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Cambodia Expected to Protect Airport

The U.S. Airlift Goes On

Washington

Defense Secretary James E. Schlesinger said yesterday that the United States would have to reassess its emergency airlift of military supplies into Cambodia if the Cambodian government is unable to provide adequate protection for the Phnom Penh airport.

Schlesinger made the comment to reporters shortly after a Pentagon-chartered DC-8 transport carrying rice was hit by shrapnel from insurgent gunfire directed at the Pochentong airport outside Phnom Penh.

After the incident — the first time an American plane has been hit during the five-month airlift —

flights were halted for the few remaining hours of daylight. The airlift resumed today.

The Defense Department insisted that no orders had been issued to suspend the airlift, which at this point is the Cambodian government's sole source of military supplies. From the comments of Schlesinger and other Pentagon officials, however, it was clear that the feasibility of continuing the airlift was being weighed in view of the deteriorating military situation around the Cambodian capital.

Schlesinger said it is "incumbent" on the Cambodian government "to provide reasonable security for the Pochentong airport." If Cambodian government forces

are unable to provide such security, he said, "We will have to consider our policies in that context."

Privately, officials were expressing dismay and discouragement at the unwillingness or inability of the Cambodian government troops to force insurgent forces out of artillery and rocket range of the airport. Their attitude was that if the Cambodian forces are unable to take that basic military step there is little hope for the survival of the Cambodian government through emergency military aid from the United States.

Publicly, Schlesinger continued to describe the Cambodian situation as "grim but not hopeless" — the same assessment he offered

a congressional committee last week. Privately, however, there was growing pessimism in administration quarters that government forces would be able to hold the Cambodian capital against the encircling insurgent troops.

In preparation for the evacuation of some 400 American civilians still in Cambodia, the helicopter carrier Okinawa, with about 800 U.S. Marines aboard, was stationed in the Gulf of Thailand off the Cambodian coast.

Schlesinger said the United States would be prepared to use Marines to evacuate American civilians if the need arises. He said he could not say how close this possibility was.

-- For Now

The stationing of the carrier with the Marine battalion in the Gulf of Thailand aroused suspicions among some members of Congress, such as Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, that the Ford administration is looking for a pretext, such as the wounding of an American citizen, to send in a Marine detachment as symbolic support for the Cambodian government of President Lon Nol.

"If the situation is so dangerous, why don't they start evacuating them now by air?" Mansfield said in an interview.

Defense Department officials insisted that the Marines would be used only as a last resort and that the preferred method of evacua-

tion would be with civilian airplanes.

Defense officials confirmed that a Marine unit on Okinawa also has been alerted for possible evacuation duty in Cambodia.

As a contingency plan, defense officials said that if the Cambodian government defense should collapse completely, the Marines might be sent in to protect the Pochentong airport or some other landing area while the American civilians are evacuated.

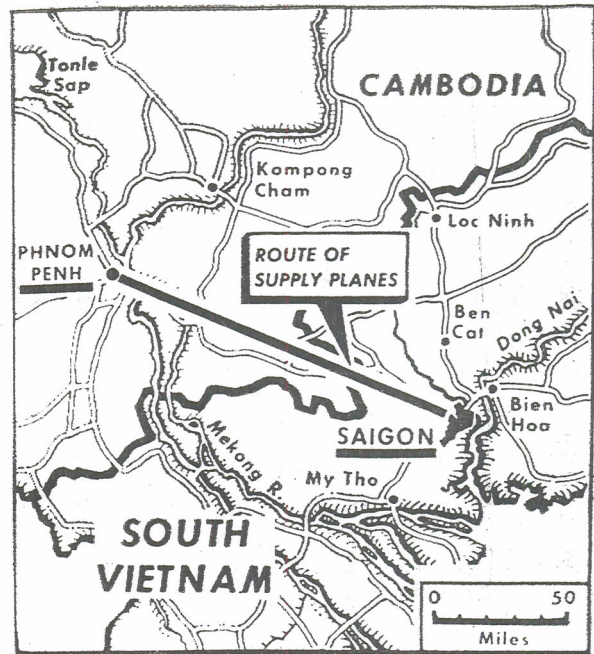
The administration, meanwhile, was discussing a possible compromise with congressional subcommittees on additional military aid to Cambodia that would not require Congress to vote

directly for the extra money.

The administration originally had requested \$222 million in additional military aid to Cambodia. As a compromise, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was reported to have expressed a will-

ingness to accept congressional action lifting the present \$200 million ceiling on military aid and permitting the Pentagon to shift \$50 million to \$75 million in existing funds into aid for Cambodia.

New York Times



Route of American planes airlifting supplies from Saigon to beleaguered Phnom Penh