

CAMBODIA TO GET RIFLES FROM U.S.

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Washington Agrees to Send a Few Thousand Weapons Captured in Vietnam

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WASHINGTON, April 22—

The Nixon Administration has agreed to supply several thousand rifles to the beleaguered Government of Cambodia, Administration officials disclosed today. The weapons would be automatic rifles of Soviet design captured from Communist forces in South Vietnam.

The Cambodian Government, when it was informed of this decision, was also cautioned against "inflated expectations" of further American military assistance, the officials said.

The decision was transmitted last Friday in a cablegram from Washington to Lloyd M. Rives, the United States charge d'affaires in Pnompenh.

Mr. Rives was instructed to stress to the Government of Premier Lon Nol that the decision should not be construed as a commitment by the United States to meet requests for weapons on a large scale, and that it must be kept secret.

Subsequently, on Monday, General Lon Nol sent a personal plea to President Nixon for ex-

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tensive military equipment and for help in the Cambodian fighting from Cambodian mercenaries now working in Vietnam for the United States Army's Special Forces.

There was no official explanation of the relationship between the Friday cablegram and the letter sent by Premier Lon Nol Monday, but presumably the letter reflected the keen disappointment of the Cambodian leader, who is seeking enough weapons to expand his 30,000-man army to roughly 200,000 men, but got an offer of only a few thousand rifles.

Publicly, the Administration continues to declare that all Cambodian requests for military aid will receive "appropriate attention."

At the White House today, Ronald L. Ziegler, the press secretary, was asked about the status of the Cambodian request:

"As you know," he said, "the initial request was made approximately a week ago and it has been under study."

Asked whether the Administration would consult with Congress before going ahead with any aid, he said: "This is a matter under study."

Big Aid Program Unlikely

The indications in various Government agencies are that the Administration does not wish to embark on a large program of military aid in Cambodia but feels compelled to demonstrate that the new regime, under heavy pressure from North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops, is not without friends.

Officials note that Mr. Nixon faces a monumental problem over the Cambodian issue. On one hand, many Senators are staunchly opposed to any hint of action that might widen the Vietnam war, and the President himself has said that he opposes expanding the battlefield.

But on the other hand, Mr. Nixon recognizes that if Cambodia should fall to Communist forces, this could jeopardize the situation in South Vietnam by turning all Cambodia into a vast enemy supply base and troop replacement center.

Senator J. W. Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told reporters on April 2 after a four-hour closed-door session on Indochina that Secretary of State William P. Rogers had given assurances that the Administration would "consult" but not necessarily seek the approval of the committee before any decision was made to extend military aid to Cambodia.

As far as could be determined today, the Administration has not consulted the committee on the automatic-weapons decision. The committee has invited Mr. Rogers to discuss Cambodia next Monday, committee sources said.

In the message that was sent Friday to Mr. Rives, informed sources said, the United States expressed readiness to supply 1,500 AK-47 automatic rifles at once and 4,000 to 5,000 more within two or three weeks. These weapons, of Soviet design and Chinese Communist manufacture, were captured in Vietnam, the informants said, and presumably could be transferred at some point along the border between Cambodia and South Vietnam.

No Ammunition Supply

Mr. Rives was told to inform the Cambodians that no ammunition for these rifles was available to the United States and to suggest that Indonesia be queried as a possible source of supply.

The Indonesian Army is armed with AK-47's. Diplomatic sources here say that Indonesia has recently sent a small military mission to Cambodia, presumably to look into the requests for arms assistance, first voiced last week by Premier Lon Nol in a general radio broadcast.

Informed sources here say that the Cambodians have presented "a long shopping list" of weapons to better equip their army of about 30,000 men and to enable them to expand it to as many as 200,000.

In the message Friday, Mr. Rives was told to let the Cambodians know that the United States was studying additional requests "carefully" and would be in touch again in the near future.

'Realistic Limits' Cited

But the Cambodians should be made to understand, the cablegram continued, that there were real restrictions on the scope of military assistance the United States might provide. Any further aid must be kept within "realistic limits," the message said, without explaining the limits.

Mr. Rives was asked to inquire whether the Cambodian Government wanted medical supplies. These could be provided openly, the cablegram said.

Officials here say that the substance of the message was delivered by Mr. Rives to Cambodian officials "without delay."

They declined to say what the Cambodian reaction had been, but presumably the personal letter sent by Premier Lon Nol to President Nixon was evidence of Cambodia's unhappiness with the limited nature of the initial American response. The officials would not say whether any AK-47 rifles had yet been transferred. No decision has yet been made on the request submitted by Premier Lon Nol on Monday, they added.

Military analysts said the 30,000-man Cambodian Army would be no match for the 40,000 to 50,000 North Vietnamese and Vietcong soldiers in Cambodia, if a determined assault were pressed by the Communist forces.

The Cambodians are not as well trained, equipped or led, they said. "The North Vietnamese and Chinese were careful, in supplying weapons to

the Cambodians, to give them ammunition for only a limited amount of sustained fighting," one officer asserted.

Military planners speculated about a possibility that South Vietnam might drop a division of paratroopers into Pnompenh to secure the city, if it appeared that Communist forces were about to capture it, and if the current Government invited Saigon to do so.

A puzzling note was injected into the picture today with word that an ethnic Cambodian, who described himself as a lieutenant colonel who had fled to South Vietnam from Cambodia some years ago after a falling out with Prince Norodom Sihanouk, then the Chief of State, complained to United States authorities in Vietnam that he was prepared to help the new regime but could get no response from the Lon Nol Government.

The man said he had offered to provide three battalions of troops to fight the Communists. Officials here were unfamiliar with the man and said they did not know whether he, in fact, could make good on his offer.

New Appeal Made at U.N.

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UNITED NATIONS, N.Y., April 22 — Cambodia made "an urgent appeal to all countries which love peace and justice" today to help the new Government to fight invading Vietcong and North Vietnamese forces.

The letter of complaint to the Security Council said that the enemy forces in Cambodia "were supported by local Vietnamese inhabitants." It appeared intended to justify reprisals reported to have been taken against those Vietnamese.