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**SPECIAL**

**NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE**

**THE EFFECTS OF CERTAIN POSSIBLE  
DEVELOPMENTS ON THE MILITARY SECURITY  
AND POLITICAL STABILITY OF LAOS AND  
CAMBODIA THROUGH 1954**



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*The following member organizations of the Intelligence Advisory Committee participated with the Central Intelligence Agency in the preparation of this estimate: The intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.*

**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY**

**SECRET**

# THE EFFECTS OF CERTAIN POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS ON THE MILITARY SECURITY AND POLITICAL STABILITY OF LAOS AND CAMBODIA THROUGH 1954

## THE PROBLEM

To examine the present military security and political stability of Laos and Cambodia and to estimate the effect which certain possible developments might have upon their security and stability through 1954.<sup>1</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Viet Minh forces are operating in Laos and Cambodia, but do not currently present an imminent threat to the existence of the native governments. However, this is so only because the security of Laos and Cambodia is supported by French regular forces and extensive French assistance to the native forces.

2. Communism has thus far made little progress in either Laos or Cambodia. Nevertheless, both countries are vulnerable to Communist pressures because of their military weakness and uncertain political stability.

3. Substantial Communist military successes in Vietnam would probably lead to an early collapse or disintegration of authority in Laos and Cambodia unless outside assistance or security guarantees assured their protection.

4. *If a negotiated settlement placed the Communists in a position which would enable them eventually, but not imme-*

*diately, to dominate Vietnam, the immediate danger to Laos and Cambodia would be less and the Laotian and Cambodian Governments could probably maintain control for some time.*

5. *If, as a result of a negotiated agreement with the Communists covering all of Indochina, French and Viet Minh regular units were actually withdrawn from Laos and Cambodia (leaving Viet Minh irregular forces still operating in those countries), native forces could probably preserve for some time approximately the present degree of security and stability in Cambodia and a certain minimum security and stability in Laos, provided French cadres and the present scale and nature of French material aid remained available to the native armies. However, such an agreement with the Communists would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to implement and police, and in these circumstances the native armies could probably not for long successfully resist the Viet Minh without increased outside support.*

<sup>1</sup>The various contingencies considered herein were supplied to the intelligence community as a basis for this estimate.

6. If outside support took the form of a security system involving multinational guarantees for the security of Laos and Cambodia and could be implemented in time, that would probably permit Laos and Cambodia to maintain their security. We believe that the requirements of such a security system would be: (a) adequate MDAP-type aid; (b) effective protective forces appropriately located in the area; and (c) assurance of assistance in the event of internal subversion as well as external attack. The success of the above measures, in the long run, would also require the maintenance and development

of a political and psychological atmosphere which would motivate the indigenous peoples against Communism.

7. If Laos and Cambodia were partitioned, the will of the non-Communist remnants to maintain their independence would greatly decrease, and their ability to do so would be weakened because of the new establishment in those countries of strong and legalized Communist positions. Under such circumstances probably nothing but military occupation of those countries would assure their continued freedom from Communist control.

**DISCUSSION**

**I. THE PRESENT SITUATION IN LAOS AND CAMBODIA**

**Military Security**

8. Viet Minh forces are operating in Laos and Cambodia, but do not currently present an imminent threat to the existence of the native governments. However, this is so only because the security of Laos and Cambodia is supported by French regular forces and extensive French assistance to the native forces.

9. Viet Minh regular troops in Laos are organic to regular Viet Minh divisions and are Vietnamese invaders, not Laotians. Viet Minh regional forces, scattered throughout Laos, are predominantly Vietnamese, but include Laotians as well. These regional troops have effectively conducted guerrilla-type operations at company level and are considered equal in effectiveness to companies of the Laotian National Army. They could be easily organized into larger units, with a consequent increase

ARMED FORCE STRENGTHS IN LAOS

AS OF 1 JUNE 1954

COMMUNIST

Viet Minh

10,300

10,300

8,500

18,800

Regulars

Attached Militia

Totals

National Army

Regionals  
National Guards and Other  
Semimilitary

Total

Grand Totals Laos

NON-COMMUNIST

A. French Expeditionary Corps (including integrated Laotian troops)

18,000 (of whom at least 5,000 are known to be Laotian)

2,000 (all Laotian)

20,000

B. Laotian National Forces

14,500

6,500

21,000

41,000

in their capabilities. There are no known armed non-Communist dissident forces in Laos.

10. The defense of Laos has depended primarily on French Expeditionary forces. For military reasons, the French may at any time reduce or increase the present strength of regular units in that country. If such strength is reduced substantially below 10,000, Laos would be seriously exposed to Viet Minh attack or subversion.

11. The Laotian National Army, numbering 14,500, is organized into six infantry battalions, seven light infantry battalions, and one parachute battalion. The combat effectiveness of the Army as a whole is only fair.

It is inadequately trained and lacks experienced native officers and NCO's. The Laotian National Guard is poorly trained and equipped.

12. The Laotian military establishment depends almost entirely on outside support. France (and, indirectly, the US) furnishes all equipment and almost all the necessary funds. The French train, advise, and tactically direct the Laotian forces. All French Expeditionary and Laotian National Army troops in the country are under French operational command. Approximately 300 French officers and NCO's serve in the Laotian National Army, and French officers occupy most field grade positions.

ARMED FORCE STRENGTHS IN CAMBODIA

AS OF 1 JUNE 1954

COMMUNIST

Viet Minh

2,200

Regulars

Attached Militia

2,200

Totals

6,500

Royal Army

Regional and Militia

National Guard

Semimilitary

Total

8,700

Grand Totals Cambodia

NON-COMMUNIST

A. French Expeditionary Corps (including integrated Cambodian troops)

5,000 (3,000 infantry; 2,000 service. Virtually all Cambodians)

1,000 (All Cambodians)

6,000

B. Cambodian Royal Forces

14,000

4,000

15,000

33,000

39,000

13. Two Viet Minh regular battalions, organic to a Viet Minh division, are now in northeast Cambodia. These troops are Vietnamese invaders who entered Cambodia in March 1954. In addition, small units of Viet Minh regulars, regional troops, and militia are scattered throughout Cambodia. The combat effectiveness of these regional and militia forces is generally only fair, but those east of the Mekong River will probably be raised to a

higher standard of organization and training before the end of 1954.

14. There are also in Cambodia several hundred armed non-Communist dissidents, who are followers of the nationalist leader, Son Ngoc Thanh.

15. The Cambodian Royal Army, numbering 14,000, is organized into ten regular infantry, one parachute, and three light infantry battalions. Cambodian armed forces are heavily

dependent on the French for finance, equipment, training, and advice, though less so than is the case in Laos. However, the Cambodian Government exercises much greater command responsibilities than does the Laotian Government. French officers and NCO's, who formerly served in the Royal Army, are at present in the process of being withdrawn. The Cambodian King has full administrative control over all Royal forces, and operational command west of the Mekong River.

16. The Cambodian Royal Army is reasonably well equipped and trained, but has a number of deficiencies, chief among which are a lack of adequate numbers of trained officers and NCO's, a low standard of discipline and responsibility in the officer corps, and an almost paralytic defensive-mindedness. In time, the effectiveness of the Royal Army may be increased as a result of the efforts of General Nhiek Tiouloung, recently appointed by the King as Defense Minister, Chief of Staff, and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.

### Political Stability

17. The political situation in both Laos and Cambodia is uncertain, but at present is relatively quiet. In Cambodia, the royal institution is held in high regard by the people, who have traditionally accepted monarchical authority, and the King is personally popular. Moreover, Cambodia enjoys a high degree of cultural, ethnic, and religious homogeneity. In Laos, the population is largely apolitical. In neither country is there any appreciable economic or social unrest. In both countries, a tradition of a governing elite subordinate to the throne attracts most educated Laotians and Cambodians to government service.

18. Communism has thus far made little progress in either Laos or Cambodia. The Viet Minh is unpopular in both countries because its members are Vietnamese, who are heartily disliked by both the Laotians and the Cambodians. Communist-sponsored "free governments" and "independence forces" in Laos and Cambodia are viewed as parts of the Viet Minh and thus have evoked little support in those countries. Communist political influence is believed to be minimal outside those

areas firmly occupied by Viet Minh forces. The "nationalist" appeal of the Communists, which has been relatively successful in Vietnam, has been blunted in Laos by the general political inertness of the country, and in Cambodia by the vigorous nationalist efforts of the King.

19. The Cambodian Government derives considerable domestic support from the fact that it is anti-French. The Laotian Government, on the other hand, is outwardly pro-French, but this policy does not adversely affect the government's domestic strength.

20. However, both Laos and Cambodia are vulnerable to Communist pressures, chiefly because of their military weakness. Moreover, in times of crisis their political leadership is often unpredictable, especially in Cambodia. There has been a widespread tendency in both countries to regard the war against the Viet Minh as being "someone else's business." In addition, the Communists may be able at any time to take advantage of the fact that in Laos, and especially in Cambodia, there are rival cliques presently contending for political power.

21. A source of weakness in Cambodia is the existence of non-Communist dissidence. The principal dissident is Son Ngoc Thanh, who is believed to be essentially an independent nationalist. A premier of Cambodia under the Japanese during World War II, Thanh is believed to have a latent political following throughout the country, particularly among students, intellectual groups, and younger army officers who see in him the embodiment of Cambodian independence aspirations. Thanh's political influence has been sapped in recent months by the nationalist efforts of the King, but is still far greater than the small size of his present armed following would suggest. Cambodia's political stability would be greatly enhanced if he should rally to the government, but his future behavior cannot be predicted and it is conceivable that he might join forces with the Viet Minh. In addition to Thanh, there are a number of former dissident leaders who have rallied to the King, but who continue to enjoy warlord-like "autonomous" powers in certain regions of

Cambodia. These people are essentially opportunists, whose future loyalty cannot be assured.

22. There are no significant non-Communist dissident groups in Laos. However, Prince Petsarath, now resident in Thailand, is a pretender to the Laotian throne and has at times been reported to be planning a coup d'etat.

## II. THE EFFECT OF CERTAIN POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS ON THE SECURITY AND STABILITY OF LAOS AND CAMBODIA <sup>2</sup>

23. The future security and stability of Laos and Cambodia will almost certainly be determined by outside developments. The fate of these kingdoms will be largely fixed, not by their own efforts, but by a number of interacting factors, chief among which are probably: (a) the trend of developments in Vietnam; (b) the scale and nature of outside assistance given the governments of Laos and Cambodia; and (c) the nature and strength of Viet Minh military and political pressures against those countries.

24. Developments in Vietnam will have an immediate effect on Laos and Cambodia. A strong non-Communist position in Vietnam would tend to assure military security and political stability. However, if key areas of Vietnam fell to the Communists, pressure on Laos and Cambodia would be greatly increased. The military capabilities of these countries are so slight that they would almost certainly request outside aid to defend themselves. If such aid were not immediately supplied, Laos would be quickly overrun, or its government would seek accommodation with the Communists. Cambodia might hold out longer, but in the end it too would be forced to surrender or accommodate. If a negotiated settlement placed the Communists in a position which would enable them eventually, but not immediately, to dominate Vietnam, the immediate danger to Laos and Cambodia

<sup>2</sup>The various contingencies considered herein were supplied to the intelligence community as a basis for this estimate.

would be less and the Laotian and Cambodian Governments could probably maintain control for some time.

25. If, as a result of a negotiated agreement with the Communists covering all of Indochina, French and Viet Minh regular units were actually withdrawn from Laos and Cambodia (leaving Viet Minh irregular forces still operating in those countries), native forces could probably preserve for some time approximately the present degree of security and stability in Cambodia and a certain minimum security and stability in Laos, provided French cadres and the present scale and nature of French material aid remained available to the native armies. However, such an agreement with the Communists would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to implement and police, and in these circumstances the native armies could probably not for long successfully resist the Viet Minh without increased outside support.

26. Under the adverse alternatives discussed in the two preceding paragraphs, outside support on a scale larger than the French could provide would be required to assure a satisfactory level of security and stability in those countries. If such additional support were not quickly forthcoming, the resistance of Laos and Cambodia to Communism would collapse.

27. If outside support took the form of a security system involving multinational guarantees for the security of Laos and Cambodia and could be implemented in time, that would probably permit Laos and Cambodia to maintain their security, despite rising pressures from the Communists in Vietnam and a probable growing degree of internal Communist unrest in both countries. We believe that the requirements of such a security system would be: (a) adequate MDAP-type aid; (b) effective protective forces appropriately located in the area; and (c) assurance of assistance in the event of internal subversion as well as external attack. The success of the above measures, in the long run, would also require the maintenance and development of a political and psychological atmosphere which would motivate the indigenous peoples against Communism.

28. If Laos and Cambodia were partitioned, the will of the non-Communist remnants to maintain their independence would greatly decrease, and their ability to do so would be weakened because of the new establishment

in those countries of strong and legalized Communist positions. Under such circumstances probably nothing but military occupation of those countries would assure their continued freedom from Communist control.

