

# PENTAGON DOUBTS CAMBODIA'S ARMY IS NEARING DEFEAT

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But U.S. Defense Chief Says  
Hard-Pressed Forces May  
Require Airlift of Aid  
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CONTINUED WAR IS SEEN

The American Priority Now  
Is Reopening of Capital's  
Road and Water Routes

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 4—The Pentagon said today that it foresaw no immediate Cambodian military defeat but held out the possibility that the United States would have to mount an airlift to the besieged Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh.

That guarded assessment was offered by Secretary of Defense Elliott L. Richardson and Adm. Thomas G. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as Administration officials watched with mounting concern what they privately described as a deteriorating military situation.

Noting that all the supply routes to Phnom Penh were cut by Communist-led insurgent forces, Mr. Richardson said in reply to a reporter's question that if the situation became dire enough, the United States might have to airlift supplies and military equipment to the hard-pressed Government forces defending it.

For the moment, however, he said, priority is being given to reopening the roads and waterway to Phnom Penh.

All seven roads and the Mekong River have been severed in recent days, reportedly leaving the capital with less than five days' supply of gasoline.

In questioning by reporters after an appearance before the House Appropriations subcommittee on defense, Admiral Moorer was asked whether he saw evidence of collapse of the Government as a result of the military pressures. "I do not see any immediate threat of total collapse," he replied.

Noting that the Communist guerrillas had periodically cut off communications into Phnom Penh only for them to be reopened by Government forces, he said, "I think the fighting of this nature will continue."

As the military situation was deteriorated over the last month, the United States has intensified bombing of North Vietnamese supply lines and insurgent troop concentrations in Cambodia.

Officially, the Administration

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continued to maintain secrecy about the extent of the American air operations—a secrecy that defense officials suggested was based more on political than on military considerations. Mr. Richardson argued yesterday that information on the bombing could not be made public because "possible advantage might be taken of it by the other side."

Privately, however, officials reported that about 60 B-52 bombers and 150 fighter-bombers had been operating daily in recent weeks. This represents an increase in the bombing, which the officials said accompanied a step-up in Communist military activity.

At the outset, according to the officials, the B-52's were used primarily to attack North Vietnamese supply routes and bases in northeastern Cambodia and along the border of South Vietnam. Increasingly, they added, the bombers have been hitting base camps and troop concentrations of the insurgents, who present the main challenge to the Government now.

## Role of Fighter-Bombers

The fighter-bombers, based in Thailand, are being used almost exclusively to support the Cambodian forces, according to the officials.

Opinion is divided in the Administration on the military objective of the Communist-led forces.

Reflecting the majority view, Admiral Moorer saw the current action as primarily a battle over communication lines with the Communist side seeking to protect theirs while intermittently cutting those of the Government.

Some defense officials speculated, however, that the Communists were intent on isolating and besieging Phnom Penh with the objective of toppling the Government and exposing South Vietnam's western flank.

The defense officials said that some fighting south of the Cambodian capital involved regular North Vietnamese units seeking to protect their supply corridors into the Mekong Delta area South Vietnam.

Mr. Richardson said he could not foresee the possibility that the military situation would become grave enough to require the reintroduction of American troops. An amendment to a foreign aid bill passed by Congress in 1970, after the American "incursion" into Cambodia, prohibits the reintroduction of American troops or advisers and provides that military aid does not represent a commitment to assist in the defense of Cambodia.

## Pressure for a Truce

Administration officials continued to emphasize that the purpose of the bombing was to put pressure on the Communist side to agree to the cease-fire called for in the Paris peace agreement on Vietnam. Mr. Richardson and other officials hinted that the bombing was being accompanied by secret diplomatic efforts.

Mr. Richardson, in talking with reporters, avoided a direct answer to a question whether the United States would permit Cambodia to fall under Communist control. The Administration, he replied, is primarily concerned with winning a cease-fire there and preventing a "situation firm developing that would endanger the ability of the Government of South Vietnam to cope with any future military crisis."

Asked if the fall of the Cambodian Government would endanger South Vietnam, the Defense Secretary replied: "It wouldn't help."

Meanwhile, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, protested that President Nixon had usurped the war powers of Congress and stretched his constitutional authority more than any president since Andrew Johnson in ordering the continued bombing in Cambodia.

Mr. Kennedy, in a speech before the legislative conference of the National Association of Countries, said: "The simple truth is that report of peace with honor are premature because we have no peace at all."

## 'State of Danger' in Cambodia

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, April 4 (Reuters)—A "state of national danger" was proclaimed today in Cambodia amid a worsening military situation in which B-52's flew overnight missions to relieve Communist pressure around Phnom Penh.

Keth Sana, minister attached to the Premier's office, told a National Assembly session that the state of national danger was a result of the resurgence of "subversive and military activities on the part of the republic's enemies, gravely menacing its institutions, national independence and territorial integrity."

Communist forces are known to be occupying the Mekong River's banks at several points 15 to 30 miles downstream.

The military command reported continued fighting along Phnom Penh's other main supply route, the road to the western coast.