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Wednesday, November 8, 1967

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FOR THE SECRETARY OF STATE FROM MICHAEL FORRESTAL

TEXT OF CABLE FROM BANGKOK (5749)

We returned to Bangkok at noon today. So far as we can tell, the trip has had no adverse consequences up to the present other than thoroughly to exhaust Mrs. Kennedy. Sihanouk went to extraordinary lengths not only to be gallant and courteous but also to ensure that every detail of the arrangements was personally supervised by him. Wherever Mrs. Kennedy went in public she evoked what appeared to be a genuinely warm reception from the crowds, even if one discounts for the likelihood of a number of previously arranged "spontaneous" demonstrations.

There was, however, virtually no occasion during which it was possible to have a serious talk either with Sihanouk himself or any of his people on any of the subjects of interest between the U. S. and Cambodia. Naturally, we did not press except in one case in which I am reporting by separate telegram.

The Prince gave us two semi-private meals, luncheon and dinner at his villa in Sihanoukville yesterday. After dinner David Harlech and myself managed to turn the conversation to the problems of Indo-China as a whole and Vietnam in particular. Despite some very gentle prodding, Sihanouk restricted himself to an hour's monologue on the various facets of his own foreign policy. He said that the conflict in Vietnam should be ended as rapidly as possible since the longer it continued the more natural regional differences between the North and the South would begin to disappear. He described what he believed to be real differences in policy between the National Liberation Front and Hanoi which centered mainly on the desire on the National Liberation Front to postpone for a period any prospect on reunification with the North. He was unconvincing on this issue. He repeated that American military, particularly the bombing of the North, made it impossible for Hanoi to consider negotiations.

Both David Harlech and myself agree that nothing he said adds in any way to what is already available in public form through the Prince's various press conferences and the related articles which appeared in the Cambodian press during our stay. I think, therefore, it is not worth giving a detailed report of our conversation at this time.

There was only one occasion during which Ambassador Harriman's recent invitation was discussed. When I told him that I had spoken to Ambassador Harriman before leaving Washington, he volunteered that he considered Harriman an

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extremely well-informed and sincere person, had a high regard for him, and had been distressed at the necessity for cancelling last year's invitation. He did, however, comment that the time was not propitious to receive official U. S. representatives.

I saw the Prime Minister (Son Sann) at 7:15 this morning at my request on the subject of prisoners, since there had been no opportunity to raise this with the Prince before. I am reporting by separate cable on this conversation, insofar as it touched on the prisoner issue. During this conversation, however, Son Sann volunteered that the American press consistently misunderstood and misreported Cambodia's position. As an example, he said that Cambodia was extremely distressed at the presence of a large Vietnamese minority within its border. He said Cambodia went to great lengths to discourage any further immigration and that this would include Viet Cong. He offered as proof the alleged fact that Cambodia had recently arrested a Viet Cong agent who was presently being interrogated in Phnom Penh and who would be sentenced by military tribunal and probably to death. He claimed he had offered the press the opportunity to interview this individual. I did not have a chance to tell Ambassador Deschamps this, and it may be that you will wish to ask Ambassador Deschamps to follow this up.

Son Sann vehemently asserted that the Prince had no desire to act as arbiter or as even a go-between in the present conflict. He rather grudgingly admitted that the situation might change if there were a change in circumstances which he refused to define. On the question of relations between the U. S. and Cambodia he volunteered that an improvement was not possible on the official level at the moment and referred to a statement he said had appeared in the New York Times this morning, allegedly quoting a U. S. spokesman as having once again refused to guarantee (sic) Cambodia's borders. He very gently warned that Mrs. Kennedy should not be upset if Monseigneur Felt was called upon to respond harshly to this alleged statement. Son Sann did, however, take care to distinguish between official relations and visits of private persons such as Mrs. Kennedy. He also said that for the time being, the Australian Ambassador would be the best channel for any communications between the two governments.

As I was taking leave, he made critical remarks about the American administration as distinguished from the American people which required me to respond. Despite this, the interview was extremely friendly and on the major point of prisoners, he was helpful.

In summary, both David Harlech and I agree that the visit did not give rise to any hopes regarding the early reestablishment of official relations with Cambodia, nor did it suggest any new avenues of communication which might be useful in connection with the general problems of Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, of a purely

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general level, the trip went off without a hitch (with a minor exception I reported Monday) and may have helped turn Cambodia's attention somewhat more to the west.

David Harlech leaves tonight. We plan to remain in Bangkok until midnight Friday and will arrive in Rome midday Saturday. I believe Mrs. Kennedy plans to return to New York Wednesday. I shall return on Sunday and will, of course, be available should you wish to see me anytime thereafter.

Mrs. Kennedy, David Harlech and myself send you both our warm personal regards.

(Comment from Unger: With regard to Mike's reference to a follow-up by Deschamps on the Viet Cong agent, I will be happy to try to generate this directly through the Australians here if you would find such a channel preferable. I will await your word.)

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