

# U.S. Was Unaware of Raid Into Cambodia, Aides Say

**Top Officials in Washington Reaffirm  
Policy of Not Widening Vietnam War  
—Rules Reiterated to Saigon**

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WASHINGTON, March 27—Senior officials here said today that a South Vietnamese army battalion with American helicopter gunship support had undertaken a raid into Cambodia without the prior knowledge or approval of Washington.

Officials in the White House, the Pentagon and the State Department said that they lacked complete information on the incident, which took place earlier today and had begun inquiries.

They also strongly reaffirmed the United States policy of not widening the war in Vietnam. They said the rules of engagement had not been changed to allow American forces to penetrate into Cambodia or to fire into Cambodian territory except in self-defense.

The officials said that Washington was taking steps to reassert these rules of engagement to commanders in Saigon and to persuade the South Vietnamese to abide by them.

Despite these assertions, the raid into Cambodia left several unanswered questions:

¶Has the Government of President Nguyen Van Thieu determined on its own to strike into the North Vietnamese-Vietcong sanctuary in Cambodia?

¶Did local American and South Vietnamese commanders

in Vietnam stretch the rules of engagement, which allow their forces to fire at the Communist-led forces in Cambodia after having been fired upon?

¶Have the South Vietnamese and Cambodians, either at the local or national level, agreed to allow the South Vietnamese to attack in Cambodian territory? Have they agreed to co-ordinated South Vietnamese-Cambodian operations against the Communist forces?

¶How effective is the command structure in Saigon in enforcing policies set in Washington? How effective are American officials in Saigon in persuading the South Vietnamese to go along with them in the absence of a unified United States-South Vietnamese command?

¶What will be the United States response if the war in Vietnam should spread into Cambodia despite the precautions?

The officials here said they hoped that the raid had been an isolated instance, although they acknowledged that similar incidents had occurred before. Some sources said that American forces had occasionally exposed themselves delib-

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erately so that they would draw fire from enemy units across the Cambodian border. That would allow them, without violating regulations, to fire back.

The officials said they had confirmed that today's raid had taken place, that the South Vietnamese had returned to South Vietnam and that no American advisers or troops had crossed the Cambodian border.

Vietnamese diplomatic sources here said that the Government in Saigon had not changed its policy of respect for Cambodian neutrality, sovereignty and territorial integrity. But they said the overthrow of Prince Norodom Sihanouk as Chief of State and the exposure of the Communist sanctuary in Cambodia had been "positive developments."

The sources here surmised that the raid today was a local action agreed upon by the South Vietnamese and Cambodian commanders in the area. They noted that those commanders had been in touch with each other for some time, dating back to before the new Government came to power in

Pnompenh. They also said that local South Vietnamese commanders had the authority to conduct operations such as the raid today without checking with Saigon.

United States officials here said that the rules of engagement on the Cambodian border did not allow "hot pursuit," a concept implying that Americans engaged in combat can pursue enemy forces across the border in an attempt to capture or kill them.

Instead, the officials explained, Melvin R. Laird, the Secretary of Defense, has used the term "protective reaction." This means that American forces can take necessary steps to defend themselves against Communist attacks from Cambodia. Such steps include aerial bombing and artillery fire but not the sending of ground forces into Cambodia.

Today's raid, the officials here said, was undertaken by the South Vietnamese on their own, without any United States encouragement, agreement or coordination. The officials were unable, however, to explain the presence of the American helicopter gunships or the back-up alert of American fighter-bombers.

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