

# Lon Nol Is Said to Decline Reported Nixon Invitation

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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, July 16—Authoritative sources here report that President Nixon sent President Lon Nol of Cambodia a letter early this month inviting him to come to the United States for medical treatment related to his stroke in 1971, but that the invitation was declined, reportedly in the belief that it was a move to ease him out of power.

These sources said that despite the refusal, a visiting Nixon representative, Gen. Frederick C. Weyand, Commander in Chief of the United States Army in the Pacific, renewed the suggestion late last week in meetings with President Lon Nol. They said that the Cambodian President was still resisting despite mounting pressure in Cambodian circles.

[In Washington the State Department refused to comment in any way on the report that President Nixon had invited President Lon Nol to the United States for medical treatment and that he had declined the offer.]

The sources in the Cambodian capital confirm that a large number of Cambodians, as well as Americans, now view Marshal Lon Nol personally, and perhaps his entire ruling group, as standing in the way of effective government here and of negotiations for a cease-fire with the Communist-led insurgents and Cambodia's former ruler, Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

## Policy Shift Indicated

The wording of the Nixon letter to President Lon Nol—that is, whether it was a gently phrased invitation or something stronger, like a request—has not been disclosed. But it nevertheless appears to reinforce the recent news reports attributed to senior officials in Washington that the Administration is prepared to abandon the Lon Nol Government if that is the price of a cease-fire.

The diplomatic activity swirling around Cambodia, and the rumors associated with it, continued to intensify today as Thomas O. Enders, the second-ranking diplomat at the American Embassy here, left Phnom Penh for two weeks of consultations in Washington. Mr. Enders, the deputy chief of mission, shares power at the embassy with the Ambassador, Emory Swank.

The sudden Enders trip follows closely the visit here by General Weyand, the former commander of American forces in Vietnam. General Weyand was accompanied by two other generals from the Pacific command and it is presumed that his weekend discussions with President Lon Nol and other Cambodian leaders centered on Cambodia's problems of defense after the expected cutoff of American bombing support on Aug. 15. However, foreign diplomats here did not rule out a

political aspect to the Weyand visit.

Some unconfirmed reports said that the general's discussions with the Cambodian President touched on the Nixon letter. According to the authoritative sources, Marshal Lon Nol considered the Nixon invitation for about a week before rejecting it. The marshal, these sources said, explained to Mr. Nixon that the press of affairs on him was very heavy and that he felt his presence in the country was indispensable at this critical time.

## Explanation Given

One unconfirmed report said that Ambassador Swank did not forward President Lon Nol's refusal immediately, in the hope that the marshal would reconsider—perhaps after talking with General Weyand.

The embassy would only say that "all high-level correspondence" between Cambodian and American officials "is promptly passed by this mission."

Despite the President's refusal, rumors persisted in Phnom Penh that the situation remained fluid and that he might still be persuaded to leave—a reflection of the confused air of apprehension and uncertainty here as the bombing cutoff date approaches.

## Long U.S. Effort

The Americans have been trying for months to persuade the Cambodian leader to go to the United States for specialized medical attention—possibly an operation—unavailable in Cambodia. The 59-year-old president has never fully recovered from the 1971 stroke that left his left side partly paralyzed despite treatments by American doctors both in Cambodia and in Hawaii.

However, the high-level renewal of the American pressure on him to leave now takes on special significance—with the military situation deteriorating, with the crucial American air support about to be withdrawn and with Prince Sihanouk saying he will never negotiate with President Lon Nol and the three other members of Cambodia's High Political Council. These men collaborated in deposing Prince Sihanouk in 1970.

The Prince, who has been presiding over a government in exile in Peking, calls the council members traitors and has been saying he will hang them if they fall into his hands.

The Lon Nol Government, because of what critics describe as its corrupt and feudal ways, has lost almost all the popular support that rallied to its side when it ousted Prince Sihanouk. The students and others in Phnom Penh's intelligentsia had become fed up with Prince Sihanouk's flamboyant and monarchical methods.

## Similarities Seen

But Marshal Lon Nol and his coterie were also part of the Sihanouk Government, and they have proved, in the eyes of

most observers, just as feudal as the Prince, though they call the Government a republic.

"You've got a God-President now instead of a God-King," said a foreign diplomat. "That's the only change."

Other critics point out that while feudal leadership might be tolerable in a stable peaceful situation, it has proved disastrous with the country at war. "We have a leadership crisis now that we didn't have under Sihanouk," said one Western analyst. "The whole system—the whole High Political Council—is a barrier to getting something settled here."