

Foe, Near Pnompenh, Cuts Last Major Open Highway

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Road to Saigon Severed

By SYDNEY H. SCHANBERG

Special to The New York Times

PNOMPENH, Cambodia, June 18 — Vietnamese Communist troops today cut the last major surface route open in Cambodia, the highway linking Pnompenh with Saigon.

Highway 1, leading southeastward to the South Vietnamese capital, was reported severed 30 miles from here. It was a key route for bringing South Vietnamese troops and supplies into Cambodia, although they also come in by air and by boat up the Mekong River.

[The Associated Press reported that Communist troops also seized a point near Skoun, 38 miles northeast of Pnompenh, cutting the only land route to Kompong Cham, where two Cambodian regiments are garrisoned.]

Earlier, the Communists cut Highway 4 leading southwestward to Kompong Som, where nearly all the country's fuel originates, either from ships or from the oil refinery there. The rail line to the deepwater port was severed two months ago.

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U.S. Concern Is Growing

By TAD SZULC

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 18 — The Nixon Administration was described by senior officials today as gravely concerned over the situation in Cambodia, particularly over the fate of Pnompenh, which is under increasing military pressure.

Urgent meetings are being held to weigh courses of United States action to help save the regime of Premier Lon Nol. Discussions are also being held with the South Vietnamese in Saigon and with Thai leaders in Bangkok.

But there appears to be a division of opinion here on whether the enemy forces are planning to try to seize the Cambodian capital or merely to isolate it to try to bring about the fall of the regime.

Consequently, no new decisions on Cambodian policy are discernible, and senior officials will not say whether any have been made.

Concern seems to be increasing that if too many South Vietnamese troops stay in Cambodia after the American with-

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drawal, which is to be completed by June 30, the Vietnamization program may be jeopardized.

President Nixon is relying on Vietnamization

President Nixon is relying on Vietnamization, the gradual transfer of combat responsibilities to South Vietnamese forces, in his commitment to withdraw 150,000 more American troops from South Vietnam by next spring.

State Department officials said today that United States policy, as stated by Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird last month, is not to impose timetables for the South Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia. They left open the pos-

sibility that the United States would provide tactical air support to South Vietnamese units in Cambodia after June 30.

But in answering questions today on the possibility of assistance to Cambodia, a State Department press officer, Carl E. Bartch, insisted that the United States opposed any steps that threatened Vietnamization.

"Our concern is that the Vietnamization program would not be weakened by the withdrawal of forces from Vietnam," he said.

He made this point in response to inquiries whether the transfer of the Thai Black Panther division from South Vietnam to Cambodia was being planned. While emphasizing that the State Department could not confirm reports that the division was being moved, Mr. Bartch said that "we do support in general the nations' in the area cooperating for their own defense."

But he also said that "we wouldn't want to see anything develop that would weaken the Vietnamization program."

According to Defense Department officials, there are now 20,000 to 25,000 South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia and 10,000 Americans.

Some officials have raised doubts whether the Thai division and additional Thai volunteers could assure the survival of the Lon Nol regime.

Another problem being discussed here is whether the United States could go on financing the Thais if they went to Cambodia. The cost of this unit's operations to the United States is about \$50-million a year, but these funds might be cut off by the senate if the Thai division went to Cambodia.

Enemy Intentions Weighed

In the discussions here and in the Asian capitals, many American officials argue that the Communist objective is to surround and isolate Phompenh. Others are inclined to believe an attack on the capital may be in the offing.

Those doubting an attack say that the Communists may wish to avoid a confrontation with the best Cambodian units, which are assigned to the capital. They also say that there are signs the Communist forces cutting off overland access to Pnompenh are not sufficiently strong to undertake an attack on the city.

Also, they said, the Communists may not want to take Pnompenh. They cite the Communists' restraint in not taking the Laotian capital of Vientiane despite their apparent ability to do so.

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and yesterday the rail line connecting Pnompenh with the rice-growing region in the northwest was also cut.

Despite the nearby enemy activity, there is no sense of hysteria or panic in Pnompenh. Hardly anyone here believes the North Vietnamese and Vietcong are capable of attacking the capital in force now, but residents are taking precautions against harassment, terrorist tactics and rocket or mortar attacks.

More and more streets are being blocked off by concertina barbed wire. Outside a cigarette factory, workmen were busy bricking up openings in a stone fence.

Nearly all embassies have prepared evacuation plans. Some embassies—those of Israel and France, for example—are already evacuating dependents. United Nations agencies here are reported to be doing the same.

Aid by South Vietnamese

In ground fighting away from Pnompenh, the Communists continued to attack Kompong Thom, a provincial capital about 80 miles north of the capital. A Government spokesman said that several enemy assaults had been thrown back and that South Vietnamese helicopter gunships had joined the Cambodian troops.

At Siemreap, in the northwest, where the Communists already occupy the ancient temples at Angkor, enemy reinforcements were reported moving into the area.

In the attack on Highway 1, the Communists staged a mine and mortar assault at the village of Koki Thom, 30 miles southeast of the capital. The distance between Pnompenh and Saigon, which the highway

links, is about 130 miles, or roughly the same as the distance between New York and Albany.

By cutting Highway 4, the Communists virtually halted work on Cambodia's biggest development project—a dam-power complex about 40 miles southwest of Pnompenh. They severed the road just at the access point to the Mekong River complex, known as the Prek Thnot project, a United Nations plan to which 13 countries have contributed funds.

Two Key Projects

About 70 Japanese engineers and construction technicians, at the site are expected to be brought out by helicopter shortly.

Below the irrigation project are two other facilities that the Government is extremely worried about—a hydroelectric plant that supplies much of Pnompenh's power and a factory that makes ammunition

for most of the small arms used by the Cambodian Army.

Though Government troops, with the help of South Vietnamese forces, may be able to reopen the newly severed roads—and perhaps some of the other major road and rail routes—there is little optimism here that they can keep them open for very long.

"The development of the country has simply stopped because of the security problem," one foreign military expert said.

And Arthur F. Ewing, a United Nations official in charge of coordinating foreign aid for the Prek Thnot irrigation project, said gloomily: "There aren't many Mekong projects that have got off the ground. This was one of the few. And now we are almost inevitably grinding to a standstill."

It was only with great difficulty that \$28.5-million was raised abroad for the first stage of the project—a large storage

dam, a diversion dam and a power station—and it is doubtful, if enemy activity in the area continues, that money could be raised for the crucial second stage. At a cost of more than \$32-million, this involves building irrigation canals to enrich 154,000 acres of what is extremely poor and dry rice land with a low yield.

The project, which is tapping two tributaries of the Mekong, was on schedule until last month when Communist harassment along Highway 4 slowed supplies and communications. The situation did not become critical until last Friday, when the Communists attacked Kompong Speu, a provincial capital 11 miles above the project site. A Cambodian-South Vietnamese force finally regained control of the town on Tuesday but the enemy had continued to harass the road and now severed it at the town of Trapeang Kraleng, adjacent to the project.



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ISOLATION OF PNOMPENH: Soldier figures indicate where the Communist forces were reported operating, among them the troops that cut road to Saigon at Koki Thom.