

## U.S. NONCOMMITTAL ON CAMBODIAN AID

Says Decision on Arms Help  
Awaits a Request for it

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WASHINGTON, March 24 —

The State Department said today that the United States would face the question of military assistance to the new Government of Cambodia "if and when it arises."

A departmental spokesman, Car Bartch, made the statement in response to a question at a news briefing. He said that Washington had received no indication whether the Government of Premier Lon Nol wanted military help from the United States.

Secretary of State William P. Rogers said at a news conference yesterday that "we don't anticipate that any request will be made." Mr. Bartch explained today that the Secretary had not prejudged a response to such a request nor had he intended to prevent a Cambodian request.

The Administration's public posture on the Cambodian situation has been not to become involved while awaiting developments. The United States has continued diplomatic relations with the Government named after the coup d'état last Wednesday, but officials have confined themselves to bland statements of respect for Cambodia's neutrality and sovereignty.

### A Precedent for Policy

This approach is strikingly similar to that adopted after the abortive coup in 1965 in Indonesia that led to the downfall of President Sukarno.

Now, as then, officials here have indicated that they want to say or do nothing that might upset a possibly advantageous turn. Equally, they want to avoid putting the United States at a disadvantage should an unforeseen downturn occur.

The Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Marshall Green, has reportedly been influential in deciding this approach. Mr. Green was Ambassador to Indonesia during and after the 1965 coup. He has also been an advocate of a reduced American military engagement in Asia, a view incorporated into the Nixon doctrine of encouraging Asian

countries to take on greater responsibility for their defense.

The Administration has also been cautious about Cambodia in an effort to preclude more dissent from antiwar critics, especially in Congress. Almost as soon as trouble began developing in Cambodia, critics of American actions in Vietnam and Laos warned against involvement in Cambodia.

### Large Force in Haven

A key to future events there is the force of 45,000 to 50,000 North Vietnamese and Vietcong soldiers in the eastern provinces bordering South Vietnam and Laos.

Officials here said that the sanctuary had always been important to the North Vietnamese but that it had become crucial now. It is the only safe area for the North Vietnamese outside their country, their rear area for supplies, training, hospitals, and regrouping, and a major base for action in South Vietnam.

Enemy battalions, officials here said, now leave the sanctuary, attack in south Vietnam and return immediately to Cambodia. In contrast, they previously went into South Vietnam for several months of operations before slipping out for rest.

The North Vietnamese and Vietcong, including its political organization, have their headquarters in the sanctuary. It is spread out, sources here said, over an area of 50 or 60 square miles and well dug into bunkers.

### Civil War a Possibility

Officials here said today they are trying to determine whether the North Vietnamese will use this base area and their troops to help Prince Norodom Sihanouk return to power. Should this happen, they said, a civil war in Cambodia could be expected.

The officials said that they had heard of no North Vietnamese troop movements against the Cambodians.

While Premier Lon Nol had vowed to see the removal of the North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops, the 32,000-man Cambodian Army has neither the manpower nor the firepower to do it alone.

Thus, ever since Prince Sihanouk was deposed, officials of the Nixon Administration have been asked how the United States would respond to a Cambodian request for arms or support of attacks against the Communists.

More official attention here has centered on the question now that Prince Sihanouk has

said from Peking that he plans to form a "liberation army" to overthrow the new Cambodian Government. But Mr. Bartch had no public comment on that today.

With the new Government in Cambodia having taken a some-what militant stance against the North Vietnamese, sentiment for American strikes against the sanctuary has revived in the Pentagon, sources here said.