

U.S. Acknowledges South Vietnamese May Remain

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WASHINGTON, May 20 — The United States today publicly acknowledged for the first time the possibility that South Vietnamese troops might remain in Cambodia after the withdrawal of United States forces, scheduled to be completed by June 30.

In a shift in the Nixon Administration's official position, the State Department's press officer Robert J. McCloskey, said in reply to inquiries that "determinations have not finally been made" on whether all or some of the 30,000 South Vietnamese troops moved remain in Cambodia after the American departure.

Senior foreign policy officials who have been evaluating the Cambodian situation said today that their analysis had led to expectation of Communist attacks after the United States withdrawal and that this might require the indefinite presence of South Vietnamese troops and their possible reinforcement with Thai units.

Until today, State Department spokesmen had insisted that the United States had no knowledge of South Vietnamese plans in Cambodia. Late last week, however, department officials indicated that the United

States was encouraging negotiations between Saigon and Pnompenh on joint defense planning.

Over the weekend, White House aides at Key Biscayne, Fla., told reporter accompanying the President that they had every reason to believe that the South Vietnamese would repatriate their combat forces from Cambodia around the June 30 deadline set by President Nixon for the Americans but they did not state outright that Saigon had committed itself to a pull-out roughly timed with the American evacuation.

Today, Administration officials privately described the weekend remarks as an effort to calm opinion in this country, and notably that of Sena-

tors seeking to limit the President's war-making powers in Southeast Asia.

An unresolved question is the degree of support the United States may give the South Vietnamese remaining in Cambodia. The Administration feels that operations in Cambodia must not adversely affect the program of turning the fighting on South Vietnam over to Saigon.

Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird said in testimony before a Senate subcommittee Monday that he would recommend to Mr. Nixon the maintenance of air strikes at Communist bases in Cambodia after July 1, but not the direct tactical support for the South

Vietnamese. Other officials said today, however, that this policy might have to be reconsidered to afford air cover for the Saigon troops.

While officials said that the South Vietnamese units staying in Cambodia would doubtless need American advisers, this might be impossible for domestic political reasons. They might have to be taken to let them operate alone.

Senior officials said there was mounting concern here that the Cambodian army of Premier Lon Nol might not be able by itself to resist attacks by North Vietnamese, Vietcong and Cambodian guerrillas despite a steady supply of small arms by

in Cambodia After June 30

the United States and the transfer to Cambodia of some 4,000 ethnic Cambodian special forces troops from South Vietnam.

Officials noted that despite extensive losses in equipment and food, the Communists retained a considerable potential for attack.

While falling back before theses officials said thrsts American and South Vietnamese thrusts, these officials said the Communists probably are regrouping for attacks after the American withdrawal.

It was noted that only the presence of South Vietnamese troops deep in Cambodia was preventing a collapse of the Lon Nol defenses.

Also these officials said, the

Pnompenh regime may be facing a civil war. The supporters of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the Cambodian head of state who was disposed in a camp led by General Lon tal and who is now in Peking, and North Vietnamese are know to be establishing an operational base in northeast Cambodia.

Even if these forces remain in northeast Cambodia during the rainy season, the Lon Nol regime will need assistance to deal with guerrilla and subversive activities. Officials said that in some ways the situation developing in Cambodia was beginning to resemble South Vietnam in 1960, when the Vietcong began their rebellion against the Saigon regime.