

How Rogers Testified on Raid Coverup

Washington

Secretary of State William P. Rogers, who participated in the decision to begin the secret bombing of Cambodia in March of 1969, repeatedly assured the Senate Foreign Relations Committee more than a year later that the U.S. was doing nothing to violate Cambodian neutrality, excerpts from his classified testimony showed yesterday.

Asked generally at the time about the U.S. role in Cambodia, Rogers declared, according to the transcript: "Cambodia is one country where we can say with complete assurance that our hands are clean and our hearts are pure."

He also told the senators, "our best policy is to be as

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ROGERS ON COVERUP

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quiet as possible, to avoid any action which appears to violate the neutrality of Cambodia."

At no time, according to the excerpts, did Rogers explicitly say that no bombing was taking place.

A State Department spokesman said Rogers was unavailable for immediate comment.

There were these related developments yesterday:

- Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the former chief Cambodian chief of staff, denied that he authorized the secret bombing raids in 1969 and 1970. The denial came in a cablegram sent to the New York Times in response to an inquiry.

- The Senate Armed Services Committee announced that it has summoned General John D. Ryan, the outgoing Air Force chief of staff, and Robert C. Seamans Jr., the former secretary of the Air Force, to testify about the falsification of records of the "secret" Cambodian bombing.

SOURCES

Well-informed sources told the New York Times yesterday that secretary Rogers was one of five key advisers who formulated the secret Cambodian bombing plan.

Under that plan, as approved by President Nixon, 3630 B-52 sorties were flown and more than 100,000 tons of bombs were dropped between early 1969 and May, 1970. During the bombing, which was not disclosed until last week, the United States officially professed respect for Cambodia's neutrality in the Vietnam war.

The transcript, a summary of which has been

made available to the New York Times, asserted that some bombing had apparently been tacitly approved by Prince Sihanouk, who by the date of the Senate hearing — April 2, 1970 — had been ousted by a coup d'état.

Asked for comment, a State Department spokesman noted that Sihanouk had, in fact, been informed of the bombing and then added:

"There couldn't be any violation of Cambodian neutrality when the head of the Cambodian government asked for assistance and acquiesced in it. The fact of the matter is that statements of general respect for Cambodian neutrality and sovereignty and the bombing limited to the sanctuaries in which Sihanouk acquiesced are quite consistent."

Early in the hearing, the transcript shows, the secretary of state noted that the prince had from time to time "indicated that — in fact stated, made it clear — that he did not object to bombing by the United States in Cambodia as long as there were no Cambodians in the area."

Sources who attended the hearing said that Rogers did not elaborate on the remark, which was volunteered, except to say in response to a question from Senator Stuart Symington (Dem.-Mo.) that there was no agreement between the United States and Sihanouk about bombing.

PROBE

Symington, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, which has been investigating the falsification of official Air Force records

of the secret bombing, said in a telephone interview yesterday that "I had no idea (after the Rogers testimony) that there had been any bombing in previous months."

"It would appear that Secretary Rogers was carrying out a policy that originated in the National Security Council," Symington said.

Senator Mike Mansfield, the majority leader, similarly said in a telephone interview that nothing he had heard during Rogers' testimony led him to believe that a systematic B-52 bombing campaign had been authorized.

Sources said that some senators were particularly rankled — in light of last week's disclosures about the secret bombing — by the fact that Rogers had initially been requested to testify at an open session of the committee to discuss the steadily deteriorating Cambodian situation. He declined to do so, the sources said, explaining that his reasons for doing so would become apparent during his testimony.

During his subsequent classified testimony, he repeatedly urged the committee to publicly state that the United States was respecting Cambodia's neutrality, a step it did not take.

Little has been said publicly about Rogers' role in the decision to secretly bomb but reliable sources said he attended at least some of the planning sessions in the White House along with the President, then Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, national security adviser Henry A. Kissinger, and Army General Earle G. Wheeler, then the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

New York Times