

Drive to Expand Air War

By Larry Green

PHNOM PENH — (CDN) — The United States embassy here has recommended that American air power in Southeast Asia be maintained throughout all of next year, reliable Western diplomatic sources disclosed today.

"U.S. air support (of Cambodian troops) has made the difference in quite a few battles," these sources said.

Maintenance of air strength in Southeast Asia would mean keeping more than 400 strike aircraft at bases in Thailand and on carriers in the South China

Sea, plus several dozen giant B-52 bombers operating from Guam.

Unanswered

Although President Nixon has pledged to get U.S. ground forces out of the fighting in South Vietnam, the question of continuing air support by American planes has remained unanswered.

These same diplomatic sources, as well as a U.S. embassy spokesman, also said there is no agreement between the United States and Cambodia preventing disclosure of the number of U.S. air strikes in Cambo-

dia, as claimed by military sources in Saigon.

The U.S. Command reports that both tactical and B-52 strikes take place almost every day, but they refuse to disclose the number.

'Just an Excuse'

The alleged treaty, one well-placed Western diplomatic source said, was "just an excuse behind which the U.S. Command can hide."

The amount of continued air support for the Cambodians, sources continued, "will depend on what the enemy does."

The U.S. has staged a

massive show of air strength in Southeast Asia since last December, increasing the number of attacks on North Vietnam five-fold over last year.

They also have staged as many as 300 air raids a day in South Vietnam this year to combat suspected North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troop buildups.

Further, reliable sources indicate there has been an intense bombing campaign along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in southern Laos this year, in addition to B-52 strikes and tactical air support of Laotian ground forces in the north.