Air Operations in the Khmer Republic

HQ PACAF
Directorate of Operations Analysis
CHECO/CORONA HARVEST Division

Prepared by: Major Elder
Project CHECO 7th AF
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The counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare environment of Southeast Asia has resulted in USAF airpower being employed to meet a multitude of requirements. These varied applications have involved the full spectrum of USAF aerospace vehicles, support equipment, and manpower. As a result, operational data and experiences have accumulated which should be collected, documented, and analyzed for current and future impact upon USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine.

Fortunately, the value of collecting and documenting our SEA experiences was recognized at an early date. In 1962, Hq USAF directed CINCPACAF to establish an activity which would provide timely and analytical studies of USAF combat operations in SEA and would be primarily responsive to Air Staff requirements and direction.

Project CHECO, an acronym for Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations, was established to meet the Air Staff directive. Based on the policy guidance of the Office of Air Force History and managed by Hq PACAF, with elements in Southeast Asia, Project CHECO provides a scholarly "on-going" historical examination, documentation, and reporting on USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine in PACOM. This CHECO report is part of the overall documentation and examination which is being accomplished. It is an authentic source for an assessment of the effectiveness of USAF airpower in PACOM when used in proper context. The reader must view the study in relation to the events and circumstances at the time of its preparation—recognizing that it was prepared on a contemporary basis which restricted perspective and that the author's research was limited to records available within his local headquarters area.

Robert E. Hiller
Chief, Operations Analysis
DCS/Plans and Operations
FOREWORD

(U) This report is one in a series of CHECO reports on air operations in the Khmer Republic.* It begins where the preceding report ended--1 December 1971. The period from 1 December 1971 until the Vietnam cease-fire on 29 January 1973 was relatively quiet with respect to U.S. air operations in the Khmer Republic. During that period the focus of U.S. airpower was on North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and Laos. Following the Vietnam cease-fire, and that in Laos within one month, American airpower was concentrated against an insurgency effort which was directed at the overthrow of the Khmer Government, and against North Vietnamese logistics activities in the eastern Khmer Republic. The main emphasis of this report, therefore, is on U.S. air operations in the Khmer Republic after the Vietnam and Laotian cease-fire agreements came into effect.

(U) An overview of the U.S. air involvement in the Khmer Republic since May 1970 is presented, and the report briefly summarizes air operations during the period 1 December 1971 to 28 January 1973. It then concentrates on the U.S. air activities associated with the temporary stand-down immediately following the Vietnam cease-fire and the subsequent intense application of airpower after mid-March 1973. The main thrust of the report is to describe how the Commander of the United States Support Activities Group (COMUSSAG)/Seventh Air Force adapted to the requirement of providing air support in the Khmer Republic.

*formerly Cambodia.
CHAPTER I
OVERVIEW

(S) Cambodia was a latecomer to the group of recipients of United
States airpower support in Southeast Asia (SEA). There were reports of
secret U.S. air strikes in Cambodia in the spring of 1969,* but it was not
until May 1970 that a large-scale U.S. air involvement there began. After
the coup which deposed Prince Norodom Sihanouk in March 1970, Marshal Lon
Nol requested U.S. help to counter Viet Cong (VC), North Vietnamese Army
(NVA), and internal Khmer Insurgent pressure against his neutralist govern-
ment. In response to Lon Nol's request and also to excise VC/NVA sanctuaries
in Cambodia, the President of the United States ordered the 1 May 1970 cross-
border incursion into Cambodia from South Vietnam. United States and South
Vietnamese ground forces, supported by U.S. and South Vietnamese airpower,
overran the enemy's staging areas. Then, as planned, U.S. ground forces
withdrew into South Vietnam before 1 July 1970; but U.S. air support for
the Lon Nol government continued and was gradually expanded.

(TS) On 24 May 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) directed the
Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV), and his
deputy for air, the Commander of Seventh Air Force, to begin air interdiction
operations in eastern Cambodia. The JCS operation plan called for interdiction
of enemy base areas, stored supplies, and movement of men and materiel
along the lines of communication (LOCs); air support of friendly troops

*In July 1973, the Pentagon confirmed these B-52 strikes.
Figure 1
in contact (TIC); and reconnaissance. The original interdiction area (later nicknamed FREEDOM DEAL) was that part of Cambodia east of the Mekong River and north of Route 13. Before the end of 1970, however, the JCS had expanded the interdiction area to the west and south as shown in Figure 2; FREEDOM DEAL became the nickname for the entire area. There, the Rules of Engagement (ROE) permitted 7AF to conduct tactical air (TACAIR), gunship, and B-52 strikes against enemy troops and supplies. Initially, air strikes outside FREEDOM DEAL required specific JCS approval; however, in May 1971 the JCS gave COMUSMACV discretionary authority for TACAIR and gunship interdiction anywhere in the Khmer Republic* in any situation that posed a threat to major Khmer positions whose loss would be a military or psychological blow. In June 1971, COMUSMACV delegated his discretionary authority to the Commander, 7AF.

Although the U.S. air involvement in the Khmer Republic was planned as an interdiction effort, most strikes provided close air support or direct air support for the Khmer Republic's ground forces, the Forces Armees Nationales Khmer (FANK). Nevertheless, in November 1970, 7AF directed its combat units to report all U.S. air strikes in the Khmer Republic as interdiction actions, the rationale being that any air support which helped retard the enemy's movement of men and supplies through the Khmer Republic to South Vietnam was, in effect, interdiction.

*In October 1970, the Lon Nol government established the Khmer Republic, and the term "Cambodia" was abandoned.
(S) The so-called interdiction effort in the Khmer Republic continued essentially unchanged in nature from June 1970 into 1973, although it decreased in intensity in 1972 when U.S. air assets were committed against the major NVA offensive in South Vietnam and against targets in North Vietnam. The characteristics of the enemy threat and MACV/7AF's focus on the protracted commitments in South Vietnam and Laos left the Khmer Republic with a low priority for air operations. The NVA and VC controlled more than one-half of the Khmer Republic's territory and were apparently content to wage a war of attrition. While they harassed the FANK and the Khmer Government with short duration attacks designed to keep the FANK on the defensive and impede the flow of supplies to population centers, they avoided direct confrontation of the Khmer forces at a level that would produce a more intense U.S. air response. The enemy's strategy changed, however, after the cease-fire in Vietnam.

(S) The Vietnam cease-fire became effective on 28 January 1973. The cease-fire agreement specified that "foreign countries shall put an end to all military activities in Cambodia, totally withdraw from and refrain from introducing troops, military advisers and personnel, armaments, munitions, and war material." On 28 January, Marshal Lon Nol announced a unilateral suspension of Khmer offensive actions, effective 29 January. The enemy, however, exploited the lull which resulted from the FANK stand-down and the associated decrease in U.S. air operations. By mid-March, the enemy had begun what the U.S. Defense Attache Office (USDAO) in Phnom Penh described as a "major countryside offensive."
(S) The USDAO and the FANK agreed as to the severity of the threat, but not on the composition of enemy forces. The indigenous Khmer Insurgents (KI) had assumed an increasing share of the enemy activity during 1972. Now, the USDAO described the enemy as primarily KI, advised and supported by the VC/NVA. The FANK, on the other hand, claimed that VC/NVA units were engaging in direct combat activity against the government forces. Noting that the FANK claims were undocumented, the USDAO reasoned that the VC/NVA were emphasizing logistics support to their operational elements in South Vietnam and logistics and combat support to the KI, but that following the Vietnam cease-fire they intended to keep a low profile in the Khmer Republic by avoiding any activity which could be directly attributed to them. According to USDAO estimates, the VC/NVA had approximately 35,000 total personnel in the Khmer Republic. Of these, about 3,500 provided artillery and sapper support, while as many as 2,000 others served as cadre in KI units. USDAO also estimated that the KI main force (combat) exceeded earlier estimates of 27,000 to 33,000 men. Whatever the case, Lon Nol considered the situation sufficiently grave to proclaim a state of siege on 18 March 1973.

(TS) By that time, the U.S. had already increased air strikes in the Khmer Republic. Earlier, in the spirit of Lon Nol's unilateral cease-fire gesture in January, the JCS had limited the air operating authorities to permit U.S. air strikes only to counter specific hostile acts against the Khmer government or the FANK. However, when it became apparent in early March that the VC/NVA-backed KI were making an unprecedented effort against
the Khmer Government, and that the VC/NVA were continuing to move men and supplies through the Khmer Republic into South Vietnam, restraints on the employment of airpower were eased. Admiral Moorer, Chairman of the JCS, notified Admiral Noel Gayler, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command (CINCPAC), to direct an "appreciable weight of B-52s, TACAIR and gunships against fixed and fleeting targets in Cambodia," and rescinded the restriction that air strikes were permitted only to counter specific hostile acts against the FANK. Air Force General John W. Vogt, Jr., commander of the newly formed U.S. Support Activities Group* (USSAG), Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB), Thailand, was given the responsibility for developing an effective campaign against these targets.

(S) General Vogt, as COMUSSAG and 7AF Commander, had operational responsibility for all U.S. combat air operations in SEA. In mid-March he began to apply his air assets on an expanded scale against the VC/NVA lines of communication and VC/NVA/KI ground forces. By the end of March, the USAF R-52, TACAIR, and gunship effort in the Khmer Republic had increased to about 220 sorties per day. This was about six times the combined sortie rate for USAF, U.S. Marine Corps, and South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) attack aircraft in the Khmer Republic during 1972. The initial effort was primarily against the NVA/VC-controlled LOCs and logistics areas, but the steadily increasing KI pressure on the Khmer LOCs and population centers, especially Phnom Penh, changed the priorities. In May 1973, the

*On 15 February 1973, USSAG/7AF assumed SEA force employment responsibility from MACV, Saigon.
typical daily sortie effort included 39 to 45 B-52s, 30 F-111s, approximately 110 F-4s, 30 A-7s, and 12 AC-130 gunships. In addition, there was a daily average of 35 Forward Air Controller (FAC) sorties and 96 support (combat, reconnaissance, air support, and radio relay) sorties. The larger part of this air effort was now in direct or close air support of FANK forces, friendly population centers, and government supply convoys.

(S) The increase in enemy activity in the Khmer Republic had elicited an escalation of the U.S. air effort at a time when U.S. forces in SEA had expected to be in a cease-fire environment. Air operations in the Khmer Republic, previously given the lowest priority in SEA, were now the only combat air operations. Consequently, these operations received an unprecedented amount of attention from the press, the U.S. Congress, and, of course, JCS, CINCPAC, and COMUSSAG. Operating authorities, targeting command and control authority changed in reaction to the situation, as did the scope and intensity of air operations. Operating methods once widely used in combat in South Vietnam and Laos presented new problems when applied in the Khmer Republic. More than at any other time in the SEA conflict, the destiny of an Allied government seemed to be in the hands of American airmen. At the same time, the U.S. air effort was politically constrained. The Cooper-Church Amendment had prohibited U.S. personnel from participating in any in-country military training or advisory activities, and other activities in the Congress suggested that further restraints were forthcoming. Both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives introduced measures aimed at ending or reducing the U.S.
involvement in SEA, and the Senate Appropriations Committee unanimously approved an appropriations bill amendment prohibiting any funding whatsoever for bombing in the Khmer Republic.

(S) Although the FANK had held its ground with high levels of U.S. air support, and the enemy offensive seemed to falter by the end of May 1973, the USDAO reports from Phnom Penh were not optimistic. The FANK, battered by months of defensive fighting, were tired and discouraged. The fate of the FANK and the Lon Nol government appeared to hinge on U.S. air support, which possibly would soon terminate. The USDAO predicted that "June, if not the entire rainy season, will be pivotal as the future role of U.S. air in Cambodia is determined."

(U) The U.S. Congress determined the future role of U.S. air support for the Lon Nol government in July by forcing the President of the United States to agree to a 15 August 1973 deadline for the cessation of U.S. bombing. If U.S. airpower were to bring the KI to the negotiating table, it would have to do so in less than six weeks, which was clearly impossible. Thus, the announcement of the impending bomb halt removed much of the existing pressure on the KI to negotiate. If the KI could survive through 15 August, their prospects for a military victory over the Lon Nol government would brighten considerably.

(U) The KI proved to be a determined enemy. Rather than waiting until the U.S. bombing stopped, the insurgents continued to carry the battle to the FANK. In so doing they showed that their forces were greater than U.S. intelligence sources had indicated at the end of 1972. Thus, in the
light of subsequent events, 1972 was apparently a vital building period for the KI. With the help of the VC/NVA, the insurgents developed into a formidable, determined fighting force in 1972 and proved it in 1973.
CHAPTER II
SUMMARY OF AIR OPERATIONS
DECEMBER 1971 TO VIETNAM CEASE-FIRE

(S) Except for a decrease in their already relatively low intensity, air operations in the Khmer Republic from December 1971 until the Vietnam cease-fire remained essentially as described in the preceding CHECO report, Khmer Air Operations, Nov 70-Nov 71. That is, the operating rules, target validation procedures, and command and control relationships did not change—only the level of effort. USAF and VNAF strike sorties reached a relative high point in December 1971 in support of an abortive FANK offensive (CHENLA II) and during the U.S. Commando Hunt VII dry season interdiction campaign. In January 1972, however, the sortie rates dropped dramatically and remained low until after the cease-fire: the number of USAF and VNAF TACAIR sorties in 1972 was about one third the number in 1971. (See Appendix, page 75.)

(S) TACAIR support for the Khmer Republic decreased during the first three months of 1972 because the enemy was content to let the FANK rest in the purely defensive posture they assumed after their severe defeat during CHENLA II. The VC/NVA were preparing for their spring Nguyen Hue Offensive against South Vietnam and apparently preferred to avoid major engagements with the FANK or South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) forces in the Khmer Republic. An increased number of B-52 sorties were requested against the growing number of NVA/VC logistics targets in the northeastern, tri-border area of the Khmer Republic, but approvals were delayed until after the enemy offensive had begun.
(S) When the NVA spring offensive began at the end of March, U.S. and VNAF TACAIR assets were diverted from the Khmer Republic to South Vietnam. Sorties available for the Khmer Republic were further reduced when the bombing operations over all of North Vietnam began in April and intensified in May. For the rest of the year, even after the VC/NVA offensive faltered in mid-June, U.S. and VNAF TACAIR supported ARVN efforts to retake lost ground, and U.S. aircraft continued to operate over North Vietnam. These priority operations, combined with the IAF's defensive posture and the VC/NVA's low profile in the Khmer Republic, kept TACAIR support for the Khmers at a low level throughout 1972.

(3) ALC LIGHT strikes in the Khmer Republic also reflected the VC/NVA operations against South Vietnam. The number of strikes, which had increased in March against the VC/NVA build-up in the portion of FREEDOM to South Vietnamese border, dropped sharply in April when the North Vietnamese surged across the border into South Vietnam. The further decrease in May corresponded to the initiation on 10 May of the LINEBACKER interdiction campaign against North Vietnam's transportation and supply systems. The number of B-52 strikes in the Khmer Republic began to rise again in June as the enemy offensive waned and the VC/NVA retreated into the Khmer Republic to regroup. The intense LINEBACKER II B-52 raids over North Vietnam from 18 through 29 December caused the Khmer Republic sortie rate for that month to decrease. For the entire year, though, the B-52 effort in the Khmer Republic was greater in 1972 than in 1971. (See Appendix, page 75.) Generally, the B-52s struck enemy
LOCs, supply areas, truck parks, and base camps, while TACAIR provided close and direct air support for the FANK.

(S) USAF A-37s, F-4s, A-7s, and AC-130s provided most of the air support for the FANK during 1972. (USAF A-7s had arrived in SEA in October for use in the TACAIR role.) The 8th Special Operations Squadron at Bien Hoa Air Base (AB), South Vietnam, deactivated, turning their A-37s over to the VNAF. Marine Corps A-4s out of Bien Hoa began flying attack sorties in the Khmer Republic in May 1972; and from June through the end of the year they averaged some 150 sorties per month. Although the VNAF did support the FANK, most of their A-1, A-37, and F-5 TACAIR sorties supported ARVN incursions into the eastern border areas of the Khmer Republic. VNAF AC-119 gunships supported* FANK ground units so that the Khmers could use their AC-47 gunships on other missions, such as night surveillance of Phnom Penh’s Pochentong Airfield.

(S) Khmer Air Force (KAF) operations remained fairly constant during 1972 as USAF and VNAF participation decreased. On 31 May, for example, the KAF had 103 aircraft, a figure which included 24 T-28s for TACAIR, 18 O-1D FAC aircraft, and 6 AC-47 gunships. The remaining aircraft (about one half of them helicopters) were used for training or resupply. During May (a typical month for KAF operations) the Khmers flew 329 T-28, 168 FAC, 85 gunship sorties, and 1,131 combat support sorties. During the same month, USAF TACAIR, gunship, and B-52 sorties totaled 266, and the VNAF flew 131 TACAIR and gunship sorties in the Khmer Republic. The number

*It should be noted that this support was limited as a result of the language barrier. [Ed.]
of USAF TACAIR sorties (239) was the lowest since the 1970 incursion. Also in that month, the B-52 and VNAF sortie rates showed marked decreases, since the U.S. and South Vietnamese assets were countering the VC/NVA offensive in SVN.

(5) Although the VC/NVA focused their military efforts on South Vietnam, they, with the Khmer Insurgents, maintained an offensive position with respect to the FANK and repeatedly frustrated FANK efforts to attain their military objectives. Those objectives, as stated by the FANK in March 1972, were to (1) secure LOCs and major supply routes, (2) eliminate major enemy units, (3) reestablish the Khmer Government infrastructure, (4) protect and hold major population centers, and (5) maintain constant pressure on the enemy by increased USAF, VNAF, and KAF interdiction. The FANK realized few of its objectives, however, because "hit and run" enemy tactics kept them confined to defensive positions along major LOCs and in urban centers. Any offensive actions taken by the FANK would have required heavy U.S. air support, but U.S. assets were heavily committed to South Vietnam.

(5) The willingness and ability of the KI to play a more active role in enemy activities against the Khmer Government was one reason the enemy successfully kept the FANK off balance even when the VC and NVA were occupied in South Vietnam. By directing stand-off attacks, sabotage, and terrorist activities against the Khmer populace, the numerically-inferior KI forces were able to keep the FANK in defensive positions in their continuing effort to protect the population centers. For example, in the Phnom Penh area in July 1972, there were 70 to 80 FANK battalions defending against 10 enemy battalions.
(S) On the basis of one estimate, enemy main force strength throughout the Khmer Republic was 5,000 to 6,000 hard-core troops. At the end of December 1972, the force estimate was the same.* However, according to U.S. sources the war had become largely a FANK versus KI struggle, with the VC/NVA providing logistics, fire, and training support to the KI.

(S) The FANK initiated an offensive action against the VC/NVA after the enemy had withdrawn their troops into the Parrot's Beak area of southeastern Cambodia following heavy losses in South Vietnam in mid-1972. (See Figure 3.) COMUSMACV concentrated B-52 and TACAIR strikes in the area, and FANK forces launched an offensive to open Route 1 from the Mekong River toward the Parrot's Beak. Simultaneously, ARVN units began a drive to clear the route east of Svay Rieng. The FANK and ARVN objective was to make Route 1, which had been interdicted by the enemy for several months, safe for truck convoy traffic. Supported by a large USAF TACAIR effort, the FANK enjoyed a limited and temporary success by opening Route 1 between Neak Luong on the Mekong and Kompong Trabek.

(S) The enemy forces reacted sharply to the FANK incursion into their sanctuary, because it posed a serious threat to their vital supply line into the delta region of South Vietnam. Demonstrating their determination to protect their LOC, the North Vietnamese introduced T-54 medium tanks.

*(S) This estimate of enemy combat troop strength at the end of the year is suspect since the USDAQ in May 1973 estimated the KI combat strength alone to be over 30,000. General Vogt in July 1973 estimated that the KI strength had grown from about 30,000 in December 1972 to about 50,000 in July 1973, primarily through conscription by threat.
and PT-76 light amphibious tanks into the battle, apparently the first
time the enemy had used armor in the Khmer Republic. Although USAF TACAIR
destroyed six of the T-54 tanks on 6 August, the NVA successfully countered
the FANK offensive. By the end of November, Route 1 from Neak Luong to Svay
Rieng was again in enemy hands.

(C) As the NVA drove its counteroffensive along Route 1 using armor,
artillery, and sizeable ground forces, FANK forces at Kompong Trabek became
surrounded, and so required aerial resupply. In response, USAF C-130s of
the 374th Tactical Airlift Wing airdropped supplies at Kompong Trabek and
at Svay Rieng where the ARVN troops were based. Although the FANK and ARVN
terminated offensive moves along Route 1 and hoped to maintain a status quo there, the C-130s continued to resupply Svay Rieng through the end of the
year. The 374th TAW airdropped approximately 1,594 tons of rice,
ammunition, and medical supplies to Svay Rieng in 1972. The USAF air
drops at Svay Rieng and other areas where FANK and ARVN forces became
isolated were complemented by VNAF C-123 aerial resupply.

(C) The requirements for USAF and VNAF aerial resupply spread to other
areas of the Khmer Republic as the enemy, anticipating a cease-fire, increased
offensive activities in January 1973. By interdicting LOCs and harassing
population centers, the enemy achieved dual benefits: they (1) kept the
FANK away from VC/NVA supply lines into South Vietnam and (2) forced aerial
resupply to isolated population centers. Kompong Thom (about 80 miles north
of Phnom Penh) and Takeo (40 miles south) were just two of the population
centers which required aerial resupply in January. These and other areas
continued to require C-130 support after the cease-fire.
(S) The enemy established a definite pattern during 1972. The VC/NVA, with their attention focused on South Vietnam, still exerted enough pressure to keep the FANK off balance while they helped the KI become a viable military force. This released more VC/NVA troops for deployment to South Vietnam. Their success in developing a formidable KI fighting force was evidenced by the KI's sustained offensive after the cease-fire. The KI's determined drive to isolate Phnom Penh and topple the Lon Nol government, combined with the NVA's logistics activity in the Khmer Republic, evoked the concentrated application of U.S. airpower in the Khmer Republic beginning in March 1973.
CHAPTER III

AUTHORITIES AND PROCEDURES AFTER THE VIETNAM CEASE-FIRE

(S) The operating authorities and control procedures for air operations in the Khmer Republic changed significantly during and after the cease-fire. Although U.S. intelligence personnel did not necessarily expect Marshal Lon Nol's unilateral cessation of offensive actions to evoke a similar response from the enemy, the United States' policy was to give the cease-fire every chance to succeed. Secretary of State William P. Rogers directed the cessation of all U.S. TACAIR and B-52 strikes as of 0700 hours Phnom Penh time on 29 January 1973, but he kept an option open for further U.S. strikes depending on the post-cease-fire situation. The U.S. Ambassador to the Khmer Republic, Emory C. Swank, pointed out that in any case "the use of USAF resources [in the Khmer Republic] will henceforth have substantial political implications."

Thus, the JCS and the Secretary of State promulgated rules and procedures for air operations in a cease-fire environment. Within two months, however, the rules were changed to give COMUSSAG the flexibility to blunt the enemy offensive.

Operating Authorities and Procedures

(S) Before the cease-fire, 7AF's TACAIR was responsive to FANK ground commanders' requests through USAF FACs and to requests from the FANK General Staff through the FANK liaison office in the 7AF Tactical Air Control Center (TACC). In the first case, the FANK liaison office validated the target and
the TACC checked it against the ROE before allotting the air support from available assets. In the second case, FACs reconnoitered the targets and, if possible, talked to the ground commanders before the TACC would approve the strikes. The American Embassy in Phnom Penh was not involved in the process.

(S) As the cease-fire approached, the JCS and the Secretary of State directed that Ambassador Swank's approval would be required for all post-cease-fire air strikes in the Khmer Republic. The Embassy would have final strike approval from a political standpoint if the strike request met the ROE and was approved by 7AF. The Senior Defense Attache in Phnom Penh, U.S. Army Colonel Ray L. Burnell, Jr., proposed strike requests and target validation procedures which met Washington's requirements. The JCS approved the new procedures, and 7AF implemented them on 2 February.

...and commanders were responsible for identifying to the FANK General Staff situations which required air support. If the General Staff judged Khmer Air Force resources insufficient to meet the threat, they would contact the American Embassy.* The Embassy would determine whether or not the situation required USAF support and, if so, would forward the validated request to BLUE CHIP, the command and control center in the TACC at 7AF. BLUE CHIP would check the request against the current ROE before directing any strikes. On a case-by-case basis, 7AF would launch FACs to help the Embassy evaluate the threat. If a FAC received a request...

*The South Vietnamese stopped ground and air support for the Khmers when the cease-fire went into effect.
for air support from the FANK, he would forward it to the Embassy for KAF support or Embassy validation as outlined above. The Battle Staff Commander at BLUE CHIP, considering the FANK ground commander's evaluation, determined the type and amount of ordnance for all strikes. Contrary to subsequent press charges, the Embassy did not target or control air strikes in the Khmer Republic—those responsibilities were exclusively General Vogt's.

(S) As the new procedures went into effect, Colonel Burnell assured Brigadier General Jack Bellamy, 7AF Assistant Director of Operations, that the Embassy was taking a "rigorous view of their role in approving U.S. air activity in the Khmer Republic." He noted that the Embassy had received the first FANK request for U.S. air support on the night of 29 January, the first evening of Lon Nol's cease-fire, but that after Ambassador Swank explained the new policy permitting U.S. strikes only in response to hostile enemy acts, the General Staff decided that U.S. intervention was not necessary.

(S) The Embassy forwarded the first requests for limited U.S. air support to 7AF on 9 February. The FANK General Staff made the requests to bolster key tactical positions against which the enemy was exerting heavy pressure. General Vogt, under authorities granted to him by the JCS, approved the use of limited U.S. airpower in principle, but retained approval authority for each individual request. During this time, in Saigon, MACV was being deactivated, and 7AF was moving to Nakhon Phanom RTAFB.

(S) For the first three weeks of February, U.S. air activity in the Khmer Republic remained at a very low level because of U.S. hopes for Lon
Nol's cease-fire and because 7AF's air assets were being directed against enemy targets in Laos in an effort to pressure the enemy into a cease-fire agreement there. The enemy took advantage of the decreased FANK ground and U.S. air operations and increased their aggressiveness. At the same time, U.S. reconnaissance and intelligence sources revealed a substantial increase in enemy logistics activities in the northeastern regions of the Khmer Republic. The U.S. intelligence personnel interpreted this as a renewed threat to South Vietnam.

(S) The 22 February cease-fire in Laos reinforced the theory that the concentrated application of airpower was an effective way to bring about serious cease-fire negotiations. This conclusion militated in favor of an intensified U.S. air effort in the Khmer Republic. Although USAF TACAIR sorties increased from 35 in the third week of February to 247 in the fourth week to break an enemy siege of Kompong Thom, Ambassador Swank was nevertheless still optimistic about Lon Nol's cease-fire. Referring to the Kompong Thom effort as a "one time air campaign," the Ambassador proposed that after 26 February air support return to the mode of operations under which 7AF would assist the FANK consistent with Lon Nol's cessation of offensive activities. At the same time, however, he acknowledged that the continuing level of enemy activity would require AC-130 SPECTRE support on 26 and 27 February, and he anticipated the need for gunship, FAC, and TACAIR support for the remainder of that week. He requested FAC coverage of Kompong Thom, the Route 15/Route 1 area, Routes 2 and 3, and possibly Routes 4, 5, 6, and 7. To
give the FAC OV-10s operating from Ubon RTAFB more time on station, the
Ambassador permitted them to refuel at Pochentong Airfield but cautioned
them to avoid publicity because of the U.S. troop limitation in the Khmer
Republic. The USAF sortie rate did drop the first week in March, but
the reduction was only temporary.

(TS) Viewing the build-up of North Vietnamese supplies, equipment,
and personnel in FREEDOM DEAL, and the increasing enemy pressure on Khmer
Government positions, the JCS on 8 March suggested an expansion of the air
operating authorities. On 9 March, the Ambassador and the FANK Chief of
Staff approved the new JCS authorities and new operational procedures pro­
posed by General Vogt. The new rules permitted air interdiction of the
VC/NVA supply routes, storage areas, and transshipment points throughout
FREEDOM DEAL. They also increased the scope of air operations throughout
the Khmer Republic by permitting the use of the full spectrum of U.S. air
strike forces against targets posing a threat to friendly forces and pop­
ulation centers, thus deleting the requirement that air response be pro­
vided only to avert actual loss of positions. The FANK General Staff
reestablished the prevalidated LOC structure in FREEDOM DEAL, and 7AF
developed validation procedures for all other targets. Although Embassy
and FANK approval were no longer required for TACAIR and gunship strikes
in FREEDOM DEAL, FACs would control all TACAIR sorties. For B-52 strikes
in FREEDOM DEAL, 7AF would submit the targets through the Embassy to secure
FANK approval. Any strike outside FREEDOM DEAL still required Embassy
validation.
(S) The numbers of B-52 and TACAIR strikes increased substantially in the second week of March, but in the third week they increased dramatically as the military situation in the Khmer Republic became more critical. USAF TACAIR sorties went from 365 in the second week to 1,392 in the third while ARC LIGHT strikes went from 165 to 409.

(TS) With the tremendous increase in the number of strikes, the validation procedure soon became what Ambassador Swank described "a very onerous burden" for the Embassy. On 17 April the Ambassador explained that even when augmented by TDY personnel to the limit of the in-country ceiling,* the small Air Attaché staff had "to work night and day under enormous pressures to meet exacting operational requirements in a satisfactory manner."

Noting that the political advantages of separating the Embassy from the operational TACAIR role were evident, Ambassador Swank strongly recommended that CINCPAC approve a proposal that General Vogt had made to delete the requirement for the Embassy's validation of each TACAIR strike outside FREEDOM DEAL.

(S) General Vogt's proposed validation procedures, approved by CINCPAC and Washington, became effective on 19 April. The Embassy and the FANK had already given indefinite validation for TACAIR and gunship strikes within FREEDOM DEAL except for friendly areas. Now, for 30-day periods, the Embassy gave blanket validation for TACAIR and gunship strikes outside FREEDOM DEAL, although the FANK continued to validate each target.

*The Foreign Assistance Act of 1971 (Public Law 92-226) imposed a ceiling of 200 U.S. and 85 third country national employees of the U.S. government in the Khmer Republic at any one time.
there. Both Embassy and FANK approvals were still required for each 8-52 strike in the Khmer Republic.

(C) The removal of the Embassy from the TACAIR target validation procedure also removed 7AF's communication link with the FANK high command. The USDAO had been providing the vital link for air support coordination between 7AF and the FANK Combat Operations Center (COC) through an operation known as Area Control. Area Control was a radio relay center in the Embassy where USDAO personnel passed targeting information back and forth between 7AF command and control personnel and the FANK COC, giving the Embassy's political approvals for air strikes. Its removal required the development of an entirely new command and control concept.

Command and Control

(C) When the American Embassy withdrew from the TACAIR target validation procedure in April 1973 and closed Area Control, there were several projects underway which 7AF, the Embassy, and the Khmers were able to weld together to serve in place of Area Control as the command and control link. One of these was the newly-established Khmer Direct Air Support Center (KDASC).

(S) Although the primary function of the Khmer Air Force was to provide close and direct air support for the FANK, the KAF did not have a KDASC to affect the essential coordination between Khmer air and ground forces. In mid-February 1973, 7AF dispatched a four-man survey team from the deactivating 505th Tactical Control Group at Tan Son Nhut AB, South Vietnam, to Phnom Penh to advise the DAO on implementing a DASC. The
team was eventually successful, but the situation it initially encountered was indicative of the undeveloped state of KAF capabilities.

(S) The survey team members reported that when they arrived in Phnom Penh on 12 February, no Tactical Air Control System (TACS) existed and that "the mere establishment of a DASC will not solve the Tactical Air Control problems present in the Khmer Air Force." The team recommended the development of a rudimentary TACS with the KDASC as the major operational component designed to direct, control, and coordinate close air support in the Khmer Republic. The KDASC would also coordinate tactical reconnaissance and tactical airlift with the Air Operations Control Center, which was not used extensively by the FANK who preferred to deal with the 7AF TACC. While the primary function of the KDASC would be to provide immediate air support for Khmer Army and Navy forces, it would also be responsible for preplanned air strikes, possibly including interdiction missions. The team noted, however, that the KDASC would not perform one of the primary functions of a DASC--diverting sorties to immediate targets--because that authority was retained by 7AF.

(S) In addition to the technical problems, Khmer intra-service rivalries retarded the KDASC's development. The KAF was reluctant to collocate the DASC with the FANK headquarters because the KAF believed it was the first step of an Army effort to take over the KAF. Although the primary purpose of the DASC was to support the FANK, the KAF wanted the KDASC located at its headquarters. Colonel Burnell, the Defense Attaché, stated:
It is a knotty situation involving strange political undercurrents and jealousies. MG Fernandez [then FANK Chief of Staff] is apparently aware of this and is trying very hard to smooth out the problem. Unfortunately, some commanders who theoretically are under Fernandez's command do bypass him and deal directly with Lon Nol.

Colonel Burnell recommended that the DASC be established at FANK headquarters as planned. He said that the Army would run it if the KAF wouldn't.

(S) The appointment of a highly qualified KAF officer as the KDASC director resolved the jurisdiction dispute, and the KDASC was located at the FANK Combat Operations Center. The KDASC was manned entirely by the KAF, including several English-speaking Khmers to communicate with American airmen. It began limited operations on 30 March 1973, assisting in validation of targets for U.S. TACAIR outside FREEDOM DEAL. The KDASC (known as Bakheng Control) eventually replaced Area Control in April as the primary avenue by which 7AF received FANK target validations and air support requests. The 7AF contact with Bakheng Control was through the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center (ABCCC), the key element in another project already on the way.

(S) To aid in coordinating U.S. operations, the ABCCC* had been in operation over the Khmer Republic or southern Laos since the Vietnam cease-fire. Prior to the cease-fire, however, the 7AF TACC (BLUE CHIP) had exercised command and control of immediate U.S. air strikes in the Khmer Republic via Sundog Alpha, a radio relay station at Nui Ba Dinh Mountain.

*The ABCCC is a C-130 equipped with a command and control capsule.
South Vietnam. (FACs and gunships controlling strikes communicated with BLUЭ CHIP through Sundog Alpha.) BLUE CHIP contacted the 7AF Target Management Office to ascertain that the targets were validated by the FANK and complied with the ROE. If so, and the assets were available, BLUE CHIP authorized the strikes and directed the aircraft with the proper ordnance to the target areas where the FACs took charge. Shortly after the cease-fire, the deactivation of Sundog Alpha and the transfer of BLUE CHIP to Nakhon Phanom broke the radio communication link between BLUE CHIP and the FACs operating over the Khmer Republic. Therefore, 7AF moved the ABCCC (which had coordinated air strikes in Laos for several years) to the Khmer Republic. Initially, the ABCCC served as little more than a radio relay platform between Area Control and BLUE CHIP, where 7AF validated the targets, a time-consuming procedure.

(S) The lack of rapid communications became a problem in early March as the number of targets in the Khmer Republic increased markedly. Seventh Air Force reinstituted a visual reconnaissance strike list so that targets of a non-fleeting nature would be recorded and disseminated to all FACs for timely coverage; but the command and control system needed further streamlining to shorten the target processing and validation time in critical situations, in particular for the protection of Mekong River convoys. At the suggestion of the Embassy the 7AF target management personnel, in coordination with the 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron at Korat RTAFB, developed a proposal to delegate BLUE CHIP's target management and validation functions to the Director of the ABCCC Air Battle Staff.
The authority would be issued only for specific operating areas for limited time periods, since General Vogt felt that the sensitive nature of the U.S. involvement in the Khmer Republic required the full control of U.S. airpower to be within his headquarters.

(C) Seventh Air Force first implemented the new proposal on a limited basis in support of Mekong River convoys in April 1973. The experiment (nicknamed Special Mekong Air Sector--SMAS) significantly reduced response time for bringing U.S. strike aircraft to the aid of the convoys. With this success, General Vogt saw the elements of a truly responsive command and control system, capable of immediate reaction to the unpredictable ground situation in the Khmer Republic. Since the ABCCC and the KDASC were already there, he decided to delegate 7AF's authority for approving all immediate air strikes in the Khmer Republic to the senior battle staff member aboard the ABCCC.

(S) The new command and control arrangement worked well. Personnel from the 7AF Target Management Office trained the ABCCC staff in target approval procedures for the Khmer Republic. The need for a FANK liaison office at 7AF for target validation was eliminated because the ABCCC communicated directly with the KDASC. Seventh Air Force headquarters fraggged air into the contested areas day and night, but the ABCCC determined its utilization based upon the immediate situation. The ABCCC with its specialized crew was making on-the-spot judgments normally done on the ground by a U.S. DASC or TACC. Daily guidance was provided by Hq 7AF, and the ABCCC staff referred any target requests not clearly within their delegated authorities to COMUSSAG/7AF for approval.
(S) General Vogt noted the practical success of the concept after it was in effect for one month:

We are employing ABCCC aircraft 24 hours a day and the entire [air] war is being controlled by airmen, in the air, in direct contact with troops on the ground. The Embassy is completely out of the tactical air business. We now have a situation where there is a man on the ground working with a FAC who, in turn, is in contact with ABCCC. ABCCC has the authority to call in the kinds of air and [determine] the manner of air employment necessary to do the job. It is highly responsive. We never had this in Laos and, if we had to return, I would recommend a similar program.

Indeed, first reports indicated that the new procedure had reduced target validation time by one half.

(C) Another element which further streamlined the improved command and control system was the identification, for the first time, of FANK ground commanders qualified as Forward Air Guides (FAGs). A similar FAG program had reduced reaction times for air support in Laos. To adopt the concept in the Khmer Republic, the FANK General Staff granted select ground commanders political and military approval authority for air strikes in support of their operations. Upon the insistence of General Vogt and the USAVO, the General Staff's selection of the FAGs was extremely stringent and each nominee had to be specifically approved by USAVO and 7AF. The USAVO published an initial list of 12 FAGs on 28 April and supplemented it with 13 more in May. Each FAG was English-speaking or had an English-speaking radio operator available to him for communication with American FACs. The FAGs began operating on 1 May 1973 after the resolution of a brief problem concerning the FAGs' limits of authority.