

Message Text

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INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

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EXDIS

DEPT MAY WISH TO PASS TO CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: PINT PINS MILI CB TH
SUBJECT: CAMBODIA-CONVERSATIONS WITH THE RESISTANCE

REF: BANGKOK 19011, BANGKOK A-145

SUMMARY: DURING SEVERAL HOURS OF CONVERSATION SEPT 24 WITH TWO LEADERS OF THE CAMBODIAN RESISTANCE BASED IN THAILAND, A PICTURE EMERGES OF A DETERMINED BAND OF PERHAPS TWO THOUSAND MEN RECONNOITERING THE LENGTHY THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER BUT DESPERATELY SHORT OF FUNDS, MEDICINES, AND AMMUNITION. THEY ARE, IN THEIR OWN WORDS, STRUGGLING MORE FOR THEIR OWN SURVIVAL THAN ACTIVELY RESISTING KHMER ROUGE RULE IN CAMBODIA. WITHOUT FOREIGN SUPPORT THESE CAMBODIANS BELIEVE THEIR EFFORTS ARE DOOMED. RESISTANCE LEADERS ALSO PROVIDED MORE DETAILED OF THE RUMORED LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE AND MILITARY PURGE THIS SPRING AND SUMMER IN CAMBODIA. REGARDING LIVING CONDITIONS FOR CAMBODIANS, RESISTANCE LEADERS DESCRIBED RISING TOLLS FROM DISEASE, MALNUTRITION AND FAMINE. THEY ESTIMATED THAT THE POPULATION OF

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CAMBODIA MAY HAVE BEEN REDUCED BY MORE THAN HALF. THEY ALSO REPORT THAT PRC MILITARY PERSONNEL ARE NOW STATIONED IN SOUTHERN CAMBODIA. FINALLY, A FORMER KHMER ROUGE SOLDIER WHO DEFECTED TO THE RESISTANCE REPORTED SEEING PRINCE SIHANOUK WORKING AS A JANITOR IN A PHNOM PENH HOSPITAL.
END SUMMARY .

1. THE RESISTANCE. TWO KEY LEADERS OF THE CAMBODIAN RESISTANCE, SEPT 24, DESCRIBED TO EMBOFF THE STRENGTH, WEAKNESSES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE CAMBODIAN RESISTANCE BASED IN AND OPERATING OUT OF THAILAND. THEIR ACCOUNT FOLLOWS (BOTH LEADERS HAVE BEEN WELL-KNOWN BY FRIEND OF EMBASSY FOR TWO YEARS. WE HAVE NO RPT NO REASON TO QUESTION THEIR RELIABILITY, BUT OF COURSE IT IS DIFFICULT TO ASSESS THE ACCURACY OF THEIR INFORMATION).

2. THE THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER IS DIVIDED BY RESISTANCE FORCES INTO FIVE SECTORS:

A. KOH KONG/PURSAT SECTOR OF CAMBODIA, OPERATED FROM THAILAND'S TRAT PROVINCE. THE KOH KONG SECTOR HAS 100 MEN, HALF OF WHOM ARE LOCATED SIX KILOMETERS WITHIN CAMBODIA AND HALF IN TRAT PROVINCE, THAILAND. EIGHTY OF THE 100 ARE FORMER KHMER ROUGE SOLDIERS WHO HAVE DEFECTED TO THE RESISTANCE. AS IN ALL SECTORS, KOH KONG/PURSAT TROOPS PRIMARILY CONDUCT RECONNAISSANCE MISSIONS IN CAMBODIA, ALTHOUGH RESISTANCE FORCES HAVE BLOWN UP ONE BRIDGE AND FIVE RESISTANCE SOLDIERS HARASSED A CAMBODIAN MILITARY CAMP CONTAINING ROUGHLY SIXTY KHMER ROUGE. THE TROOPS SUFFER FROM MALARIA, EASILY CONTRACTED IN THE MOSQUITO-INFESTED ROUGH, JUNGLE MOUNTAIN TERRAIN OF THE BORDER AREA OF KOH KONG.

B. SOUTHERN BATTAMBANG/PAILIN SECTOR OPERATIONS CONDUCTED
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FROM THAILAND'S CHANTHABURI PROVINCE, WITH 300 MEN.

C. NORTHERN BATTAMBANG-WESTERN ODDAR MEANCHEY SECTOR, OPERATING FROM NORTH OF ARANYAPRATHET. WITH 300 MEN, THE TROOPS CONDUCT RECONNAISSANCE MISSIONS INTO THE POLITICALLY SENSITIVE NORTHWEST CAMBODIAN REGION. RESISTANCE MAINTAINS TWO SMALL FORWARD BASES IN CAMBODIA. ROUGHLY ONE HUNDRED OF THE MEN ARE FORMER SOLDIERS OF THE KHMER REPUBLIC. TWO HUNDRED ARE NEW RECRUITS WHICH COME PRIMARILY FROM THE REFUGEE CAMP AT ARANYAPRATHET. WHEN NOT ON MISSIONS, THEY RETURN TO THE CAMP. SMALL TEAMS ARE DESPATCHED FOR THE RECONNAISSANCE MISSIONS, WHICH REQUIRE ROUGHLY A MONTH, ROUND TRIP. MISSIONS HAVE GONE AS FAR INTO CAMBODIA AS TONLE SAP, BUT MOST MISSIONS (AT THAI ARMY INSISTANCE) GO NO FURTHER THAN TEN TO FIFTEEN KILOMETERS INSIDE CAMBODIA. A FEW KHMER ROUGE SOLDIERS ATTEMPTING TO DEFECT HAVE JOINED THE RESISTANCE FORCES IN THIS SECTOR.

D. EASTERN ODDAR MEANCHEY SECTOR, OPERATING OUT OF SURIN PROVINCE, THAILAND, WITH 400 MEN.

E. PREAH VIHEAR SECTOR, OPERATING FROM SISAKHET THAILAND,

WITH 300 MEN. TROOPS ARE MAINLY MONTAGNARD CAMBODIANS AND POSSIBLY FORMER "BLACK COBRAS" OF KHMER REPUBLIC.

3. OPERATING INDEPENDENTLY ARE 400 TROOPS UNDER FORMER GENERAL CHANTARANGSEY IN KOMPONG SPEU PROVINCE NEAR PHNOM PENH. OUR INFORMANTS SAID THE GENERAL'S TROOPS HAVE AMBUSHED KHMER ROUGE CONVOYS OCCASIONALLY.

4. EMBOFF INFERRED THAT COL. KETH RETH, FORMER COMMANDER OF THE PAILIN SECTOR, NOW SERVES AS LIAISON IN BANGKOK TO THE "ANGEL" OF THE RESISTANCE, EAR NGUON, A FORMER GUN MERCHANT IN PAILIN WHO NOW OSTENSIBLY IS A GEM MERCHANT IN BANGKOK. EAR NGUON FINANCES ALL THE OPERATIONS ALONG ALL FIVE SECTORS. CONTRIBUTIONS, OUR INFORMANTS CLAIMED,
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ARE ALL PRIVATE. EAR NGUON ALSO AUTHORIZES ALL MISSIONS. HE ALSO APPARENTLY IS THE MAJOR CONTACT POINT WITH THE ROYAL THAI ARMY. THE RESISTANCE (EAR NGUON) PAYS FOR ITS OWN SUPPLIES, BUT THAIS, AT LEAST EARLIER, ASSISTED WITH TRANSPORTATION. (WE HAVE AN UNCONFIRMED REPORT FROM A DIFFERENT SOURCE THAT FORMER DEPUTY PM PRAPHAT IS INVOLVED IN FINANCING THE CAMBODIAN RESISTANCE.)

5. RTA SOLDIERS ACCOMPANY THE CAMBODIANS ON MOST, IF NOT ALL, THEIR MISSIONS INTO CAMBODIA. AS QUID PRO QUO FOR THAI PERMISSION FOR CAMBODIANS TO CONDUCT THEIR OPERATIONS THE CAMBODIANS ARE EXPECTED TO PROVIDE THE RTG ALL INTELLIGENCE DERIVED DURING THE MISSIONS.

6. THE RESISTANCE IS PLAGUED BY MALARIA, SHORTAGE OF FUNDS, LACK OF AMMUNITION AND THE ABSENCE OF EXTERNAL SUPPORT. WHEREAS THE THAI COOPERATED WELL EARLIER, DURING THE PAST THREE MONTHS THAI COOPERATION HAS DIMINISHED CONSIDERABLY. RESISTANCE LEADERS BELIEVE THE THAIS SUSPECT THAT KHMER ROUGE OPERATIVES MAY HAVE INFILTRATED THE RESISTANCE FORCES.

7. COUNTER-REVOLUTION IN CAMBODIA. ECHOING EARLIER REPORTS (REF A, WHICH WE BELIEVE MAY BE A DIFFERENT SOURCE), SOURCES DESCRIBED AN EXTENSIVE AND LETHAL PURGE WHICH TRANSPIRED IN JULY. PLOT CENTERED IN BATTAMBANG PROVINCE, BUT EXTENDED TO THE TOP OF THE ADMINISTRATION IN PHNOM PENH. THOSE GUILTY IN THE COUP PLOT, AS IT WAS TERMED, WERE EXECUTED IN JULY, INCLUDING INFORMATION MINISTER HU NIM, OLD GUARD KHMER ROUGE HOU YOUN, AND CHHAKREY, HITHERTO UNKNOWN BUT WHO IS THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN A MIDDLE MAN BETWEEN THE CENTRAL FIGURES IN PHNOM PENH AND THEIR MILITARY ALLIES IN BATTAMBANG. A POLICE COMMISSIONER, TWO DISTRICT CHIEFS, AND A DISTRICT AGRICULTURAL CHIEF WERE ALSO IMPLICATED IN
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THE PLOT AND EXECUTED. OF THE REGIMENTS ASSIGNED TO THE NW REGION, THE 20TH AND 60TH, (BUT NOT RPT NOT THE 30TH) WERE REPORTEDLY INVOLVED IN THE COUP PLOT. ACCORDING TO OUR INFORMANTS' INTELLIGENCE, THE TWO REGIMENTS WERE EFFECTIVELY ELIMINATED WITH THE EXECUTION OF MANY IF NOT MOST OF BOTH LEADERSHIP AND TROOPS OF THE REGIMENTS. THEY WERE REPLACED BY THE 40TH REGIMENT KNOWN AS "POL POT'S REGIMENT."

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8. STORY DOES NOT END THERE, HOWEVER. THE SUPPOSEDLY LOYAL 30TH REGIMENT IS COMANDED BY MIT (COMRADE) NAM, WHO IS KNOWN TO BE DISSATISFIED WITH THE REGIME IN PHNOM PENH AND, WHO, RESISTANCE LEADERS HOPE, IS WILLING TO COLLABORATE WITH THE RESISTANCE. A MISSION WAS SENT TO BATTAMBAND ABOUT THREE WEEKS AGO WITH INSTRUCTIONS TO CONTACT REGIMENTAL COMMANDER NAM AND RESISTANCE LEADERS AWAIT ANXIOUSLY THE MISSION'S RETURN. THE 30TH REGIMENT IS COMPOSED OF 900 MEN (SIC) IN THREE BATTALIONS, BTNS 301, 320, AND 347.

9. OUR INFORMANTS COMMENTED THAT THE RECE T LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE FORMED PART OF A PROCESS WHICH WOULD LEAD EVENTUALLY TO THE ELIMINATION OF THE OLDER "INTELLECTUAL" LEADERSHIP, TRAINED IN HANOI (AND FRANCE). THE HARSHNESS OF THE CAMBODIAN REVOLUTION COULD BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE "PURISM" OF THE KHMER ROUGE LEADERSHIP. IMPLICATION OF THIS ASSESSMENT SEEMED TO BE THAT THE SHADOWY FIGURES ACTUALLY RUNNING CAMBODIA MAY BE EVEN "PURER" AND THERE-SECRET

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FORE MORE SEVERE IN IMPLEMENTING THEIR REVOLUTIONARY TEXTS THAN THE "INTELLECTUALS", WHO MAY HAVE BEE ELIMINATED. WITHOUT FURTHER EXPLANATION, SOURCES ASSERTED THAT THE NEW LEADERSHIP MIGHT COME FROM THE KHMER LOEU, THE MOUNTAIN TRIBES IN MONDOLKIRI AND RATANAKIRI PROVINCES IN NORTHEAST CAMBODIA.

10. CONDITIONS IN CAMBODIA. OUR INFORMANTS SAID THAT CONDITIONS VARIED WIDELY IN CAMBODIA. LIFE WAS MOST DIRE IN BATTAMBAND AND SIEM REAP PROVINCES. KOMPOT PROVINCE IS THE MOST PROSPEROUS. THEY HAD LITTLE INFORMATION ON EASTERN CAMBODIA. ALTHOUGH THE KHMER ROUGE CONTINUE TO SEEK TO IDENTIFY AND ELIMINATE ANYONE ASSOCIATED WITH THE FORMER REGIME, FAMINE, AND DISEASE HAVE BECOME THE GREATEST THREAT TO LIFE IN CAMBODIA. MALNUTRITION, MALARIA, INTESTINAL DISEASE, AND NOW BERIBERI ARE REDUING THE POPULATION. STARVATION IS TAKING A GREATER TOLL, A FACT WHICH INFORMANTS FOUND DAMNABLE SINCE THEY SAID CAMBODIA'S RICE HARVEST EARLIER THIS YEAR WAS GOOD. INTERLOCUTORS SAID THAT PRODUCTION HAD BEEN SUFFICIENT TO FEED ALL CAMBODIANS BUT ANGKA IS STOCK-PILING RICE AND EXPORTING EVEN MORE, PRESUMABLY TO CHINA, TO SATISFY TRADE IMPORT REQUIREMENTS. SOURCES CALCULATED THAT 41,000 CAMBODIANS HAVE DIED IN KOH KONG AND PURSAT PROVINCES. THEY COMMENTED THAT IT WAS NOT UNCOMMON FOR MORE THAN HALF THE POPULATION OF A PILLAGE TO HAVE PERISHED. BOTH INTERLOCUTORS ESTIMATED THAT THERE ARE ONLY THREE MILLION OF THE FORMER SEVEN MILLION CAMBODIANS STILL ALIVE. THE FRUIT OF THE KHMER ROUGE RULE MIGHT WELL BE THE EXTINCTION OF THE CAMBODIAN RACE, IN THEIR ASSESSMENT.

11. CHINESE IN CAMBODIA. INFORMANTS SAID THERE WERE A FEW NORTH KOREANS IN CAMBODIA BUT THE MOST VISIBLE FOREIGN GROUP COMES FROM THE PRC. A RECENT DEFECTOR FROM THE KHMER ROUGE TOLD ONE OF THE LEADERS THAT THERE ARE 500 PRC MILITARY PERSONNEL STATIONED IN KOMPOT PROVINCE. INFORMANTS ARE AWARE OF THREE CHINESE

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MEDICAL AND AGRICULTURAL TEAMS STATIONED IN BATTAMBANG. GROUPS OF ABOUT SIYTY TECHNICIANS ARE STATIONED IN A BIG VILLA OUTSIDE

BATTAMBANG ENROUTE TO PAILIN, IN THE MAIN HOTEL IN BATTAMBANG AND IN "THE MOTEL" OF BATTAMBANG.

12. BORDER SKIRMISHES. CINESE WERE ALSO REAR ECHELON ADVISORS IN THE CAMBODIAN ATTACK THIS SPRING ON VIET-NAM'S HA TIEN AREA, ACCORDING TO REPORTS REACHING RESISTANCE FORCES. REASON, SOURCES CONCLUDED, WAS PLEASURE IN PEKING OVER ANY DIFFICULTIES HANOI MIGHT SUFFER.

13. PRINCE SIHANOUK. ANOTHER RECENT DEFECTOR FROM THE KHMER ROUGE TOLD ONE OF OUR INTERLOCUTORS THAT HE, AFTER BEING WOUNDED AND HOSPITALIZED, HAD SEEN SIHANOUK IN A HOSPITAL IN PHNOM PENH. THE PRINCE AND HIS WIFE, MONIQUE, WORK IN THE FIELDS ALL DAY AND ARE ON THE JANITORIAL STAFF OF THE HOSPITAL AT NIGHT. ACCORDING TO THIS ACCOUNT, SIHANOUK TOLD THE CURIOUS PATIENTS AT THE HOSPITAL THAT HE PERFORMED THIS LABOR TO SERVE AS A MODEL FOR OTHERS IN DEMOCRATII CAMBODIA.

14. COMMENT: DURING COURSE OF DISCUSSION, CAMBODIANS WERE REMINDED EXPLICITLY THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT COULD NOT RPT NOT BECOME INVOLVED IN THEIRS OR OTHER INTERNAL STRUGGLES, NOR COULD THE U.S. SUPPLY SUPPORT FOR THEIR CAUSE.

15. THE SOURCES IMPRESS ONE AS HIGHLY INTELLIGENT, ARTICULATE AND DEDICATED BUT ALSO REALISTIC ABOUT THE EXTREMELY LIMITED PROSPECTS FOR THEIR SUCCESS UNDER FORESEEABLE CIRCUMSATANCES.

16. THIS RELATIVELY DIRECT ACCOUNT OF TROUBLES IN BATTAMBANG AND IN THE CENTRAL LEADERSHIP MAKES MORE CREDIBLE EARLIER, ESSENTIALLY SIMILAR REPORTS INDICATING THAT KHMER ROUGE LEADERSHIP MAY NOT BE STABLE. RECENT MYSTERIOUS ABSENCE OF PM POL POT, HIS TEMPORARY REPLACEMENT DURING THAT PERIOD BY NUON CHEA, AND REFERENCE TO POL POT'S REGIMENT IN BATTAMBANG, COULD MEAN THAT POL POT HAS BEEN IN BATTAMBANG ATTEMPTING TO RESOLVE PROBLEMS

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ANGKA IS HAVING IN HORTHWEST CAMBODIA.

17 THAI ARMY SUPPORT FOR RESISTANCE IS NOT RPT NOT NEWS. HOWEVER THIS REPORT PROVIDES ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE STRUCTURAL LINKAGE BETWEEN THE RESISTANCE AND THE THAI ARMY. AS FOR THE COOLER THAI ATTITUDE TOWARD THE RESISTANCE IN RECENT MONTHS, WE ASSUME THAT IT MAY STEM PARTLY FROM SUSPICIONS ABOUT THE REAL IDENTITY OF THE RESISTANCE FORCES, AS SUGGESTED. HOWEVER, THIS MAY ALSO STEM FROM THAI CONCERN OVER TOO OBVIOUS INVOLVEMENT IN CAMBODIAN RESISTANCE ACTIVITIES AT A TIME WHEN THE RTG IS PUBLICLY SEEKING NEGOTIATIONS WITH CAMBODIA.

WHITEHOUSE