

JUN 30 1970

CAMBODIAN CHIEF LAUDS U.S. ACTION

Lon Nol Voices Optimism
on His Army's Future

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Special to The New York Times

PNOMPENH, Cambodia, June 29—Premier Lon Nol said today that he thought United States military intervention in his nation had brought favorable results and also expressed optimism about the development of the Cambodian Army.

The Premier was asked during a news conference at the Defense Ministry whether he thought the over-all result of the United States intervention had been good although it had forced the Vietnamese Communists deeper into the heart of the country. He thought briefly, looked at Sisowath Sirik Matak, the First Deputy Premier, who nodded, and replied, "I believe it has been favorable."

The Premier explained that the North Vietnamese and Vietcong had used their border sanctuaries to mount attacks against Cambodia and therefore the elimination of the sanctuaries had become essential.

Concerning the combat readiness of the Cambodian Army, the Premier expressed hope that the "24-hour" soldiers that had been thrown into action when the enemy began operations were now better trained and prepared to do battle. He said that in some instances the Cambodian Army was beginning to go from the defensive to the offensive and he hoped that such operations would grow in scope soon.

Continued Support Sought

Premier Lon Nol said he hoped that the United States Air Force would continue to fly combat-support missions and that the departing ground troops would return if the military situation took a drastic turn for the worse.

But the Premier said that Cambodia had received no specific assurances from Washington that the Air Force would continue operations in support of Cambodian troops.

American sources indicated that there would be continued American aerial support for Cambodia but that there was no expectation that American ground troops would return. The sources said they believed the South Vietnamese ground forces in Cambodia or nearby would be able to protect Pnompenh.

Premier Lon Nol said that United States air support had consisted of both strategic and tactical missions. He emphasized that he hoped the United States Air Force would continue to try to cut the enemy's lines of reinforcement and supply. Asked whether there would be combined operations between Cambodian ground troops and American planes, he replied that he also hoped for continued close support.

U.S. DECLARATION CITED

He frequently cited a declaration to that effect by "the American Defense Minister" but seemed uncertain of the tenor and exact content of such a declaration.

Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird reiterated last Friday that the United States planned to continue bombing raids inside Cambodia after the withdrawal of American troops on June 30. While he said the main purpose of the attacks was to cut off enemy supply routes, he did not rule out the use of air support for allied ground troops.

Hope was the keynote of the Premier's remarks. He said that he hoped that other nations would respond favorably to Cambodia's request for assistance but that he had no details of specific commitments by anybody.

Throughout his news conference—the second he has held since the overthrow of Prince Norodom Sihanouk as Chief of State last March 18, the Premier insisted on the urgent need for arming the Cambodian military forces. He said that there were now 70 Cambodian battalions without arms, while there were 80 that were "more or less" armed.

Battalion Figures Doubted

A Cambodian battalion consists of 607 soldiers. Military observers doubt that this strength is attained in many of the existing battalions and are skeptical about the existence except on paper of the number of battalions mentioned by the Premier.

The Premier faced the press in the olive-drab uniform of a lieutenant general. He wore a large gold ring on his finger, a gold watch on his right wrist and a heavy gold bracelet on his left. He was flanked by Prince Sirik Matak, and the Foreign Minister, Yem Sambaur.

General Lon Nol, who conducted the news conference in fluent and idiomatic French, consulted his deputy frequently on matters of substance and his Foreign Minister for translations from English.

Regarding an issue that has caused a great deal of concern among the population, the Premier said that the conduct of South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia would improve. He asserted that Cambodia had assigned liaison officers with some South Vietnamese units and that the Saigon command was dealing severely with offenders.

Informed Cambodian sources called the general's remarks on the subjects "diplomatic" and said that pillaging of Cambodian villages by South Vietnamese continued unchecked.