

Cambodian Plea for Help Is Reported

Associated Press

Saigon

Cambodia's president was reported yesterday to have requested the help of South Vietnamese troops and warplanes to fight Communist forces which have taken over much of his country and threaten the capital of Phnom Penh.

President Nixon's special emissary, General Alexander M. Haig Jr., flew back to Phnom Penh for a second visit last night after a meeting in Saigon with Premier Tran Thien Khiem. It is speculated they discussed the request, which was disclosed by South Vietnamese sources.

Haig's four-nation tour has also taken him to Thailand and Laos for what is described as an assessment of the military, political and economic situation in Indochina following the January 27 Paris peace agreement.

Haig is due back in Washington today. The White House said no major announcement of a policy change on Cambodia is expected.

THIEU

South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu has already given ample indication that he will not stand idly by while Cambodia falls to the Khmer Rouge insurgents and their North Vietnamese and Viet Cong allies.

"If Cambodia falls, it will be a threat to Vietnam," Thieu said during his recent U.S. visit. He described the worsening military situation in Cambodia as "a very great danger to Vietnam" and warned that if Phnom Penh is taken by the Communists "certainly that would be the start of another war."

Thieu noted that by the terms of the Paris peace agreement North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces should have withdrawn unconditionally from Cambod-

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ia. But they still have an estimated 23,000 troops in the country, both assisting the home-grown Khmer Rouge insurgents and protecting their won base areas and supply routes.

Thieu could argue that by sending his own forces across the border he would be no more in breach of the peace agreement than the Communist side.

North Vietnamese supply routes run down the eastern border of Cambodia to the Parrot's Beak region which juts into South Vietnam.

THREAT

Saigon is already threatening to mount a division-size offensive to relieve the besieged Tong Le Chan ranger base, 50 miles north of Saigon, and is well aware that it might completely shatter what remains of the cease-fire accord.

There is continuing evidence that the Communists are ignoring the cease-fire agreement to send fresh troops and war materiel into South Vietnam.

A Pentagon spokesman in Washington said the North Vietnamese buildup in the South since the January cease-fire has raised Communist strength there to the level reached before last year's costly offensive.

GAIN

There is general agreement between South Vietnamese and American intelligence assessments that Hanoi is preparing for extensive military operations. With this in mind, Thieu may consider he has more to gain than lose by a pre-emptive attack into Cambodia.

The situation in Phnom Penh was eased somewhat yesterday by the reopening of Highway 4 to the port of Kompong Som 140 miles away on the Gulf of Siam, and the arrival of a convoy of 184 trucks. They carried fertilizer, charcoal, salt, coconuts, mattresses and rice — but no fuel.

A U.S. airlift is under way to bring in desperately needed fuel supplies by Air Force tanker planes. Four C-130s landed at Phnom Penh's Pochentong Airport yesterday.