

Diplomats' View Of the Bombing

Phnom Penh

Knowledgeable western diplomats here say that they believe that the heavy U.S. 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 made woman," one diplomat said. "They don't know what effect it's having."

U.S. officials refuse to discuss any aspects of the bombing, which is directed from the embassy here. Instead, they refer all queries to the U.S. Pacific Command in Honolulu, which has consistently refused to go beyond 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 as 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-52s a day, each carrying up to 30 tons of bombs.

Military experts say the bombing has slowed the Cambodian insurgents but has 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 government 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."

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