

# NIXON AIDES SPLIT ON CAMBODIA ISSUE

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## Pressures Stiff as President Seeks Decision Viewed as Fateful for Indochina

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WASHINGTON, April 23 —

President Nixon is struggling with a decision on further military aid to Cambodia in terms that at least some of his advisers portray as fateful.

Mr. Nixon appears to be under enormous but conflicting pressures from a variety of sources. For the moment he is described as still reluctant to send large quantities of American arms to the beleaguered new Government of Premier Lon Nol. But both military and diplomatic developments in the near future will affect his decision.

There is general agreement in the Administration that the total collapse of the new Lon Nol Government would pose a sizable threat to allied operations in South Vietnam and have far-reaching implications for the security of the Indochina peninsula. But there is disagreement about the extent of the threat to the Government in Pnompenh and the capacity of the United States to help it survive.

### Pressure on Soviet Hinted

The possibility of limited aid by other countries, notably Indonesia, is under urgent study.

There are also indications—without official acknowledgment—that the Soviet Union is being urged to restrain Communist forces in Cambodia lest their actions and American responses spoil whatever chance remains of a negotiated settlement for Southeast Asia.

Some senior military officials, including members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, contend that the President now controls the fate of the new Cambodian Government and that the allies' military success in South Vietnam depends on its survival. They define the situation

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as a "crisis" for Cambodia and are calling for sizable arms shipments not only to buttress the Cambodian Army but also to give more Cambodians confidence that the new leadership, which ousted Prince Norodom Sihanouk, can survive.

With a friendly or even allied regime in Pnompenh, the military men argue, the allies will be able to harass or even to disperse the North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces that have been using Cambodian territory as a base for attacks into South Vietnam. The collapse of the new government or the return of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, they maintain, would turn not only the frontier regions but all of Cambodia into a hostile base for Communist assaults on South Vietnam and Laos.

But other senior advisers, apparently including key officials of the State Department, are counseling caution on the White House. They are worried that an increased American involvement in Cambodia, no matter how direct or modest at the start, could provoke a still wider Indochina war as well as a loss of the popular support that Mr. Nixon has achieved with the promise of an end of American participation in the conflict.

### Senators Ask Accounting

Meanwhile, influential Democrats in the Senate, already disturbed about the supply of captured Communist weapons to Cambodia in recent days, were demanding an accounting from the Administration and warning against a piecemeal involvement there.

When the New York Times reported this morning that the Administration had agreed to give Cambodia several thousand automatic rifles of Soviet design and Chinese Communist manufacture, Secretary of State William P. Rogers quickly assured Senate critics that it was a relatively minor development involving no breach of his promise to consult the legislators on new aid shipments.

Mr. Rogers telephoned Senator J. W. Fulbright, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, to confirm the report and to discount its significance. Mr. Fulbright is said to have asked for the Secretary's detailed testimony on the situation, but Mr. Rogers held to his plan to meet with the committee in closed session next Monday.

The White House remained publicly noncommittal, as it usually is while the President weighs conflicting advice. He met yesterday and again this morning with the National Security Council, but the subject of the discussions was not disclosed.

### Guns Traced to Saigon

Mr. Nixon's press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, confirmed the report about the shipment of captured weapons but disclaimed any primary American responsibility for the aid. The AK-47 rifles were being supplied by South Vietnam, he said, "with our knowledge and approval."

Mr. Ziegler refused to disclose the size of the shipment or the methods of delivery. He refused later to comment on a new report from Cambodia that American-made weapons had also reached Pnompenh.

The President's spokesman said the delivery did not represent "a response to the specific requests for arms"—by which he apparently means an urgent appeal from the Cambodian Premier in a letter Monday. Other sources said the delivery had in fact been a considered American response to earlier Cambodian appeals for help to provide at least an interim token of support.

One source raised the possibility that the captured weapons might actually be passing from American stocks in Okinawa, where seized Communist arms have been refurbished for use by special troops operating behind Communist lines in Vietnam.

Mr. Ziegler justified the arms aid to Cambodia with a severe denunciation of what he called the massive and overt Communist aggression there. He said several times that there "is no question as to who is the aggressor" and called the aggression clear violation of the 1954 Geneva accords on Indochina and "similar to be blatant violation of the 1962 accords in Laos."

The reported diplomatic discussions with the Soviet Union are believed to be based on the new-evident pattern of North Vietnamese military activity throughout Indochina. The Nixon Administration is seeking further evidence of a Soviet interest in a new Geneva conference on all Southeast Asia—despite recent denials

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that Moscow was promoting the idea.

In any case American officials are thought to be saying to the Russians—and through them to the North Vietnamese—that the conversion of Cambodia into a Communist-run state or base of operations would be viewed here as a major new threat to all of Southeast Asia.

American willingness in recent years to let the North Vietnamese use Cambodian soil as a sanctuary from battle in Vietnam has been cited to the Russians as evidence of Washington's desire to contain the war. The hope that Cambodia might yet be recognized as neutral and nonbelligerent by both sides has also caused the White House to limit allied military forays into sanctuary areas in the four weeks since General Lon Nol came to power.

The dilemma confronting the President is defined as great in many quarters and as grave in some.

Military commanders here and in South Vietnam believe that they could turn the tide of battle decisively if allowed to attack the 40,000 Communist troops in Cambodia. To achieve that, they favor an urgent aid program to prop up Premier Lon Nol's government and the

dispatch of some military advisers—Americans if possible but non-Americans if necessary—to tutor the generally weak and undersupplied Cambodian Army of about 30,000 men.

The military men tend to put the most pessimistic possible interpretation on intelligence reports from Pnompenh. They see the Cambodian capital imperiled, believe the road and rail lines to the port of Sihanoukville are cut off and the river traffic on the Mekong severely curtailed.

However, other sources have told Mr. Nixon that there is no imminent threat to Pnompenh and that the intentions of Communist-led forces in different parts of Cambodia are not entirely clear.

Preferring to accept the less urgent view, Mr. Nixon is said to feel that he still has time to await both military and diplomatic moves by the Communist forces and Governments. He is also awaiting signs of what Indonesia, France and other interested countries decide to do to support Pnompenh.

Though tempted by the short-term military advantages that might result from an all-out attack on the Communists in Cambodia, the President is

described as convinced that such an attack would finally kill whatever chances remain of negotiating a settlement for Indochina, or at least parts of it.

He also described as mindful of the political opposition that would develop in the United States to a wider war effort.

Mr. Nixon's reluctance to become further involved was portrayed not only by usually reliable sources in the Administration but also by a vigorous opponent of any military aid to the Cambodian regime, Senator Mike Mansfield, the majority leader.

While Senator Fulbright described the transfer of captured weapons to Cambodia as "very dangerous" and Senator Edmund S. Muskie of Maine called it "disturbing," Senator Mansfield said only that he was not prepared to regard the shipment as "a first step" toward deeper involvement, though it perhaps "contains the elements" of such a step. He said he knew the President to be extremely worried about developments in Cambodia, to be moving "slowly and carefully" in response, more by "examining" the situation than "considering" any immediate decision.

Mr. Mansfield had declared himself opposed to military aid to Cambodia "in any way, shape or form." He has regretted the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk, whom he believed to be a deft and neutral politician able to keep his country out of the Indochina war.

To obtain an independent

source of information for the Senate, the Foreign Relations Committee announced that two of its staff consultants would fly to Cambodia next week. They are James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose, who recently brought back a critical examination of the pacification program in South Vietnam.