

ROGERS SAYS U.S. MIGHT AID A DRIVE BY SAIGON IN LAOS

Indicates Air Support Would
Be Given if Ally Struck at
Enemy's Supply Bases

BARS GROUND TROOP USE

Secretary Says Nixon Would
Rule on Involvement in
Such an Operation
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WASHINGTON, Jan. 29 —

Secretary of State William P. Rogers held open today the possibility that United States air power might be used to support a South Vietnamese expedition against Communist supply bases in southern Laos.

The Secretary specifically ruled out the use of American ground combat troops in Cambodia or Laos, but he said the United States would use its air power in any way necessary throughout Indochina to prevent enemy forces from massing strength for an attack.

Asked what view the United States would take of a South Vietnamese strike into southern Laos — a project that has been reported under serious consideration by the military command in Saigon for some time—Mr. Rogers said it would depend on the circumstances.

The decision on American involvement in any such operation would have to be made by the President, he said.

Pullout at Critical Stage

At a news conference at the State Department, the Secretary warned that American troop withdrawals from South Vietnam were entering a critical phase and that, "as our troops are reduced, the danger increases."

He specifically expressed concern about a large build-up of North Vietnamese forces and supplies in the panhandle area of southern Laos, just across the border from northwestern South Vietnam.

Asked whether he would rule out a South Vietnamese strike backed up by American aircraft in that area soon, Mr. Rogers paused and replied:

"We do not rule out the use of air power to support Asians in any effort they make to fight the common enemy. There is one enemy; it is North Vietnam."

The Secretary's remarks stirred speculation here that a

Continued on Page 4, Column 3

Continued From Page 1, Col. 1

South Vietnamese move into Laos might be in the offing. Another possibility, however, would be a major new allied operation in the northwestern corner of South Vietnam, where enemy troops are massed, posing a threat to the security of the densely populated coastal lowlands.

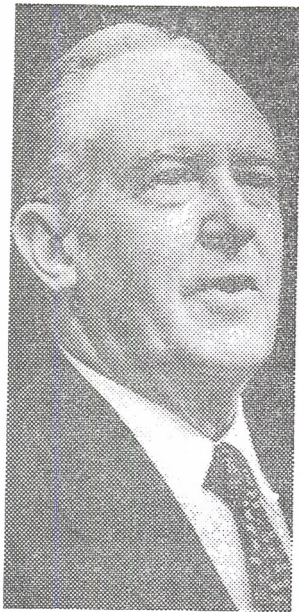
The Secretary said that the United States would continue its intensive bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the enemy's network of supply roads and paths that runs the length of the Laotian panhandle.

"Whether we will take other action or not, we will have to wait and see," he said. "I am certainly not in a position to announce any such action, but we don't foreclose any possibility."

In answer to another question on Indochina, the Secretary insisted that current United States air activity in Cambodia was intended to protect the American forces fighting in South Vietnam, not to guarantee the survival of Premier Lon Nol's Government in Cambodia. When United States aircraft participate in an action like the recent allied drive to open the highway between Pnompenh and its seaport, he said, it assists the Cambodian Government as well, "because we have a common enemy, common objectives."

On other subjects, Mr. Rogers made the following points:

¶The United States is encouraged by recent developments in the Arab-Israeli peace talks now under way in New York and hopes that the negotiations can now move into a more active phase, "with oral exchanges in private sessions." So far, the parties have been submitting their proposals in writing to the United Nations mediator, Dr. Gunnar V. Jarring, then promptly leaking the contents to the press. "This is a time for quiet diplomacy and military restraint," Mr. Rogers said, expressing the hope that



Associated Press

Secretary of State William P. Rogers at his news session yesterday.

the Suez Canal cease-fire will be extended beyond its Feb. 5 deadline.

¶Through the strategic arms limitation talks between the United States and the Soviet Union have so far been "somewhat unproductive," an agreement is still possible if both sides want it.

¶East German harassment of road traffic to West Berlin is "not conducive to a satisfactory solution" of the Berlin question or progress in the four-power talks on the divided city.

¶The United States will propose that its current dispute with Ecuador over fishing rights be referred to the International Court of Justice for resolution.

Comment on Ruled Out

The Secretary declined to be drawn into a discussion of the Nixon Administration's attitude toward the Government of China, noting that a review of the policy against Pe-

king's admission to the United Nations is under way.

He specifically refused to state — as previous administrations have frequently stated — that the United States regarded the Government of the Republic of China in Taiwan as the rightful government of all China, including the mainland. The result was to leave the inference that a change in this traditional posture might be in the offing.

Returning to Indochina, Mr. Rogers said that the period "between now and May 1" would be critical in Vietnam, because of the continuing withdrawals of American troops and the probability of increased enemy activity in the dry season. To cope with this dangerous period, he said, the President "intends to use the air power as he sees fit against enemy forces, enemy supplies, enemy communications and to prevent the enemy from re-establishing base areas."

Use of Air Power Defended

In a spirited defense of the Administration's policy on the use of air power, Mr. Rogers said that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which includes many of the chief critics of that policy, "does live with memories of the past."

The Nixon policy, he asserted "is entirely different" from that

of previous administrations. "It is to withdraw troops from South Vietnam in an orderly way, as soon as we can, consistent with the sacrifices this nation has made over the years, in a way that will not be a total repudiation of all our nation has stood for."

He added that the use of air power by this Administration "is not going to get us bogged down in a land war in Cambodia or Laos."

Fulbright Dismayed

Senator J. W. Fulbright, the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, expressed dismay after the Secretary's news conference over the possibility that American aircraft might support a South Vietnamese move into Laos.

"The Secretary met with the committee for three hours yesterday and made no such suggestion," he said. "If it occurs, it will display an extraordinary contempt for Congress on the part of the Administration," he said in a telephone conversation. "But it would not be inconsistent with past history."

This was an allusion to the Secretary's appearance before the committee on April 27, 1970—three days before the start of the allied incursion into Cambodia—in which he made no specific reference to the impending operation.