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 NOM. PHNOM PENH

AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY  
PHNOM PENH.

Memorandum No. 279  
Files Nos. 251/10  
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7th June, 1965.

The Secretary,  
Department of External Affairs,  
CANBERRA

AUSTRALIAN BATTALION FOR SOUTH VIETNAM - CAMBODIAN REACTION

I attach my translation of the text of an editorial published by the Cambodian Press Agency (A.K.P.) on 31st May regarding Australia's decision to send a battalion of combat troops to South Vietnam.

2. The Cambodian Government is strenuously opposed to any form of external intervention in South Vietnam which it feels will only prolong and envenom the fighting there without ultimately altering the outcome. It also believes that the intervention of nations which are either geographically or racially non-Asian will arouse opposition and perhaps hatred towards them amongst Asian nations.

3. South Korea and the Philippines have already been sharply attacked and referred to as mere satellites of the United States. Even New Zealand, following an apparently gratuitous remark by a representative figure has now been personally attacked by Prince Sihanouk as a country which has sold itself to the Americans. Cambodia is geographically very close to the struggle in Vietnam and her fate is to a considerable degree involved in the outcome of the struggle. Cambodian attitudes therefore cannot be dismissed as trivial ones which have been lightly arrived at but are on the contrary deeply felt.

4. The extraordinarily restrained attitude towards Australia's decision to send a battalion of combat troops to South Vietnam is therefore all the more remarkable. The unwillingness to emphasise what is regarded as an Australian error and the almost complete absence to editorial comment, which could only be adverse, has been remarked on by all observers in Phnom Penh and is quite obviously not coincidental.

5. The attached editorial had to be written some time and it has struck most foreign observers here with whom I have discussed it as surprisingly mild.

6. This friendly attitude is reflected not only in the official press such as the A.K.P. Bulletin, the Nationalist and "Réalités" and in the well disposed Phnom Penh Presse, but in the Cambodian language papers and above all in the left-wing "La Dépêche" which for some 18 months has offered no criticism of Australia and has published all available favourable items. No doubt this attitude stems from Prince Sihanouk himself. (Chau Seng the publisher of "La Dépêche" is currently Chef de Cabinet to the Head of State). But it is gratifying that such a lead given by Prince Sihanouk has been so generally accepted and followed by even the left-wing press which is highly critical of other Western nations and even of non-aligned nations such as India.

7. One could speculate at some length on the reasons for the favour currently shown us but I think these are essentially simple ones. Firstly Australia has shown a sympathetic understanding of Cambodian policies and her Colombo Plan aid has been intelligently chosen, discreetly given, unconditionally and without political overtones and has in all cases been effective and locally appreciated. Secondly, Australia has so far done

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*M. J. ...*  
*...*  
*Mr. Curran*  
*Mr. ...*

*Shannon*

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nothing directly against the interests of Cambodia as, voluntarily or involuntarily, the United States and certain other countries have done. Thirdly, as the Prince has himself implied, he wishes to maintain a bridge or a door to the West. There are two countries which can serve this purpose but the French door does not open directly on Washington and London as does the Australian.

8. We should, I feel, do everything to strengthen this position and not simply rely on Cambodian goodwill or the requirements of the Cambodian policy for its maintenance. Where policy and power have become so personalised as in Cambodia, relations with any country including China and France are to some extent at the mercy of conclusions reached by the Head of State who can at any time give a new direction to policy. In the case of Australia this could be triggered by a statement by some representative figure or by an Australian publication following in the footsteps of Time magazine in its attitude towards this country. Should a campaign be launched against us there is plenty of material which could be used from Sir Percy Spender's dissenting opinion at the International Court of Justice on the subject of Preah Vihear, to the sending of Australian troops to Vietnam and even to our undertaking to protect American interests here.

9. On the other hand I have some reason to believe that during the weeks since Prince Sihanouk's speech of 24th April and the handing of Mr. Gordon Walker's Note to the Foreign Minister on 26th April, Sihanouk has been making an important re-appraisal of many aspects of his foreign policy including the relationship with China and that the outcome of this re-appraisal may prove encouraging to the non-Communist world. This is a purely personal assessment which I have not discussed with non-Australian observers here and which will be the subject of a further report. Should we witness in the near future a Cambodian attempt to improve relations with the West, Australia's position here could be a very favoured one indeed.

10. Copy of this memorandum has also been sent to London, Washington, Paris and Saigon.

*Noël Deschamps*  
(Noël Deschamps)  
Ambassador

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