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2008/02/01 :
CIA-RDP85T00875R001100010
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CIA-RDP85T00875R001100010

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Developments in Indochina

NSA review
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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA*(Information as of 1800)*Page

SOUTH VIETNAM

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The Army General Staff believes the Communists will start a new offensive in April. The pressure against Tonle Cham has eased off. The new requirements for political parties are now in effect; only three parties made an effort to comply. The bilateral talks in Paris are making little progress.

CAMBODIA

3

The insurgents are active along Route 1, around the town of Banam, and along Route 4 north of Kompong Som. In Tam and Defense Minister Thappana Nginn join the critics of Lon Non.

LAOS

5

Government forces are trying to reopen Route 13.

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SOUTH VIETNAMAn April Offensive?

An estimate prepared by the South Vietnamese Army's general staff for presentation at San Clemente predicts that the Communists will mount an offensive in April designed to inflict as many casualties as possible on government forces. In the view of General Cao Van Vien, the army's chief of staff, the scope and intensity of Communist action will be below the threshold that would require American military intervention. Vien believes the Communists cannot sustain an offensive because they lack the necessary reserve supplies and manpower. He anticipates the heaviest Communist activity will be in Military Regions 1 and 3 and that South Vietnamese forces will have little trouble containing the Communists except in Quang Tri Province.

While it is clear that a step-up may occur in the fighting after 28 March, it is not so clear that the increase will be of the level or scope predicted by the South Vietnamese.

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The Military Situation

Light attacks continue throughout the country. Communist pressure against the Tonle Cham ranger camp in northern Tay Ninh Province has eased somewhat, possibly because enemy forces there believe that they have neutralized the camp's watchdog functions, making its capture unnecessary. By bottling up government forces inside the camp, the Communists can move troops and supplies unobserved along the Saigon River corridor.

Some action continues in the delta. South Vietnamese military officials think this activity could be the result of Communist forces having to move inside South Vietnam to escape B-52 air strikes in Cambodia.

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Status of Political Parties

There are now only three legal political parties in South Vietnam. March 27 was the deadline for compliance with the presidential decree on parties, and only the government's Democracy Party and two new independent coalitions--the Freedom Party and the Social Democratic Alliance--attempted to meet its terms. The Democracy Party has been granted formal recognition; the other two will have provisional status for a year while they try to meet the decree's membership requirements. If the government decides to enforce the decree strictly, it can order the dissolution of old-line political parties such as the Revolutionary Dai Viet Party and several factions of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party.

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Saigon - Viet Cong Talks

The bilateral talks in Paris between the Thieu government and the Viet Cong are making little progress. After three formal sessions, the two sides have agreed that general elections for South Vietnam and the creation of the Council for National Reconciliation and Concord should be on the agenda. Saigon wants to add the question of the demobilization of Vietnamese armed forces, including the withdrawal of Hanoi's troops, while the Viet Cong want to talk about "democratic liberties" in South Vietnam. Each side is trying to pin responsibility on the other for the slow pace of the talks. Both may be waiting to see what happens after X+60 and President Thieu's meeting with President Nixon next week.

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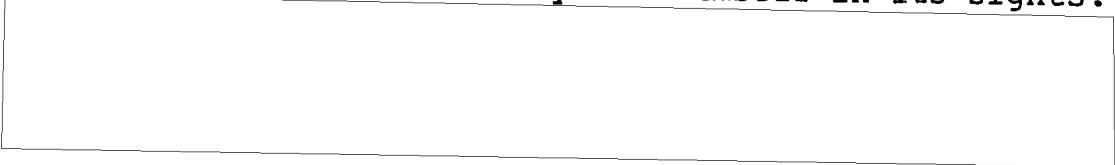
CAMBODIAThe Military Situation

Government forces have been unable to dislodge Khmer insurgent troops from the lower end of Route 1 between Phnom Penh and Neak Luong. The insurgents appear to be tightening their control over a section of the Mekong River's east bank above the town of Banam. Elsewhere in the Phnom Penh region, heavy insurgent attacks forced a Cambodian battalion to abandon its position some ten miles west of the capital on 26 March. In the southwest, government units are trying to clear a stretch of Route 4 about 50 miles north of the seaport of Kompong Som.

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25X1Lon Non, the Troublemaker

Former Democratic Party chief In Tam reports that the government has taken no restrictive measures against him except to increase surveillance around his residence. In Tam, who remains in Phnom Penh "awaiting developments," believes that for the time being the government's political attention will stay centered on Sirik Matak and his associates, but he does not rule out the possibility that the regime may yet put his Democratic Party and himself in its sights.


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On the government side, Defense Minister Thappana Nginn has voiced dismay over the move against Matak. Nginn said on 24 March that the rift between Lon Nol and Matak was a loss for the whole country because their association had been a stabilizing element in the government. He attributed Matak's downfall to Lon Non, whom he called a universally unpopular

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troublemaker. Although Nginn believes that some way should be found to get Lon Non out of the government, he stated that no one in the cabinet or among the President's advisers dares make such a proposal to Lon Nol.

Nginn showed no concern over the possibilities of unrest among military leaders, and said it was unlikely that Cambodian Army chief of staff General Fernandez would be replaced in the immediate future.

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LAOS

The Military Situation

Government forces are still trying to reopen Route 13 southeast of Thakhek. General Thao Ly, the senior commander in this area, is under considerable pressure from Lao Army headquarters in Vientiane to clear the road. On 25 March government forces tried and failed to overrun a Communist blocking position some ten miles from the town; without extensive air support these troops are unlikely to do much better in the future.

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