

SFChronicle
Congress Sees a Possible Conflict

Nixon Statement

Washington

More than a year after President Nixon approved a secret Cambodian bombing campaign in 1969, he and the State Department publicly claimed no major U.S. military activity there before the spring of 1970.

Congressional sources said yesterday that the apparent conflict between these claims and disclosures last week about the secret bombing will be among the factors considered today by the Senate Armed Services Committee in deciding how deeply and how soon to probe the four-year coverup of the air raid.

Some sources said the issue could lead to a new clash between Mr. Nixon and the Congress.

Official documents show Mr. Nixon and John R. Stevenson, then State Department legal adviser, said in separate 1970 speeches the first U.S. move against North Vietnamese base areas inside Cambodia was the joint raid launched by the U.S. and South Vietnam on April 30, 1970.

These statements appear to stand in sharp conflict with facts about the bombing — code named "Operation Menu" — which were disclosed for the first time last week by the Pentagon and the White House.

Defense officials said the bombing was launched in deepest secrecy in March, 1969, — 14 months before the Cambodian invasion — and the 3630 B-52 attacks sent almost 104,000 tons of bombs on six Communist base

areas in Cambodia.

The White House said the bombing was authorized by former Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird, now Mr. Nixon's top domestic adviser, and was approved by the President.

Neither the White House, the Pentagon nor the State Department was able to explain the 1970 speeches.

TELEVISION

Mr. Nixon made his statements during a nationwide television address on April 30, the night the controversial invasion started.

"For the past five years . . . North Vietnam has occupied military sanctuaries all along the Cambodian frontier with South Vietnam," he said. "For five years, neither the U.S. nor

and Cambodia Raids

South Vietnam has moved against those enemy sanctuaries because we did not wish to violate the territory of a neutral nation."

Mr. Nixon told reporters the next day he had written the speech himself.

Administration sources said the President knew then about the massive bombing of the sanctuary areas. Defense officials said last week Mr. Nixon ordered the land invasion because the bombing had not worked as well as expected in weakening the North Vietnamese in preparation for U.S. troop withdrawals.

LAW

Stevenson's speech came a month later to a New York City bar association group, discussing the questions of international law raised by

the raid into neutral territory. The State Department reprinted this speech in July of 1970 for sale to the public.

Tracing the history of the long war leading up to the invasion of Cambodia, Stevenson said North Vietnam had been attacking the South since 1965 and that the aggression "long ago reached a level that would have justified our taking appropriate measures of self defense on the territory of Cambodia."

REPORTS

"However, except for scattered instances of returning fire across the border, we refrained until April from taking such action in Cambodia," he said, giving no hint that bombing had been going on for more than a year.

False reports, saying the

raids took place in South Vietnam, were sent through normal military channels, while highly classified true reports went to only a few top officials in Washington through secret communications channels.

Various officials have indicated the reason for the extreme secrecy was that the ruler of Cambodia in 1969, Norodom Sihanouk, approved the attacks even though he was allegedly neutral.

Sihanouk was deposed March 18, 1970, two weeks before Mr. Nixon's speech and six weeks before Stevenson's. Once Sihanouk was out of power, former Defense Secretary Elliot L. Richardson said recently, the need to keep the bombing secret "disappeared."

United Press