

Nixon Accedes To Hill, Sets Bombing Halt

By Carroll Kilpatrick and Michael Getler
Washington Post Staff Writers

President Nixon yesterday reluctantly bowed to the congressional demand that he halt the bombing of Cambodia on Aug. 15, but he warned that by its action Congress had abandoned a friend and undermined hope for a negotiated settlement.

The administration will obey the law despite the "dangerous potential consequences" and even though other countries, such as Thailand, will be profoundly affected, the President said.

Shortly before the President's decision was sent to Capitol Hill, Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger ordered American commanders to end all military activity in, over and off the coasts of Cambodia at midnight, Aug. 14.

However, the commanders were directed to continue "unarmed" reconnaissance flights "for the purpose of gathering intelligence." The Defense Department said it will continue to deliver an estimated \$187 million in military equipment to Cambodia.

These activities are viewed by the administration as "non-combat" and are not ruled out by the congressional order to end American combat involvement.

The President warned the North Vietnamese in his statement, sent as a letter to House Speaker Carl Albert (D-Okla.) and Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.), not to draw "the erroneous conclusion from this congressional action that they are free to launch a military offensive in other areas in Indochina."

He said that Hanoi would make "a very dangerous error if it mistook the cessation of bombing in Cambodia for an invitation to fresh aggression or further violations of the Paris agreements."

"The American people," he said, "would respond to such aggression with appropriate action."

The warning, however, may not impress Hanoi, for it knows that the President's authority to conduct military operations in Southeast Asia has been undermined by Watergate as well as by the congressional insistence that Congress approve any future use of American military power in the area.

The amendment to which the President objected declares a prohibition against "combat activities by the United States military forces

See BOMBING, A18, Col. 1

BOMBING, From A1

in or over or from off the shore of North Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia."

Mr. Nixon in effect put the blame for what may happen in the future on Congress.

He did not say so in his letter, but his decision not to request authority to continue military operations in Cambodia after Aug. 15 reflected in large part his weakness from the Watergate scandal.

On June 27, the President vetoed an appropriation bill with a rider imposing an immediate halt to the bombing. Following a flurry of negotiation between the White House and Congress, the President consented to a new measure imposing a bombing halt as of Aug. 15.

He apparently recognized that Congress would continue to put the bombing halt amendment on almost every piece of legislation passed, and he hoped that the Aug. 15 cutoff would allow time to negotiate a cease-fire.

But no progress was made in the Cambodia negotiations,

and national security adviser Henry A. Kissinger, who had been scheduled to go the China in early August, postponed his trip because he recognized he could not bargain effectively with the Aug. 15 halt facing him.

Exiled Cambodian Prince Norodom Sihanouk announced last month in Peking that he would not negotiate with Kissinger.

After the June 27 veto, Melvin R. Laird, counselor to the President, said that Mr. Nixon would veto every bill that contained a ban on Cambodian bombing.

But within a few days, Laird engineered the compromise cutoff date of Aug. 15, although Kissinger wanted a later date. Laird assured congressional leaders that the President would sign the bill.

Mr. Nixon did so on July 1, but he said that if further military action by this country should be required, "I shall request the Congress to help us achieve our objectives."

There was some debate in the administration over a pos-

sible request to Congress to extend the cutoff, but legislative advisers informed the White House that there was no chance Congress would change the date.

The President thus had no alternative but to accept the congressional ban even though he believed it eroded his efforts to negotiate a final end of the war in Southeast Asia.

"With the passage of the congressional act," he told Albert and Mansfield, "the incentive to negotiate a settlement in Cambodia has been undermined, and Aug. 15 will accelerate this process.

"This abandonment of a friend will have a profound impact in other countries, such as Thailand, which have relied on the constancy and determination of the United States, and I want the Congress to be fully aware of the consequences of its actions."

The end of the bombing, however, does not signal "an abdication of America's determination to work for a lasting peace in Indochina," Mr. Nixon said.

"We will continue to provide all possible support permitted under the law," the President said. "We will continue to work for a durable peace with all the legal means at our disposal."

On ABC's "Issues and Answers" program (WMAL) last Sunday, Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.) said that if anything disastrous now happens in Cambodia "the President would be justified in feeling . . . it would have been the fault of the Congress, and that means me, among others, because I voted for it. . . ."

"If disaster occurs, we in the Congress have to assume a great part of that responsibility."

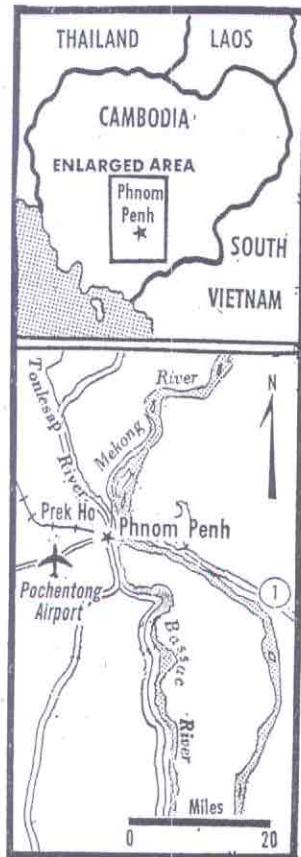
The President's letter was delivered to Capitol Hill as Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, briefed congressional leaders and members of key military and foreign relations committees of both the House and Senate behind closed doors.

The Pentagon declared in an official statement: "Effective at midnight, Aug. 14, EDT, all combat activities of Defense Department forces are forbidden in, over and off the shores of Cambodia and Laos."

Prohibited under the guidance" being sent to U.S. field commanders are: bombing, strafing, armed air reconnaissance, helicopter gunship operations, forward air control operations, artillery fire control, or the employment of combat advisers with indigenous forces."

Chairman J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.) of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee told newsmen after the closed-door session with Moorer that he personally felt continuation of unarmed reconnaissance flights was risky. But he indicated that he had been given assurances that the shooting down of such a plane would not touch off a U.S. bombing response.

Moorer told newsmen, "We don't expect any [reconnaissance planes] to get shot



Phnom Penh battle area.

down," apparently a reference to the likely use of high-flying spy planes, which are out of reach of Communist air defense missiles, and the use of unmanned pilotless drones for picture-taking.

Moorer said he did not think the so-called protective-reaction policy, in which U.S. planes used to retaliate against enemy air defenses that fired on reconnaissance planes in Vietnam, would be revived in Cambodia.

Fulbright challenged the President's assertion that Congress had forced the "abandonment of a friend" in Cambodia.

"We invaded that friend," he said. "We have no commitment, and they [the Cambodians] went out of their way to disassociate themselves from the SEATO treaty" with the United States.

Asked about Mr. Nixon's hint of some future U.S. response to any North Vietnamese attempt to take advantage of the bombing halt, Fulbright said, "I don't know what that means. The policy of Congress is quite clear."