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Cease-Fire Developments

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CEASE-FIRE DEVELOPMENTS

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SOUTH VIETNAM

Desertions in the Territorial Forces

Some provinces, particularly in the delta, have reported an increased desertion rate among the Regional and Popular forces during the past few weeks. This is in contrast to the first several weeks of the cease-fire period, when desertions decreased.

New and more rigid reporting requirements in part account for the increase, but officials in some provinces say there are other reasons. In some delta provinces, local units are composed largely of ethnic Cambodians who celebrate their New Year in April, and many of these have taken off to spend the holidays with their families. Continued fighting in some regions, decreased air and artillery support being provided smaller units, and the practice of sending some local forces far from their home areas, have lowered morale and encouraged desertions.

At least one province chief has instituted a series of drastic measures to discourage desertions, and some local officials believe that tougher roll-ups and the return of many ethnic Cambodians after their holiday will bring the units back to strength. Others, however, are more concerned about the future and claim that territorial units in their provinces are critically understrength.

The government's regular combat forces are not experiencing a comparable increase in desertion rates, although they face many of the same problems. In fact, some army units have reported a decreasing rate since the cease-fire began. As might be expected, morale remains highest and desertions lowest in the areas where there has been little or no fighting.

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LAOS

The Military Situation

Preliminary reports indicate that North Vietnamese troops on 19 April overran a government company 25 miles southeast of Thakhek in the central panhandle. The incident occurred in an area where neither side had clear control at the time of the cease-fire. Additional fighting can be expected as both sides maneuver for control of villages in the area. [REDACTED]

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Negotiations Still in Holding Pattern

Despite bellicose statements from Sam Neua on the bombing at Tha Viang, Lao Communist envoy Phoune Sipraseuth is continuing to meet twice daily with government negotiator Ngon Sananikone in Vientiane. Ngon reports that little progress is being made at these sessions. The Communists in effect have repudiated the tentative agreement on the division of cabinet portfolios by renewing their demands for a deputy prime ministership and the Ministry of Interior. Ngon believes the private sessions will continue, but that prospects for any immediate progress are dim. [REDACTED]

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CAMBODIA

The Military Situation

Communist forces on 18 April again attacked the village of Tram Khnar on Route 3, some 25 miles south of Phnom Penh. Only light casualties resulted. The Khmer Communists also kept up their pressure on government positions east of the Mekong River near Neak Luong. In the southwest, the government has temporarily halted truck convoys along Route 4 because of reports that Communist troops are on the highway.

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Hanoi or Government Shakeup

The reshuffled government in Phnom Penh is no more to Hanoi's liking than the previous one. In a broadcast on 18 April, Radio Hanoi called the proposed changes a sham "aimed at solving the government's ever more critical internal differences in the face of heavy political and military defeats." The broadcast noted that US pressure was behind the effort to include opposition elements.

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INTERNATIONAL

Soviets Relaxed

There has been no authoritative Soviet reaction to recent US and South Vietnamese moves in Cambodia and Laos. Although the Soviets have reported these developments and parts of official Vietnamese Communist statements, the reporting conveys no sense of crisis, suggesting that the USSR is still anxious to keep Indochinese problems in the background. In one of the few routine-level commentaries available on South Vietnamese incursions into Cambodia, the commentator ends with the reminder that the Paris agreements "prove" that the political problems of Indochina can only be resolved by peaceful means.

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