

Ex-Envoy Says U.S. Pays For 15,000 Thais in Laos

Estimate Offered by Godley to Senate Group Is More Than Twice Earlier Figure on 'Irregular' Troops

NYTimes

By BERNARD GWERTZMAN MAY 10 1973

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 9—A Nixon Administration official told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee today that despite the Vietnam and Laos cease-fires, 15,000 to 20,000 Thai "irregular" troops—financed by the United States—were now based in Laos.

This was reported by G. McMurtrie Godley, who has just completed his tour as Ambassador to Laos, and who was appearing for a hearing on his appointment as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs.

The presence of the so-called Thai "irregulars" is rarely discussed openly, and the figure supplied by Mr. Godley represented a marked increase from the 5,000 to 8,000 estimated to be in Laos until recently.

Mr. Godley also said that the Thai forces in Laos were being paid about \$26-million yearly. The Thai forces were introduced into Laos several years ago primarily to combat North Vietnamese regular forces in northern Laos.

Under the terms of the Laos cease-fire reached in February, all foreign forces, including the Thais, would have to be withdrawn within 60 days of the formation of a new coalition government. So far, the Government of Prince Souvanna Phouma and the pro-Communist Pathet Lao have failed to reach a political settlement. As a result, both the Thais and the North Vietnamese have remained in Laos.

Later in the day, Secretary

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of State William P. Rogers appeared at the request of some committee members of to hear rebuttal arguments against the administration's legal justification of the Cambodian bombing, which Mr. Rogers presented to the Foreign Relations Committee to days ago.

Bombing a Major Issue

The continued American bombing in support of the Lon Nol Government has become a major issue on Capitol Hill. Tomorrow the House is expected to voted on the Administration's request to transfer \$500-million in Defense Department funds to help cover the increased costs brought about by the Cambodian bombing.

There were reports that in the House Republican Caucus today debate was often heated, with some previous supporters of the Administration threatening to vote against the request on the ground that the bombing was taking place without authority from Congress.

The Senate Majority Leader, Mike Mansfield, in remarks to newsmen, called the bombing "outrageous" and said he would fight to keep any more money from going to the military effort.

Mr. Rogers, in his justification for the bombing, had said that the President had "adequate" constitutional authority to conduct the bombing and that moreover, the bombing was needed to gain full North Vietnamese compliance with the Vietnam cease-fire agreement.

Although most members of the Foreign Relations Committee have criticized the bombing, only a few appeared this afternoon to rebut Mr. Rogers. Only one, Senator Jacob K. Javits, Republican of New York, had a full, prepared statement.

Mr. Javits said that the State Department's constitutional argument "cannot withstand close scrutiny" and that the document as a whole represented "an untenable case built on false premises."

Withdrawal Cited

An argument used by Mr. Javits, and other critics such as Senator Edmund S. Muskie, Democrat of Maine, is that with the withdrawal of American forces and the release of prisoners in Vietnam, Mr. Nixon has lost whatever basis he might have had to continue bombing without specific Congressional authority.

Mr. Rogers repeated his contention that the bombing was in response to the failure so far to achieve a cease-fire in Cambodia, and was needed as a "stick" to prod North Vietnam into abiding by the agreement and to bring about a cease-fire in Cambodia.

In an optimistic tone, Mr. Rogers also held out hope that talks expected to be held between Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's adviser on national security, and Le Duc Tho, Hanoi's top negotiator, in Paris this month, would prove fruitful and that economic talks on possible American economic aid might soon resume with the North Vietnamese.

"We think they are still serious about wanting economic assistance," Mr. Rogers said. "That's why we will continue the political and economic discussions."

He also pledged that the United States would not send ground forces into either South Vietnam or Cambodia, and that he saw no need for the use of American air power in South Vietnam. He said the bombing in Cambodia was needed to offset the North Vietnamese backing for the anti-Government forces.

In this morning's hearing, three Southeast Asian experts were up for confirmation.

In addition to Mr. Godley, they were William H. Sullivan,

formerly Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs, who has been nominated to be Ambassador to the Philippines, and Graham A. Martin, formerly Ambassador to Thailand and Italy, who has been nominated to be Ambassador to South Vietnam.

Senator J. W. Fulbright, the committee chairman, began the hearing by saying that although he respected the tree men, it was "disturbing" to him that all three were "intricately involved" in Indochinese affairs and would remain concerned with future Southeast Asia policy.

Mr. Godley and Mr. Martin, the two men questioned today, both defended actions in Laos

and Cambodia as necessary on the ground that there was one Indochina war.

The details about the Thai forces were provided by Mr. Godley in response to questions. It was later learned from a Senate source that there had been 8,000 Thais in Laos for most of last year, but beginning with October, additional forces were moved there to be in place in anticipation of the Vietnam cease-fire agreement.

Mr. Godley also said that about \$350-million was being given to Laos yearly. This prompted Mr. Fulbright, a consistent critic of American involvement in Indochina, to question the need for such expenditures on what he called a small, strategically unimportant country.

"In Arkansas this is a considerable amount of money," said the Democrat from Arkansas.