

Pentagon Statement

U.S. Airpower To Aid Allies in Cambodia War

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Washington

The Defense Department said yesterday that the United States intends to employ the full range of its air-combat power throughout Cambodia against enemy troops and supplies that "ultimately" might threaten American military men in South Vietnam.

A Pentagon spokesman, Jerry W. Friedheim, said this includes the use of American-flown helicopters to ferry South Vietnamese troops into combat — even under hostile ground fire.

The only things ruled out, he said, are the use of American ground troops or military advisers. He conceded that American air crews might sometimes leave their craft while on the ground in Cambodia in the course of moving supplies or troops to support South Vietnamese forces there.

But he denied a report from Saigon that American air liaison officers might have operated from Cambodian soil. South Vietnamese and Cambodian liaison officers are aboard some American spotter planes to help coordinate American fire support, he said.

FERRYING

A few troop-ferrying missions were flown over the weekend, Friedheim said, in support of troops fighting to open Highway 4, connecting the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh with its major seaport to the south, Kompong Som.

A high Pentagon official conceded yesterday that Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, before he left on his tour of Southeast Asia, had turned down a request for similar authority to ferry troops and ammunition to a major South Vietnamese operation north of Phnom Penh, near Kompong Cham, on Highway 7.

The official said the request to authorize such activity in the current offensive south of the capital was considered and approved by Laird during his recent trip.

Laird and Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, briefed President Nixon and the National Security Council yesterday on their findings during their visits to South Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia.

WITHDRAWALS

Their report was described as generally optimistic about the prospects for continued, and possibly accelerated, troop withdrawals from Vietnam.

A Pentagon official said that while there had been two or three previous instances in which American helicopters had returned a South Vietnamese commander to his troops in the field in Cambodia or moved a squad

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INTERDICTION

Such operations, he said, come within "the over-all context of our interdiction effort to deal in Cambodia with enemy personnel, bases and supplies which might ultimately endanger the lives

and safety of U.S. personnel inside South Vietnam as we continue the Vietnamization program and the redeployment of American forces.

Friedheim declined specifically to link expanded American air operations with an effort to sustain in power the Cambodian government of General Lon Nol. "The fall of the government is a diplomatic question," he said.

A Pentagon source said the helicopter assault carriers, Cleveland and Iwo Jima, which have been used in the last few days by Marine Corps helicopters supporting the Highway 4 campaign, were diverted to Cambodia after having moved south for possible use in aiding victims of floods in Malaysia.

Friedheim repeatedly explained the objective of American combat support in Cambodia as being to prevent the re-establishment of enemy sanctuaries.

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from "Point A to Point B," the current operation represented the "first time" that a significant assistance was required.

"We still want to consider these things on a case-by-case basis," he said, "but we don't want to foreclose the use of any kind of air power in the future."

Friedheim insisted at a news conference that the use of helicopters, transports and fighter-bombers — including the first use of helicopters operating from American vessels off the Cambodian coast — represents no change in policy.