGARD AN ARMY OF A QUARTER OF A MILLION AS TOO LARGE FOR CAMBODIA BUT OBSERVED THAT WE SHOULD IN HIS JUDGEMENT GUARD AGAINST ANY TEMPTATION TO EXPAND IT MUCH FURTHER THAN THAT (EXCLUDING SELF-DEFENSE FORCES) OR TO INCREASE DISPROPORTIONATELY THE AMOUNT OF SOPHISTICATED ARMAMENT SUPPLIED IT. HE ADVERTED TO THE PROBLEMS OF MAINTENANCE OF SOPHISTICATED EQUIPMENT AND OF DEMOBILIZATION WHICH HAVE TO BE FACED IN VIET NAM AND IMPLIED THAT THE MORE MODEST OBJECTIVES WHICH HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED FOR FANK AND THE ESSENTIALLY HOLDING STRATEGY PRESENTLY IN PLACE IN CAMBODIA SHOULD NOT BE ABANDONED FOR MORE AMBITIOUS PLANS GIVEN THE CONDITIONS OF PROTRACTED WARFARE WHICH HE FORESEES IN INDO-CHINA.

7. IN A CONVERSATION WITH LT. COLONEL LON NON AT WHICH DATT WAS PRESENT SIR ROBERT ADVOCATED THAT EXPANDED USE OF SMALL UNITS OPERATING IN ENEMY-OCCUPIED TERRITORY TO CREATE INSECURITY. TO ACHIEVE THIS CAPABILITY HE PLACED STRONG EMPHASIS ON THE NEED FOR THOROUGHLY TRAINED PLATOON AND SQUAD LEADERS. HE ALSO REMARKED THAT SUCH PROGRAMS AS BOUNTIES TO THOSE WHO BRING IN RALLIERS AND PRISONERS WOULD EXPLOIT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ADVANTAGE WHICH THE GKR HAS NOT ONLY AMONG THE KHMER IN OCCUPIED TERRITORY BUT ALSO AMONG NORTH VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS FIGHTING IN AN ALIEN LAND.

8. WE REGARD SIR ROBERT'S VISIT AS HIGHLY USEFUL. HOPEFULLY IT STIMULATED THE KHMER TO GIVE ADDITIONAL THOUGHT TO THEIR STRATEGY AND TACTICS, SUPPLEMENTING OUR COUNSEL WITH THAT OF A RESPECTED NON-AMERICAN EXPERT ON SECURITY MATTERS. ALSO, SIR ROBERT'S VIEWS ARE OF INTEREST IN OUR OWN ONGOING CONSIDERATION OF FANK'S REQUIREMENTS AND FUTURE.

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