

High Civilian Toll Is Seen In Bombing of Cambodia

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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, April 15—Knowledge Western diplomats here say that they believe that the heavy United States bombing campaign in Cambodia is being carried out on the basis of inadequate intelligence data and often with imprecise control, causing high civilian casualties.

"The Americans are throwing air support around like a mad women," one diplomat said. "They don't know what effect it's having!"

United States officials refuse to discuss any aspect of the bombing, which is directed from the embassy here. Instead, they refer all queries to the United States Pacific Command in Honolulu, which has consistently refused to go beyond its terse daily statement saying that the bombing is continuing at the request of the Cambodian Government.

Informed Western sources say, however, that American fighter-bomber pilots based in Thailand are flying an average of 250 strikes a day—almost as many in South Vietnam, which is much larger, during the heavy fighting there last year.

In addition, the sources say, Cambodia is being pounded by an average of 60 B-52's a day, each carrying up to 30 tons of bombs. One day recently, they say, the United States mounted an attack by 120 of the huge bombers.

Military experts say that the bombing has slowed the Cambodian insurgents but not stopped them. The experts add, however, that the bombing has probably prevented the collapse of the Cambodian Army and, in turn, the fall of the Government of Marshal Lon Nol.

It is rare to find a high Gov-

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ernment official critical of the bombing. One official said: "We know that some villagers have been hit by the bombs, but the other side has done worse. In a war like this some side effects are expected. So we consider it a side effect when bombs hit innocent civilians."

In an interview the other day, Brig. Gen. Lon Non, brother of the Chief of State, who is regarded as the most influential man in Cambodia, skirted most questions on the bombing. But at one point he said, "The Americans can use any means they like in order to get the North Vietnamese out of our territory."

Like most Cambodian officials, General Lon Nol does not publicly accept the assessment of Western intelligence sources that most of the fighting is now being done by Cambodian insurgents rather than the North Vietnamese.

Another Government official said: "We do worry about the effect of the bombing on the

people, but when you have a cancer on your skin and you take out the bad cells, some good cells must go along and you will probably have a scar on your skin. It is the same with the bombing and we think we must accept this."

Documentation Impossible

In the nearly 40 days that the heavy bombing has been under way in Cambodia it has been impossible to document independently the impact on the civilian population.

Fighting has sharply restricted travel outside the capital and, at any rate, much of the bombing has been carried out in the 70 per cent of the country controlled by the insurgents. Most of the United States jet fighter-bombers are reported to be guided to their targets by American forward air controllers in slow, low-flying observation planes.

But often, Western sources say, there are more bombers than American controllers and the strikes are directed by Cambodian controllers. Sometimes there are language problems. Furthermore, men in the field say that the Cambodians

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have often shown little concern for the civilian population in cases in which Cambodian ground troops badly need air support.

Some American bombers also have reportedly been authorized to conduct armed reconnaissance missions in which two aircraft flying at several hundred miles an hour go hunting without a forward air controller and attack when they find what looks like a suitable target.

'Preplanned' Missions

In addition, there are said to be times when pilots are sent out to bomb "preplanned" targets—a set of map coordinates where enemy activity has been reported.

There have been delays ranging from several hours to a few days from the time the target is initially reported, approved, plotted and assigned; when the pilot finally arrives with his bombs the situation on the ground sometimes has changed drastically. All B-52 strikes are "preplanned."

While some of the bombing is ordered on the basis of aerial

photography, there is also said to be heavy reliance on Cambodian intelligence, which is thought to be gravely inadequate.

Cambodia has very little of the electronic surveillance equipment that the United States dropped widely in South Vietnam, and few if any Cambodian agents venture into the territory held by the insurgents.

Some of the bombing in the insurgents' territory is planned with the use of large-scale maps showing hamlets and house locations. But authoritative Western sources say that there have been reports of major population shifts in these regions and that the maps cannot be relied upon.

Almost No Evaluation

In South Vietnam ground troops sometimes followed B-52 strikes to evaluate the damage. But that is almost never done here because so much of the country is in hostile hands.

One diplomat who has

worked in Vietnam said: "I don't think the B-52's are worth a damn the way they're being used here. All we know is that they're blowing up the ground, and they're probably nailing a lot of civilians as well."

Intelligence analysts say that the bombing has almost certainly alienated some of the population. The insurgents have already begun telling people that the leaders of the Government in Phnom Penh have become the "slaves" of the Americans and that the fight now is to save the country from American domination. It is the same argument the Communists used effectively against American intervention in South Vietnam. While it may sound absurd to some Americans, it rings true in the countryside of Indochina.

"The question we ought to be asking ourselves right now," said one American privately, "is whether the military gains are worth the political costs."

Diplomats and educated Cam-

bodians outside the Government say that the military situation has never looked worse and many strongly fear that no amount of bombing will turn the tide.

"You just cannot win a revolutionary war with air power," said one diplomat with considerable military experience. "With all due respect, you Americans lost the war in Vietnam because you insisted on fighting to the last B-52."

More Bombing Reported

HONOLULU, April 15 (AP)—The United States Pacific command said that American heavy bombers and tactical aircraft conducted operations over Cambodia today but declined to say if they were supporting a South Vietnamese push into Cambodia.

The air operations marked the 40th straight day that B-52's have been used over Cambodia at the request of the Government in Phnom Penh, according to the command's daily report.