

10% Aid Rise for Cambodia Is Sought by U.S. Embassy

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PNOMPENH, Cambodia, Feb. 15 — The United States Embassy here will ask Congress for \$250-million for military aid to Cambodia for the next fiscal year, an authoritative embassy official said today.

The request, if granted, would represent a 10 per cent increase over the current United States military aid budget of about \$185-million for Cambodia. At least \$200-million is required for essential needs, the official said.

"The \$200-million is the absolute minimum, and then we still wouldn't be able to do it right," said the official, who is close to the American military assistance program.

The new budget, if approved by Congress, would keep stockpiles of such expendable items as ammunition, batteries and bombs at the needed level and would leave enough funds to buy 40 to 80 light artillery pieces and 25 rebuilt armored personnel carriers.

Essential Needs Provided

The United States has given or earmarked for Cambodia about \$194-million in military aid, including the allocations of the current fiscal year. Most of the money has been used for such essential items as rifles, trucks and field radios, and the need for these items has largely been filled, the embassy official said.

The new artillery and the armored personnel carriers would be intended to help the Cambodian forces keep essential roads open. The personnel carriers, Cambodia's first, would be used to patrol the roads, vulnerable to attack by Communist forces.

According to the Embassy source, the money would not

be spent to strengthen the Cambodian Air Force with the fighter-bombers that the Government had requested, because American, Thai and South Vietnamese combat planes can provide close support for Cambodian troops.

Instead, the official said, the program would concentrate on replacing the six Cambodian cargo planes that were blown up in the recent enemy attack on the Pnompenh airport.

The Cambodians have already received eight helicopters from the United States, two of which were destroyed during the raid.

Emphasis on Replacement

The official explained that 65 per cent of the current budget was committed to replacing expendable items and that an additional 10 per cent was spent on packing and shipping. "This only leaves about \$40-million for improvements—it's not very much," he said.

The official said that the military-assistance office had prepared a possible 1972 fiscal-year budget with purchase priorities established for a \$250-million allocation.

"If they don't give us all of it, we'll just have to back off to what we can afford," he said.

The official stressed that the military aid funds were being spent only on essential items and not on such personal equipment for the soldiers as ponchos, boots and entrenching tools.

"These men have learned to fight in the school of hard knocks—they've never had that stuff," the official said. "The men who defended Kampong Cham and Kampong Thom wore rubber sandals and had rags around their heads."