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MEMORANDUM TO HOLDERS OF DIEM 7-73:

SECURITY PROSPECTS IN CAMBODIA (U)

This memorandum to holders has not been coordinated with the Service Intelligence Chiefs.

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Authority: EO 13526  
Chief, Records & Declass Div, WHS  
Date: SEP 05 2018

Memorandum to Holders  
DIEM 7-73  
7 May 1973

Office of the Secretary of Defense  
Chief, RDD, ESD, WIIS

Date: 05 SEP 2018 Authority: EO 13526  
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APPROVED BY:

*Samuel V. Wilson*  
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→ 26 September 1973

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18-M-1518



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MEMORANDUM TO HOLDERS OF DIEM 7-73:

SECURITY PROSPECTS IN CAMBODIA (U)

This memorandum reassesses judgments concerning the short-term military prospects and the survivability of the Lon Nol government contained in DIEM 7-73, dated 7 May 1973.

1. ~~(S)~~ The original memorandum noted that the principal enemy force in Cambodia (the communist-led Khmer insurgents, KI), although factionalized, was displaying increasing combat effectiveness and would be likely to bring still greater military pressure on government forces over the next several months. An all-out KI attack on Phnom Penh was, however, considered unlikely, as was any appreciable increase in the level of Soviet, Chinese, or Vietnamese communist involvement in the Cambodian conflict.

2. ~~(S)~~ DIEM 7-73 also predicted the probable end to Lon Nol's active role in Cambodian politics before the end of 1973 unless extraordinary measures were taken by the High Political Council (HPC) to reverse the deteriorating trend in Cambodian military capabilities. We estimated that Lon Nol might be eased out through some face-saving action, but that the result would be a successor leadership prone to seek an accommodation with the KI, and eventually a government dominated by the Khmer communists.

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3. (S) These judgments were published at a time when the situation in Cambodia appeared bleak. The Lon Nol government lacked a rational sense of purpose, the motivation and combat effectiveness of the bulk of the armed forces were questionable, and enemy activity threatened to prevent the delivery of sufficient quantities of critical supplies and materiel to Phnom Penh. In addition, US combat air support was taken to be a decisive element holding the KI at bay.

4. (S) It now can be seen that the Cambodian Government and its military forces possess more resilience than previously believed, and that there are real limitations on the capabilities of the KI. The KI offensive, which began in mid-February and reached its peak in July, was designed to bring about the collapse of the government. The insurgents miscalculated, however; the governmental structure survived and US air sorties against massed KI units were particularly effective. Most enemy units in the capital area ultimately withdrew from the battlefield.

5. (S) Even more striking has been the successful Cambodian resistance to KI attacks since the 15 August cessation of US combat air support -- both in the Phnom Penh area in late August and in the battle for the provincial capital

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of Kompong Cham from mid-August into late September. In the latter battle, Cambodian ground forces had capable leadership, the troops fought well when their backs were to the wall, and naval and air support were equal to the task of reinforcing and resupplying the beleaguered city and participating in its defense. The performance of the Navy has been especially noteworthy in recent months, not only at Kompong Cham, but also in the protection of Mekong River convoys bringing supplies to Phnom Penh.

6. (u) The improved performance of the armed forces in the absence of US combat air support has doubtless given Phnom Penh a psychological boost, and the Cambodian Government has received a new lease on life. The government's morale may well be bolstered further by reports of KI supply and distribution difficulties and by Prince Sihanouk's recent allegations that North Vietnam and the PRC were not providing the KI with sufficient munitions. In addition, Phnom Penh has been made aware that the end of US combat air support does not mean the end of US aid.

7. (u) Monsoon flooding will restrict the area of combat for the next two to three months. During this time, Phnom Penh will have an opportunity to improve its military preparedness

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Hanoi probably believes, however, that the KI alone will eventually be successful even without large-scale Vietnamese communist participation.

#### OUTLOOK

9. ~~(S)~~ It no longer seems probable that Lon Nol will be eased out of political life by year's end. Indeed, circumstances are such that we believe a noncommunist Cambodian Government (probably still under Lon Nol) will survive for the next six months or so, and that it will retain control of about the same territory that it does now. The longer-term prospects for Cambodia, however, are not favorable. The Phnom Penh government, caught up in the exigencies of the war, has been unable to overcome its fundamental weaknesses, and we have little confidence that it will be able to do so. For their part, the KI are expected to grow stronger and keep the government on the military and political defensive. They will almost certainly renew attacks in the Phnom Penh area to cut supply routes and erode the government's will to fight, although an all-out attack against the capital remains unlikely, at least within the next three months.

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