

U.S. Aides See Situation In Cambodia Deteriorating

*Enemy Forces Exerting Heavy Pressure
and Discontent Increases in Capital;
Economy Is Reported 'Devastated'*

By TERENCE SMITH APR 9 1971

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WASHINGTON, April 8—The military, political and economic situation in Cambodia has been deteriorating over the last two months, according to knowledgeable sources within the Administration.

The Communist forces operating in Cambodia are on the offensive, student and intellectual groups in Phnompenh are calling for political reforms, and the economy, as one analyst here put it, is "devastated" as a result of the expanded fighting.

In normal circumstances these developments would be the subject of high-level concern here. But they have been obscured by the controversy generated by the South Vietnamese invasion of Laos and the subsequent enemy assaults in the northern part of South Vietnam.

For example, an event that three months ago provoked a bitter national debate over the American combat role in Cam-

bodia went relatively unnoticed when it was repeated late last month.

On March 25, Communist troops retook the entrance to the strategic Pich Nil pass on Route 4, cutting off the flow of supplies between Kompong Som, the nation's only deep water port, and Phnompenh.

When that same point was seized by the enemy at the turn of the year, two American helicopter carriers were stationed off the Cambodia coast. Helicopter gunships and jet fighter-bombers provided close air support for the force of 13,000 South Vietnamese and Cambodian troops that eventually retook the pass on Jan. 24.

The direct involvement of American aircraft generated a furor in Congress, but the debate was overshadowed by the operation in Laos, which began Feb. 8.

Pentagon sources s

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