

Some U.S. Officials Doubt Cambodians Face Vietnam Reds

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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, April 20 — Official American sources here said today that since the Vietnam cease-fire three months ago, there has been no documented evidence that Vietnamese Communist troops are serving in combat roles in Cambodia.

The statement is a direct contradiction of the official Cambodian Government position that enemy forces in this country are chiefly Vietnamese.

It also appeared to conflict with the reason given by Secretary of Defense Elliot L. Richardson for continued American bombing in Cambodia. He said that the object of the bombing was to force North Vietnam to honor Article 20 of the Paris agreement and withdraw its troops from Cambodia.

The American sources, questioned by reporters about the apparent contradictions, declined comment.

In some parts of Cambodia, Vietnamese Communists may be serving with Cambodian insurgent units as advisers, the sources said, and regular Vietnamese Communist units continue to operate in the border

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areas of Cambodia against Saigon Government troops.

But, the sources maintained, current insurgent attacks on the Kampot area of the coast on the Gulf of Siam, the town of Takeo, south of here, and the approaches to Phnom Penh itself, are entirely the work of Cambodian insurgents and not of Vietnamese.

One source said that the Vietnamese influence on Cambodian insurgent forces was continuing to decline. That assessment has been corroborated in recent weeks by Cambodian officers in the field and by residents of villages in combat areas.

Areas Heavily Bombed

Kampot, Takeo and the approaches to the capital are all areas in which American raids by tactical fighter-bombers and by B-52's have been particularly heavy in recent weeks. It is clear, therefore, that American bombing has been intended not so much to drive out the Vietnamese as to sustain the feeble resistance offered by the forces of President Lon Nol to an indigenous insurgent army dominated by Communist-led units.

The proximity of insurgent forces to the capital was underscored by heavy fighting within a mile of the suburban town of Takhmau, only seven miles from downtown Phnom Penh.

Street fighting and mortar duels were under way just beyond the town on the banks of the Tonle Sap River this afternoon. However the military headquarters in Takhmau was struck earlier this week by 50 shells and several infantry attacks. Enemy activity there has been frequent without so far actually overrunning or even seriously damaging Takhmau.

The American sources reiterated the belief that the Cambodian insurgents themselves were not homogeneous in political orientation—that some were Communists and some



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Fighting was reported in Takhmau, Takeo, Kampot.

adherents of Prince Norodom Sihanouk and that others belonged to different political factions.

Earlier this week the Cambodian Government ordered reporters to refer to the enemy in all cases as Vietnamese Communists. The Government censors references to "Cambodian insurgents," "insurgents," or even "Communist forces" unmodified by "Vietnamese."

The American sources estimated that there were about 40,000 North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops in Cambodia, including those in the border area adjoining South Vietnam. Of the total, not more than a third are combat troops, the sources said, and those are not interested in Phnom Penh and maybe not even in Cambodia.

Doubt Threat to Capital

There are 10 or 15 hostile battalions of 100 to 400 men each within a 25-mile radius of Phnom Penh, the sources said, but no Vietnamese troops were known to be with those units. The hostile force, the sources said, poses no immediate threat to Phnom Penh even in terms of demolition attacks.

A villager south of here, backing the statements that Vietnamese influence on the insur-

gents was declining steadily, said: "We always know when Vietnamese are around — their presence around here is as noticeable as yours. No Vietnamese have been fighting us here for months."

At Cambodian Army high-command headquarters in Jakkman, Col. Khieu An, Chief of Staff for Government forces in Kandal Province, said in an interview that heavy pressure on the shattered and deserted village of Siem Reap, seven miles south of Phnom Penh, had forced defenders to withdraw. They moved about a mile east along the road to Jakkman, the colonel said.

At that point, he said, the Government troops were re-

U.S. REPORTS PLANE MISSING IN CAMBODIA

HONOLULU, April 20 (UPI) — An Air Force Phantom jet was reported missing in Cambodia by the United States Pacific command today.

The command said that the plane had been participating in raids in Cambodia Wednesday when it disappeared. Search operations have been unsuccessful, and both crew members have been declared missing.

The Phantom was the second American plane reported lost in Cambodia since the Vietnam cease-fire was declared on Jan. 28. On April 7 the command reported that an observation plane had been shot down and the pilot killed.

The command also said that American planes continued raids against suspected Communist positions in Cambodia today for the 44th day. The command said routinely that the raids were conducted at the request of the Cambodian Government but gave no other details.

No air operations were conducted today over Laos, it added.

inforced and were holding a position along the road.

"We are getting the American support we need and I am not worried about the situation," the colonel said.

Siem Reap—not to be confused with the Siem Reap that is near Angkor Wat—has been fought over many times and was abandoned by its permanent residents months ago. All its houses were destroyed long ago, though vines with brilliant red and purple blossoms still grow on the stilted foundations of the buildings.

Meanwhile, it was reported that Cambodian Government forces carried out a reinforcement by sea yesterday for the hard-pressed troops defending Kampot, on the Gulf of Siam. Ships were said to have brought in a battalion from the small port of Ream, 40 miles west, and more troops were being airlifted to Kampot today.

On Tuesday troops identified as Cambodian insurgents forced elements of two Government battalions to abandon the former resort town of Kep. The defenders have been forced to withdraw westward in the direction of Kampot. Kampot is an important regional population center, and its loss would be serious. At last report Government troops seemed to be holding their ground.

Rebel troops also continued to attack the encircled province capital of Takeo, 40 miles south of Phnom Penh, but the defenders were said to be well supplied and in no immediate danger.