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Cambodia Push Set Long Ago, General Says

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The commander-in-chief of the U.S. Army in the Pacific said in New Orleans yesterday plans for U.S. military activity in Cambodia were formulated long ago but American troops were kept out of the country during the reign of now-deposed Prince Norodom Sihanouk out of respect for Cambodian neutrality.

Gen. Ralph E. Haines Jr. spoke at a luncheon for area business, civic and military leaders at the Plimsoll Club.

He said after Sihanouk's overthrow, the threat of North Vietnamese-Viet Cong domination of the Vietnamese-Cambodian border and the request for assistance by the new Cambodian government led to the U.S. decision to intervene.

Enemy supply lines will be disrupted effectively by the Cambodian operation, Gen. Haines said, and the South Vietnamese army will be instilled with confidence it can "whip any forces it meets" in Indochina.

Defending American influence in the Pacific area, Gen. Haines declared, "There is no other nation in the world today more willing to let nations choose their own destiny than the U.S."

The general also defended the government of South Vietnamese president Nguyen Van Thieu, saying Thieu is "trying to do a good job" and is not "as corrupt as some would have you believe." Haines suggested, however, the U.S. should oppose any attempt by the Thieu government to disenfranchise any segment of the electorate.

The Cambodian army, Gen. Haines told the group, is not strong but there is hope that with the aid of American equipment and South Vietnamese personnel, Cambodian forces will be able to thwart Communist infiltrators.

"The Communists now know they can never win a ground war in Vietnam," he said. "Some tend to write off Cambodia. I hope this never happens, because it's just what the Communists are looking for."