

U.S. PLANS TO USE ALL AIR WEAPONS IN CAMBODIAN WAR

Says It Will Ferry Saigon's Troops—Aim Is Protection of Americans in Vietnam

BRIEFING AT PENTAGON

Two Helicopter Carriers Off Cambodia Carrying Out Interdiction Missions

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By WILLIAM BEECHER

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 18—The Defense Department said today that the United States intended 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.

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

The only things proscribed, 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 by The Associated Press from Saigon yesterday 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.

The United States command in Saigon said that two American helicopter carriers stationed off Cambodia were staging "interdiction" missions and supplying allied forces operating in the country. American helicopter gunships reportedly made at least three attacks Monday in support of allied troops trying to clear a major Cambodian supply route, The Associated Press said. [Page 3.]

Ferrying Missions Disclosed

A few troop-ferrying missions were flown over the weekend, Mr. Friedheim said, in support of efforts to open Route 4, connecting the Cambodian capital of Pnompnh with its major seaport to the south, Kompong Som.

A high Pentagon official conceded today 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 Pnompnh, near Kompong Cham, on Route 7.

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

Mr. Laird and Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, briefed the President and the National

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Security Council this morning on their findings during their visits to South Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia.

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 have been two or three instances in which an American helicopter returned a South Vietnamese commander to his troops in the field in Cambodia or moved a squad from "Point A to Point B," the current operation represented the "first time" that any 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 airpower in the future."

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

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 United States personnel inside South Vietnam as we continue the Vietnamization program and the redeployment of American forces."

Following the withdrawal of American troops from Cambodia last summer, President Nixon and other United States officials insisted that American air power would be used in Cambodia only to prevent enemy movements of supplies and troops potentially threatening to American forces in South Vietnam. Secretary of State William P. Rogers at one point conceded that such air action might have a "dual benefit," that of interdiction as well as dealing a blow to the enemy's fighting capacity.

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

First 'Significant' Case

A Pentagon source said the amphibious transport dock ship Cleveland and the helicopter carrier Iwo Jima, which have been used in the last few days by Marine Corps helicopters supporting the Route 4 campaign, had been diverted to Cambodia after having moved south for possible use in aiding victims of floods in Malaysia.

Repeatedly during the 45-minute session, Mr. Friedheim explained the objective of American combat support in Cambodia as prevention of the establishment of enemy sanctuaries there.

American and South Vietnamese troops engaged in an offensive last May and June to destroy enemy bases and supplies in sanctuaries along the

Cambodian-South Vietnamese border.

Asked whether current air operations also were in support of Cambodian troops, he said there obviously were "certain ancillary benefits" for Cambodian forces on the ground.

He defined as "logistics support" the movement of South Vietnamese troops, as well as supplies, from one point to another in Cambodia. Normally logistics is defined by the military only in terms of supplies.

Mr. Friedheim said there "seems to be no question" that the military effort by the North Vietnamese and Vietcong throughout Cambodia was aimed at re-establishing supply lines, presumably for use of their troops in South Vietnam.

He was asked whether, under his definition, the United States could use any element of its combat power anywhere in Cambodia, so long as no American ground troops or advisers were involved and so long as the United States interpreted this as benefiting its operations in South Vietnam.

"I think I've said that in a little different words," he answered.

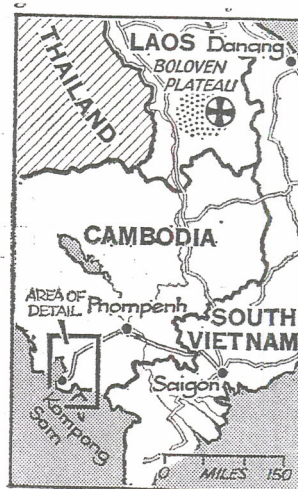
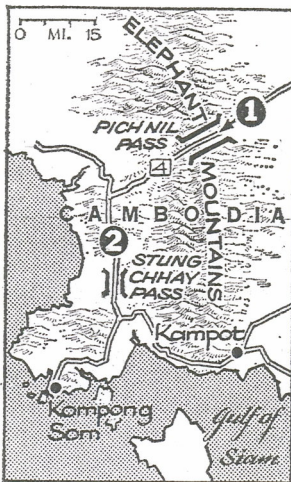
Earlier Laird Decision

Other Defense officials said Mr. Laird had turned down certain prior requests to use American helicopters to ferry troops or supplies and to provide regular helicopter fire support for operations in Cambodia.

"We have to take up each case separately," one official said. "But we do not want to get foreclosed down the road from using any form of airpower."

In current operation's officials agreed, the United States is using more extensive and varied air support than at any time since last summer's offensive.

Admiral Moorer told reporters yesterday on returning from his trip to Cambodia, that he had confidence the Cambodian armed forces would eventually be able to win their battle for survival. "Just give them time," he said.



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Allied troops trying to clear Route 4 were reported at Pich Nil Pass (1 on map at left) and 32 miles south of there (2). In Laos, Government troops lost defensive positions in the Boloven Plateau area (cross on 2d map).