

More Secret Air Attacks In Cambodia Disclosed

Pentagon Reports That Fighter-Bomber Raids in '70 and '71 Were Concealed by a System of Dual Reporting

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 10—The Defense Department acknowledged today that United States fighter-bombers flew air strikes in support of the Cambodian Government in 1970 and 1971, with the attacks kept secret through a system of dual reports.

At the time, the Administration was announcing that tactical air strikes, flown by fighter-bombers, were directed against North Vietnamese troops and supplies moving through Cambodia into South Vietnam.

The Defense Department had previously acknowledged that Air Force B-52 heavy bombers were secretly attacking Communist sanctuaries inside Cambodia in 1969 and 1970. At the time the raids were officially said to have been directed against targets in South Vietnam.

The Pentagon report also disclosed that during 1970 American Special Forces troops led 422 reconnaissance and

interdiction patrols into Laos although Congress in 1969 approved an amendment prohibiting the introduction of American ground troops into that country.

Senator Harold E. Hughes, Democrat of Iowa, said in a statement that this raised a "serious question as to whether the law forbidding the use of American ground forces in Laos has been observed." However, a Pentagon spokesman, Jerry W. Friedheim, said that the American troops had been engaged in reconnaissance, not combat, and that therefore the amendment was not violated.

The Pentagon explanation of the air operations in Cambodia in 1970 and 1971 was contained in a 32-page white paper submitted in response to a request from the Senate Armed Services Committee for a "simple, concise account" of air and ground operations in Cambodia and Laos over the years.

Between July, 1970 and Feb-

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ruary, 1971, according to the Pentagon paper, United States planes conducted 3,634 tactical air strikes—or sorties—to help support Cambodian Government forces.

Pentagon Didn't Know

As in the case of the B-52 raids in Cambodia between March, 1969, and May, 1970, a system of dual reporting was worked out to help conceal the tactical air strikes.

According to the Pentagon, the field commanders devised "a system of attributed targets" in which the strikes were reported as having been conducted against the North Vietnamese supply network in eastern Cambodia.

As described by the Defense Department, this dual reporting system was ordered by field commanders without the knowledge or approval of the Pentagon. The Pentagon also said that the system was ordered stopped in February, 1971, after it was discovered more or less by chance when duplicate data were received on a plane that had been lost in action.

The paper concentrated on the controversy stirred up in July by the disclosure that, with White House approval, a system of dual reporting was devised to conceal B-52 operations in Cambodia in 1969 and 1970.

Under this system, the B-52 bomber strikes in Cambodia were officially listed as having been conducted against targets in South Vietnam, while separate, top-secret reports were sent to a few civilian and military officials giving the actual details of the strikes.

Reporting System Defended

The white paper defended the dual reporting system as a necessary precaution to conceal the B-52 operations in view of the "sensitive" political situation in Cambodia.

The paper also denied that there had been any falsification of reports, asserting that officials with a "need to know" were provided with correct information.

Why the system of "attributed targets" was devised to cover the tactical air operations was not fully explained, either in the report or by Mr. Friedheim in briefing reporters on the white paper. One possible explanation was the secrecy that started with the B-52 operations, carried over to the air operations in Cambodia following the drive by American troops into Cambodia in March, 1970.

After the withdrawal of the American forces from Cambodia, the Administration gave the impression that American air operations would be limited to interdiction of North Vietnamese supply routes in Cambodia. In a speech on June 30, 1970, the day the last American troops were withdrawn from Cambodia, President Nixon declared:

"We will conduct—with the approval of the Cambodian Government—air interdiction missions against the enemy efforts to move supplies and personnel through Cambodia toward South Vietnam and to re-establish base areas relevant to the war in Vietnam. We do this to protect our forces in South Vietnam."

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'Special Authority' Cited

With no attempt a secrecy, the United States continued bombing in an area of north-eastern Cambodia that was used as a supply rout by North Vietnam, under an operation known as "Freedom Deal."

But the report disclosed that "special authority" was granted by "appropriate civilian authorities" to employ United States air power outside the area "in interdicting enemy supply lines and caches on the supply trails and river routes being used by the enemy, particularly in situations which involved a serious threat to any major Cambodian positions."

The Pentagon said that instructions were issued "in the field" that special security communications channels — similar to those employed in reporting on the B-52 raids — would be used to report these operations.

One difficulty, however, the report said, was that field units did not possess the special communications equipment. As a result, it continued, the field units worked out the "system of attributed targets" in which strikes in other parts of Cambodia were listed as having been flown within the "Freedom Deal" area.

Mr. Friedheim told reporters "somebody loused it up in the field." He said there were never any orders to use "cover targets" for these strikes, but only instructions to report them through secure communications channels.

Civilian Authority

On the B-52 raids on Cambodia, the paper generally expanded on information already brought out in the Senate Armed Services Committee hearings, providing more details on the secrecy.

The report disclosed, for example, that the Secretary of Defense had to obtain "additional appropriate civilian authority" for the B-52 raids on a daily basis. The report did not describe the higher civilian authority, but Mr. Friedheim pointed to the National Security Council, which he noted is headed by the President.