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Lon Nol Says U.S. Vows Full Support

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PHNOM PENH, Jan. 5—President Lon Nol says the Nixon Administration has promised Cambodia resolute support in the future for her fight against Communist aggression.

The Cambodian leader also says he believes the outlook for Cambodia is "favorable" because in his opinion the North Vietnamese are now so militarily weak that they will have to negotiate a "just" peace settlement and withdraw from Cambodian territory—a view that is not shared here by diplomats and other independent observers, who are almost all pessimistic about Cambodia's immediate future.

Marshal Lon Nol—who has ruled Cambodia since he and a close coterie ousted Prince Norodom Sihanouk in March, 1970—made his views known in written answers to a list of questions submitted by The New York Times.

Asked to elaborate on the nature of his meeting Dec. 10 with Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., President Nixon's representative, the Cambodian President said it had been agreed that the details of that 90-minute discussion would be kept confidential.

"However," he added, "I can tell you that in the course of that conversation, the assurance of the firm support of the United States for the just struggle of the Khmer Republic against the North Vietnamese aggression was confirmed to me."

The marshal declined to comment on reports that General Haig brought a message from Washington that President Nixon wanted better performance from the Cambodian Army.

Since the war began in Cambodia in 1970, against the North Vietnamese, the Vietcong, the Cambodian Communists and other rebel forces, these opposition troops have gained control of three-quarters of the territory of Cambodia. The Government army rarely ventures off the main roads or out of the population centers in the western half of the country, where the Lon

Nol regime still governs 50 or 60 per cent of the country's seven million people.

The Cambodian army has become riddled with corruption, as unscrupulous commanders have padded unit rosters so as to pocket the salaries of the "phantom" soldiers. Recently, a Cabinet minister revealed that "at times" the central Government had been paying salaries to as many as 100,000 nonexistent soldiers—which represented one-third of the army on paper and a total of \$2-million a month in embez-

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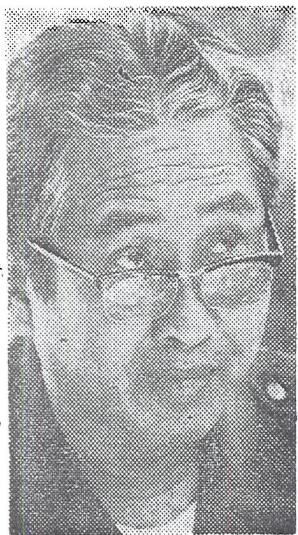
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zled funds.

Most of this money comes through American aid, which has risen from nothing in 1970 to \$300-million this year, two-thirds of it in military assistance. This does not count the cost of the raids in Cambodia by B-52's and fighter-bombers based in Thailand.

Marshal Lon Nol's statement about a pledge of continued American support is borne out by recent evidence.

Shipments of military goods to Cambodia have been accelerated in recent weeks, and some of the items are more advanced weapons than the Cambodians have had in the past—such as Cobra helicopter gunships, heavily armed with rock-



Denis Cameron

President Lon Nol in the garden of his home near the Presidential palace.

ets. The helicopters that the Cambodians have had until now carry only two machine guns, one at each door.

Heavier artillery pieces, 155-mm guns, are scheduled to be delivered soon, as are the larger C-123 transport planes.

Most of Marshal Lon Nol's

responses to The Times's questions, which he made in French, stressed his view that the North Vietnamese have been critically weakened by the recent heavy bombing of the Hanoi-Haiphong area and by other developments.

The Cambodian leader said he had not discussed the bombing with General Haig during their meeting Dec. 19—one day after the air raids began.

"But on this subject," he said, "I can tell you that our long experience with the behavior of the Vietnamese Communists has sufficiently taught us that the only language they are able to understand is force. That is why we believe that the air attacks that were carried out against their territory will, without doubt, convince them to resume the negotiations with a more conciliatory attitude. Moreover, one must not forget that North Vietnam is today weakened after the costly failure of its 'general offensive' begun last March 30. It was, therefore, a particularly well-chosen moment for resuming the bombing north of the 20th Parallel."

Asked if he thought the bombing might make Hanoi more intractable and thus prolong the war, the Cambodian President said:

"No, I do not think so. The North Vietnamese leaders trapped themselves by their bad faith at the last secret talks in Paris and they are now obliged to seek to compensate for their errors. Furthermore, they must reckon with their own internal opinion, because the situation in their country is so critical and so precarious today that they cannot afford the luxury of prolonging the war indefinitely."

The marshal, who is a six-star general, said that the military situation in Cambodia had been "relatively quiet" in the last few weeks. The only "hot points" at present, he said, are the province capitals of Kompong Thom and Takeo, which are respectively 80 miles north and 40 miles south of the capital. But he said that all the enemy attacks on those two towns had been successfully beaten off.

Finally, Marshal Lon Nol was asked his views on the chances of peace in Indochina, in particular Cambodia, and what he thought was going to happen in the region in the next few months.

"I still remain quite optimistic on this subject," he said. "As I have already indicated to you in my previous answers, Hanoi must, in all likelihood, give in sooner or later and end up by negotiating for a just peace with a much more conciliatory attitude, in order to

get out of a war in which it no longer has the least chance of victory."

"For the Khmer Republic," he added, "the prospects will then be favorable, for our cause is just and our situation remains ruled by the Geneva accords of 1954, which recognized and guaranteed our sovereignty, our independence, our unity and our territorial integrity."

"When the forces of Hanoi and the Vietcong will have finally left our territory," he said, "we will be in a position to resolve by ourselves any problems that might then arise, none of which will be insoluble, being that all Khmers are Buddhists, that they all desire the public well-being, and that all of them, at heart, do not like the North Vietnamese continuing to operate as the master in the country."