

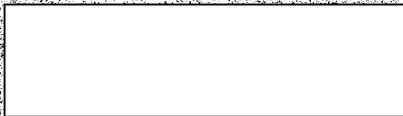
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SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

The Short-Term Prospect for Cambodia
Through August 1974



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SNIE 57-1-74
11 April 1974



Nº 190

Warning Notice
Sensitive Intelligence Sources and Methods Involved

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

Concurring:

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The Director of Intelligence and Research representing the Department of State

The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency

The Director, National Security Agency

The Assistant General Manager for National Security representing the Atomic Energy Commission

The Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Treasury representing the Department of the Treasury

Abstaining:

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

ALSO PARTICIPATING:

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

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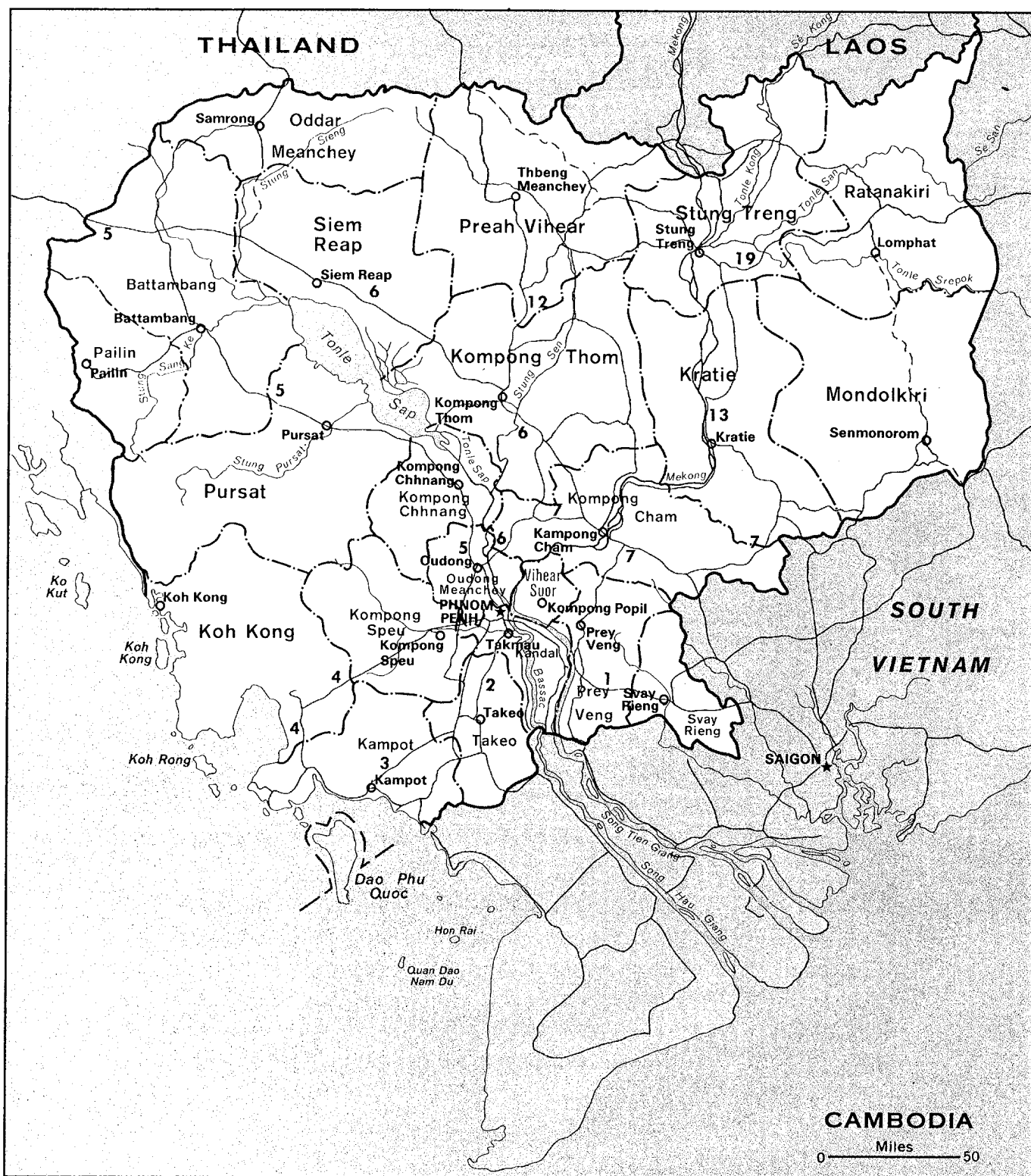
THE SHORT-TERM PROSPECT FOR CAMBODIA THROUGH AUGUST 1974

PRÉCIS

The fighting since early February has shown that the Khmer Communists (KC) currently lack the military muscle and skill to bring down the Cambodian Government (GKR) during this campaign season (through the end of August). Given a continuation of the present level of US military and economic aid, a standoff is the most likely outcome—with the KC unable to gain their objective of decisively defeating the GKR, but with the GKR equally unable to do much more than react to KC military initiatives.

At this time, the KC leaders still appear wedded to the notion of a military solution. But if their dry season campaign ends in a stand-off, the KC may be more inclined to consider negotiations and would be more susceptible to external pressures toward such an end. Even if the KC do adopt a more flexible position, however, they are not likely to drop their refusal to deal with the present leaders in Phnom Penh.

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I. BACKGROUND

1. In SNIE 57-1-73 (issued December 5, 1973), we concluded that the GKR would survive the communist dry season military campaign, although it would be a "very close call." A Memorandum to Holders on January 31, 1974, noted that renewed North Vietnamese logistic assistance had generally eliminated supply shortages as a constraint on the level of KC military activity and that the communists were then bent on securing a decisive victory this dry season by defeating the four FANK divisions defending Phnom Penh. Nevertheless, we believed that the KC lacked the ability to plan and implement coordinated heavy attacks that would lead to the GKR's defeat, and we estimated that the Phnom Penh government would survive the dry season by a "very narrow margin." The GKR would, however, remain on the defensive militarily, and KC control outside the capital would be extended and tightened. We foresaw little chance of movement toward a negotiated settlement before the end of the dry season, and possibly only then if the KC saw their military effort beginning to fail.

2. This Estimate takes a fresh look at the situation in Cambodia in light of develop-

ments over the last ten weeks or so. It assesses the GKR's prospects for survival through August, when the current fighting season will end, and the chances of a negotiated settlement after that time.

II. THE MILITARY DIMENSION

3. *The KC Campaign.* Our previous judgment that the KC would be unable to secure a decisive victory in the Phnom Penh area this dry season still appears valid. But the communist failure has not resulted from any lack of effort. Throughout January and much of February, KC combat units in the Phnom Penh area—at their height totaling some 20,000-25,000 men—not only exerted heavy pressure on the capital and its environs but kept all key land lines of communication to the city closed. Northwest of Phnom Penh, for example, several KC battalions managed to seize positions only six kilometers from Pochentong Airfield, itself a vital link in the flow of US military and economic aid to the beleaguered Phnom Penh government. South and southeast of the capital, KC forces sought to roll up FANK units in the Prek Thnaot River area and in the Bassac River-Route 1 corridor.

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4. The most dramatic communist actions, however, were the January and February shellings of Phnom Penh from positions south of the city. Relying primarily on captured US 105mm howitzers, the KC on February 2 began laying down intense fire on the capital's southwestern suburbs. Although there were numerous other artillery attacks, the most destructive took place on February 11, when more than 200 people were killed or wounded and over 10,000 were made homeless. The effect of the shelling was militarily insignificant, but it induced widespread uneasiness throughout the capital. Such uneasiness, however, was dissipated when the KC were unable to keep up the shellings. FANK subsequently forced the communists to withdraw their howitzers beyond range of the capital.

5. The intensity of communist pressure in the Phnom Penh area has subsided considerably since early February, primarily because KC combat units have taken extremely heavy casualties and have become battle weary; local supply shortages caused by distribution problems have also been a factor. For the most part, government forces are still reacting to local communist initiatives. But northwest of the capital near Pochentong Airfield and along the Prek Thnaot River to the south, government forces have eliminated communist salients.

6. *Why the KC Effort Faltered.* Even though they were slow to get their campaign started, the KC evidently believed they had good grounds in opting for a military solution in Cambodia this dry season. US combat air support—a key factor in GKR survival in the past—was no longer available, and deficiencies in the government's military capabilities and performance, if not known first-hand, were widely advertised. There is no evidence that the communists downgraded the impor-

tance of US military and economic assistance to the GKR. But for reasons which are not entirely clear, they did not make a major effort to close the Mekong. They may have thought their chances of scoring a relatively quick victory in the immediate Phnom Penh area made such an effort unnecessary.

7. The KC also underestimated their own military deficiencies, especially in such critical areas as planning, coordinating and executing attacks. They probably also misjudged their requirements for adequately trained combat replacements. They have consistently found themselves short of munitions. These shortcomings in large part explain their failure to achieve a decisive victory so far this dry season. They also badly underestimated the GKR's military resiliency.

8. The results of these continuing KC deficiencies have shown up more and more on the battlefield as the dry season has progressed. For example, by mid- to late-January, several weeks after the KC kicked off their offensive against Phnom Penh, the inadequacy of the KC command-and-control apparatus in coordinating military operations had allowed the GKR to deploy its ground forces and use its air force and navy to optimum advantage. Hence, FANK was able to inflict heavy casualties on (though not eliminate) communist units operating around Pochentong Airfield during the first three weeks of January, and then redeploy forces to counter a KC thrust along the Prek Thnaot River.

9. Although such government redeployments were largely reactive, and by no means eliminated the threat to Phnom Penh, their impact was such that the KC called a special meeting of their Phnom Penh area commanders to draw up fresh plans to knock out FANK units. The new KC timetable called for a renewed offensive in late February, but

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government forces employed their superior firepower and mobility to launch successful preemptive operations. The KC probably lost about a third of the original combat force they had in the Phnom Penh area at the beginning of their dry season offensive; they have not been able to replace all these losses. As a result, their hopes to provoke the collapse or capitulation of the Phnom Penh government by military action any time soon have received a considerable setback.

10. *As for the GKR.* The GKR would not have survived the communist drive against Phnom Penh without the continued receipt of US military and economic assistance, especially munitions, rice, and POL. Moreover, it is problematical whether the GKR would have survived if the US had not continually urged it to take the necessary military, economic, and political measures that have enabled it to conduct a successful defense of Phnom Penh. Nonetheless, the fact that the GKR did survive the first (and probably most important) round in the KC dry season campaign should have some beneficial long-term effects.

11. Of prime importance is the confidence the GKR has gained in knowing that even in the absence of direct US military intervention, FANK has been able to defend the capital and keep the Mekong open. In turn, this has not only prompted FANK to become more aggressive in some areas but has reduced defeatism in government circles. (Conversely, the KC have experienced difficulties in sustaining enthusiasm among their own forces for aggressive combat operations.) In addition, substantial numbers of people have taken advantage of FANK forays into the countryside to move to government-controlled territory—the total since the first of the year now amounts to some 45,000-60,000. Although this development is primarily the result of dra-

conian communist administration, it does indicate the type of gains Phnom Penh can make if FANK exploits the thinned-out communist presence in the countryside.

12. On the negative side, the GKR remains on the defensive, and this situation is not likely to change soon. Thus far, FANK troops in the Phnom Penh area have been fighting primarily to reoccupy positions from which to carry on defensive warfare. And isolated GKR forces in many other areas have consistently displayed a garrison mentality or have been content to make only shallow penetrations into the countryside. Although the General Reserve—the 24,000-man force that was to be the key element in the GKR's dry season operations—has been effectively shifted from front to front to counter KC threats as they arose, it has not provided FANK with the strong offensive punch originally envisioned. Moreover, the government has been unable thus far to move the rice crop in Battambang Province over Route 5 to Phnom Penh. It has also been unable to keep open the road to the country's only seaport at Kompong Som.

13. *From Now Through August.* All things considered, we believe that the GKR has weathered the most intense attack the KC are capable of mounting during the current campaign season (December 1973-August 1974) in the Phnom Penh area and that, given continued high levels of US military and economic aid, it will emerge from this period with its already shrunken territorial holdings largely intact. It is possible that the KC could rest, re-equip, and reinforce their combat units to conduct another major push against Phnom Penh's defenses, but the GKR would be likely to succeed again in holding them off.

14. ☐

☐ KC forces in the capital area have lost

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a great deal of heart. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Even though renewed North Vietnamese military aid has enabled the KC to support present levels of combat through the dry season and beyond, such problems as command-and-control and maintaining adequate combat personnel strength in the Phnom Penh area will not be readily overcome, at least over the short term. These problems have been compounded by the ability of the GKR to move men, supplies, and firepower within the perimeter defenses of Phnom Penh and to direct artillery fire and air strikes on KC concentrations.

15. The KC are now more aware of their shortcomings and, for at least the next month or two, have apparently opted to maintain low to moderate military pressure against Phnom Penh, while keeping its land lines of communication closed and stressing attacks against government enclaves elsewhere in the country. A shift of emphasis to provincial capitals has recently been manifest by the fierce attacks in the Oudong area—the city fell on March 18—and by the increased pressure against Kampot.

[REDACTED] Moreover, additional battlefield authorities are being formed in northern Cambodia's Kompong Thom and Siem Reap provinces, probably in part to tighten communist control in the aftermath of the highly visible FANK raids into territory adjacent to these provincial capitals. In our view, the KC have changed their strategy in an effort to recoup some of their losses and possibly score a psychological victory by seizing an additional provincial capital or two.

16. Overall, we do not expect increased KC activity in areas remote from Phnom Penh

to produce any militarily decisive gains. KC fighting forces in such regions are not only stretched extremely thin, but their combat effectiveness is highly suspect. And any significant KC redeployments from the capital to beef up their forces in the countryside would permit the GKR to take advantage of its greater mobility to counter KC actions. We cannot, however, rule out KC gains achieved through surprise attack or as a result of GKR military incompetence or negligence—which could have important psychological impact. Even so, the GKR's superior firepower and mobility will probably hold communist gains to modest levels for the rest of the current fighting season.

17. *In sum*, we expect to see little more than a stand off develop between the GKR and the KC through the end of August—the KC having been largely unable to gain their major dry season objectives but with the GKR able to do little more than react to KC initiatives wherever they appear. Nevertheless, the overall FANK performance has been such that the outlook for the GKR is brighter than it was four months ago.

III. THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

18. *GKR Viability.* The political situation in Phnom Penh remains relatively calm, and GKR leaders have managed to preserve a basic unity and stability. The fact that Long Boret gets along better with Lon Nol than did his predecessors has contributed to the prime minister's encouraging political showing. Thanks largely to Long Boret's efforts, relations between civil and military officials have improved considerably. Long Boret has also been primarily responsible for muting inter-party squabbling within his cabinet, and he has helped to keep student-teacher unrest within bounds.

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19. Although the GKR has kept the lid on political pressures, it has not demonstrated much success in resolving its most pressing domestic problems. For example, its effort to obtain 25,000 new troops for the armed forces has been impeded repeatedly by bureaucratic sluggishness and by the reluctance of local officials in Phnom Penh and in the provinces to be associated with the politically unpopular conscription campaign. It has taken the GKR four months longer than originally scheduled to fulfill its 25,000-man goal—which undoubtedly must be increased to make up for dry season losses to date. Consequently, many of the new troops—still to be trained—will not be available to flesh out understrength Cambodian Army units in the Phnom Penh region until the end of the current dry season.

20. The GKR's military manpower problem is overshadowed by those related to the country's war-ravaged economy. Chronic inflation poses the greatest immediate threat to internal stability. Prices in Phnom Penh have quadrupled in the past 14 months. Efforts to devise a satisfactory income distribution program have been hampered by the large number of relatively unproductive refugees and by the decline in real wages of most salaried workers. Moreover, corruption and maladroitness leadership in both military and civilian circles are pervasive; a case in point is the GKR rallier program, which is used not so much to produce ralliers as it is to enrich the officials running it.

21. Thanks to US efforts, the GKR has sufficient stocks of rice and petroleum for short-term needs. Rice stocks in Phnom Penh now stand at a two months' reserve. Another three-weeks' supply is at Kompong Som, and could be brought up the Mekong to the capital if Route 4 stays closed. In addition, an estimated two months' supply of rice from the recently-

completed harvest in Battambang will be available—provided the GKR can find a way to ship it to Phnom Penh.

22. Mekong River convoys have maintained adequate supplies of both civilian and military petroleum products. Civilian stocks are sufficient for at least three weeks and military stocks are almost enough for three months. Efforts to bring in enough POL and other essential commodities to see Phnom Penh through the next few months will depend on keeping the Mekong open and obtaining sufficient bunker fuel for cargo vessels operating out of Saigon.

23. On the military side, FANK has a sufficient supply of ammunition despite an increase in consumption to about 500 tons a day (up from less than 400 last fall). Once again, ammunition problems have been avoided primarily because the KC have not interdicted resupply convoys coming up the Mekong or prevented cargo aircraft from using Phnom Penh's airport.

24. *Negotiations.* The GKR knows that negotiations now offer the best way out of the imbroglio in Cambodia. While building up its own military strength and trying to set its political house in order, the government's approach has basically been designed only to keep the KC from winning a decisive military victory. Beyond this, the GKR lacks a coherent strategy. In effect, the GKR's hope has been that, if the KC can be kept at bay, they will ultimately despair of gaining a military victory, thereby leading them to start the process of working out a realistic negotiated end to the fighting.

25. At this time, however, prospects for an early end to the fighting are not bright. KC propagandists continue to reject categorically any political dealings with the Lon

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Nol government. Moreover, there is evidence that the KC are reaffirming their tough position. The senior KC official in Paris stated privately in mid-March that the KC had begun an intensive campaign to inform friendly governments that a Vietnam-style cease-fire and settlement would be unacceptable in Cambodia. He also maintained that there could be no "third force" solution for Cambodia. More recently, KC "defense minister" Khieu Samphan emphasized during his visits to Hanoi and Peking that the only solution to the Cambodian problem was for the US to end its aggression and end all forms of support to Phnom Penh. He asserted that this would enable the Cambodians to settle their own affairs.

26. But just as developments appear to have forced a shift in KC battlefield strategy, the insurgent leadership may be confronted with increasing difficulties in maintaining their commitment to a military solution. The KC now face a more protracted and uncertain struggle than they apparently envisioned at the beginning of the dry season. KC intercepts indicate that a spirit of "pacifism" has infected some insurgent units. According to a provisional member of the Khmer Communist Party who rallied to the government earlier this year, leading KC cadre—including a regional party chairman—operating east of the Mekong River were unhappy with the refusal of party leaders to consider a compromise solution.

27. Factionalism has been a chronic problem for the insurgency, but we have as yet seen no indication that the highest level of the KC leadership is divided over basic strategy nor any sign that this leadership is beginning to lose control over significant portions of the insurgent rank and file. If, however, the KC's dry season offensive produces

no significant gains, mounting internal pressures could oblige KC leaders to review their overall position on negotiations.

28. One sign that such a reappraisal may already be underway, in at least some quarters of the insurgent movement, was provided by the resumption in mid-March of Sihanouk's public advocacy of talks between his "government" and the US. His "prime minister," Penn Nouth, has privately repeated this theme, warning that if the US does not agree the fighting will go on indefinitely. Penn Nouth—who clearly wanted his remarks relayed to Washington—also stressed that a prolongation of the war will serve to improve the KC's political power at the expense of "moderates" like himself and Sihanouk.

29. The demand for direct talks with Washington—bypassing the Lon Nol government—was a standard feature of Sihanouk's line on a Cambodian settlement until early last summer, when the possibility of a US bombing halt became stronger and the KC appeared to be convinced that military victory was in sight. It is not known whether the in-country KC leadership supports Sihanouk's revival of this theme. At this point the KC may reason that there is little to lose in establishing a dialogue with the US. Khieu Samphan, however, made no reference to this theme while in Hanoi or Peking. There is no indication that the KC leadership, or for that matter Sihanouk himself, is now prepared to consider a genuine compromise settlement with the existing government and political leadership in Phnom Penh.

30. In the absence of a military solution in Cambodia, it is possible that the KC's allies might become more willing and able to work for an end to the fighting. In March, the senior KC official in Paris expressed con-

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cern over "indications" that certain "great powers" were waiting until the end of the dry season to exert pressure for a negotiated settlement. In the past, however, the KC have demonstrated considerable ability to resist the advice of their friends. Up to now the KC have been the major impediment to negotiations and it seems clear that the decision on negotiations continues to rest with an independent-minded Communist leadership in Cambodia.

31. Although *Moscow* and *Peking* have appeared favorably disposed to a negotiated settlement in Cambodia, there are limits to their ability to influence events as long as the KC are determined to press for a military solution. Of the KC's allies, the *North Vietnamese* are still the ones who appear able to bring the most effective pressure to bear on the KC to negotiate, but Hanoi's equities in Cambodia are not easily sorted out. North Vietnam has little to gain by making an uncertain effort to force Cambodian negotiations—an action that would further damage its relations and diminish its leverage with a KC movement that might eventually come to power without the backing of Hanoi. On the contrary, North Vietnamese leaders publicly assured Khieu Samphan that Hanoi could be counted on to render full support to the KC. They also indicated that they would not be a party to any efforts to pressure the KC into negotiating.

32. In fact, however, Hanoi may well have mixed feelings about a clear-cut KC victory that would put its fractious and increasingly self-centered proteges in power in Phnom Penh, although the North Vietnamese would obviously be unhappy if the KC lost out to the GKR and if Hanoi's own freedom of action in Cambodia along the South Vietnamese border were jeopardized. The North Vietnamese probably rest easiest when KC attention is focused on the struggle with the GKR and when KC dependence on Vietnamese Communist material support is most acutely felt. This serves to keep within reasonable bounds the frictions between KC and Vietnamese Communist forces operating in southern and eastern border areas. Hanoi thus seems to have little interest in dropping its relatively conservative approach to the Cambodian problem in order to play a more active role—particularly as regards negotiations.

33. *In sum*, the KC are facing some difficult decisions regarding their future course of action in Cambodia. If their dry season campaign produces no significant gains and ends in a standoff, KC leaders may be more inclined to consider negotiations and would be more vulnerable to external pressure for negotiations. But even if they do adopt a more flexible political position, they are not likely to drop their refusal to deal with the present leaders in Phnom Penh.