

DEVELOPMENTS IN CAMBODIA FOLLOWING
THE MARCH 18 COUP

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May 11, 1970

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DEVELOPMENTS IN CAMBODIA FOLLOWING THE MARCH 18 COUP

I. Summary

Prior to the overthrow of Prince Norodom Sihanouk on March 18, Cambodia had largely avoided the fighting in Vietnam. North Vietnam had established bases for an estimated 40,000 of its troops on the Cambodian side of the South Vietnamese border. From 1965 to March 18, 1970, the Cambodian Government did little to interfere with these "sanctuaries"; and, with the exception of isolated border incidents, the Allies did not directly attack them.

The Government of General Lon Nol assumed power on March 18, committed to getting the Vietnamese Communists out of Cambodia. Lon Nol's initial policy of negotiations coupled with limited measures of pressure, such as closing the port of Sihanoukville, failed when Sihanouk, now in Peking, declared on March 23 his intention to return to power with Communist support. Both North Vietnam and the Vietcong endorsed Sihanouk's aims, recalled their diplomats from Phnom Penh, and began to occupy all of eastern Cambodia. By April 20, they controlled most of the territory east of the Mekong River, threatened to isolate Phnom Penh from the sea, and had pushed to within 18 miles of the capital.

As Communist forces began their attack at the end of March, South Vietnamese forces began limited forays into the Communist sanctuaries with the cooperation of Cambodian authorities. The scale of the operations increased sharply after April 15. Some American advisers were seen

with Saigon forces in Cambodia on April 9.

As South Vietnam stepped up its attacks on the sanctuaries, Cambodia requested military aid from the United States sufficient to support an army of from 200,000 to 400,000 men (the Cambodian Army numbered 35,000 men when the fighting began). On April 23, the White House announced that the Allies would provide Cambodia with captured Communist arms.

On the diplomatic front, the Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations created a stir by suggesting that Moscow might support a new Geneva Conference on Indo-China. He afterwards backed away from this position, and both Peking and Hanoi rejected the idea. Indonesia invited some 20 Asian countries to a conference on Cambodia, but both North Vietnam and Communist China turned it down. At the same time, Prince Sihanouk met with leaders from North Vietnam, the Vietcong, and the Pathet Lao; they all pledged "full support" for his liberation movement and subsequently recognized his government-in-exile.

During the last ten days in April, the United States began to give serious consideration to full-scale Allied attacks against the sanctuaries. According to Administration accounts, it was felt that a Communist take-over of Cambodia would enable North Vietnam to strengthen and enlarge its sanctuaries, thus creating a permanent threat along the entire border to South Vietnam's security and to U.S. troops remaining in the country. Moreover, the Administration believed that it needed to do something to relieve the pressure on the Lon Nol Government. It decided to attack the sanctuaries with the objective of destroying Communist facilities

there and capturing their supplies, thus eliminating for some time (for eight months, according to U.S. officials) the usefulness of the sanctuaries to Hanoi. It also hoped to seize the supreme Communist headquarters (the Central Office for South Vietnam, or COSVN), believed to be located in the Fish Hook area of Cambodia.

On April 29, South Vietnamese forces attacked the Parrot's Beak region of Cambodia; and on April 30, President Nixon announced that American and South Vietnamese troops had moved into the Fish Hook. He also announced that military aid to Cambodia would be given in the form of small arms. In the week that followed, the Allies attacked other sanctuaries.

President Nixon said in his press conference on May 8 that "the great majority" of all American units would be out of Cambodia by the second week of June and all Americans, including advisers, would be out by the end of June. On May 6, the White House announced the discovery of a large base complex; and by May 11, United States and South Vietnamese forces had uncovered large stores of Communist weapons and supplies. North Vietnamese resistance has been spotty. The Communist headquarters listed as one of the major objectives of the campaign apparently has not been found.

The immediate threat to Phnom Penh has apparently lessened. The Communists appear to be consolidating their positions along the east bank of the Mekong River. A combined U.S. and South Vietnamese naval flotilla moved into Cambodia on the Mekong River on May 9, meeting little resistance. The 30 American boats remained in Neak Luong, observing the

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21-mile limit set by President Nixon, but the South Vietnamese boats arrived in Phnom Penh on May 11.

II. The March 18 Coup and the Step-Up in Communist Military Activity

The March 18 coup which overthrew Prince Sihanouk resulted from the buildup of resentment against him among a number of important groups in Cambodia: namely, the Army leadership, intellectuals, students, and the professional groups. Domestic issues, such as the Prince's economic policies and alleged corruption among his family and official circle of advisers, played a part in this; but the issue of an estimated 40,000-60,000 North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops on Cambodian soil created an emotional climate among those opposed to Sihanouk which provided the foundation for the coup. This was indicated by the attacks on the Vietcong and North Vietnamese embassies by Cambodian civilians, largely students, just prior to the coup.

Sihanouk had helped to create this upsurge of hostility toward the Vietnamese Communists. He had slowly developed a "harder line" in opposition to their presence in Cambodia while moving to improve relations with the United States. In fact, the coup came while Sihanouk was visiting Moscow and Peking in an effort to win their support in securing the withdrawal of Vietnamese Communist forces from Cambodia's territory.

The policy of the new Government of General Lon Nol toward the Communists was one of caution in a military sense; but verbally the new regime made it clear that it intended to hamper the North Vietnamese-Vietcong use of the border sanctuaries in the hope that this would ultimately lead to a Communist withdrawal. The new Government pledged

to keep Cambodia neutral but diplomatically moved to pressure the Communists by an appeal to the United Nations and through an effort to revive the International Control Commission for Cambodia. Some Cambodian troop movements toward Vietcong and North Vietnamese base areas were reported as early as March 21, and reports reaching Saigon told of scattered clashes. ^{1/} Moreover, South Vietnamese commanders began to establish contact with their Cambodian counterparts along the border, thereby initiating the pattern of cooperation which developed. ^{2/} The Government had already moved to abrogate a trade agreement Sihanouk had signed with the Vietcong for supplying rice to the Communists. On March 25, Government reportedly cut off the supply of food and arms through the port of Sihanoukville. ^{3/}

The Government, however, still appeared to feel that this kind of measured pressure rather than a direct military confrontation would force the Communists to agree to a withdrawal. The Government's hesitancy also stemmed from the realization that the 35,000-man Cambodian army was no match for the seasoned Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops. Negotiations between the Communists and the Cambodian Government, which had begun prior to Sihanouk's ouster, continued, and Phnom Penh continued to stress diplomacy as the main instrument to achieve its

^{1/} New York Times, March 22, 1970.

^{2/} Ibid., March 23, 1970.

^{3/} Washington Star, March 25, 1970.

objective. ^{1/}

The Communist response came on March 23 when Sihanouk proclaimed from Peking the formation of a National Liberation Army to restore his authority. He declared that the "anti-imperialist forces of the brother countries" would assist in "the struggle for liberation of the homeland." North Vietnam immediately announced support for Sihanouk and called for the "overthrow" of the Lon Nol Government. On March 25, North Vietnam and the Vietcong announced that they were recalling all their diplomats from Cambodia, thus ending any real hope for negotiations.

The breakdown of the uneasy peace came quickly following the diplomatic rupture. Pro-Sihanouk demonstrations, many of which became violent, took place in several provincial cities, and reports from the frontier areas indicated that North Vietnamese troops had begun to move against Cambodian Army posts and villages. ^{2/} The Government position also hardened when Lon Nol said on March 30 that Cambodia might seek help from "friendly countries" if North Vietnam/Vietcong units did not leave Cambodia. ^{3/}

The next three weeks saw the occupation of most of eastern Cambodia by North Vietnamese-Vietcong forces, massacres of Vietnamese civilians by the Cambodian Army, and the initiation of South Vietnamese border incursions against North Vietnamese bases in Cambodia. The Communist offensive in Cambodia had succeeded by the fourth week in April in taking

^{1/} New York Times, March 24, 1970. Washington Post, March 24, 1970. Following the attacks on the North Vietnamese and Vietcong missions in Phnom Penh, talks between the Communists and the Cambodian Government began on March 16.

^{2/} Washington Star, March 29, 1970. New York Times, March 29, 1970.

^{3/} Washington Star, March 20, 1970.

over substantial chunks of six provinces north, south, and east of Phnom Penh. The Government was cut off from nearly all of the border region adjacent to South Vietnam, including rich rice growing areas. The Communists blocked road and rail access to Sihanoukville and threatened to attack Cambodia's seaports. At one point, the Communists occupied the village of Saang, only 18 miles from Phnom Penh. The North Vietnamese and Vietcong had significantly enlarged the area of their control along the border with South Vietnam, and most observers believed that they were fully capable of capturing the capital.

Cambodia's deteriorating military position helped create the psychological basis for what appeared to be large-scale massacres of Vietnamese civilians by the Cambodian Army. Cambodians and Vietnamese have had a long history of animosity, and the fact that Communist forces in the border sanctuaries had probably received active assistance from some Vietnamese civilians made all Vietnamese civilians suspect in the eyes of the Cambodians. During mid-April incidents reportedly occurred in which the Cambodian Army deliberately exposed Vietnamese civilians to fire in battles with the Communists. Several hundred apparently were killed. Moreover, hundreds of bullet-ridden bodies of Vietnamese were seen floating in the Mekong River, lending further credence to reports of massacres. Testimony given by reported survivors of the massacres appeared in many American newspapers. ^{1/}

^{1/} See Washington Post, April 19 and 22, 1970, for examples.

III. South Vietnamese-American Border Activity

Since 1965, Allied forces in South Vietnam have been authorized to fire across the border at Communist troops in retaliation for attacks launched from Cambodia. During that period, numerous incidents have occurred as a result of this policy, including some reported border crossings by Allied troops. At the end of March, South Vietnamese units began crossing the border to attack Communist positions without prior provocation. The Cambodian Government formally protested to the United States about these incursions on April 1, but they reportedly took place after the consultations between Cambodian and South Vietnamese officers ^{1/} which, as stated previously, had begun soon after the coup. While no Americans reportedly participated in the initial actions, White House Press Secretary Ron Ziegler stated on March 28 that in accordance with the judgment of commanders on the scene, U.S. troops could go into Cambodia "to deal with the inherent right of self-defense." However, U.S. Army Colonel Ernest P. Terrell met with Cambodian officers on Cambodian soil on March 29 to, as he put it, "encourage meetings between Vietnamese and Cambodians." ^{2/} On April 9, American military personnel were seen with Saigon forces in Cambodia. ^{3/} The South Vietnamese, in

^{1/} New York Times, March 28, 1970. Washington Star, March 29, 1970.
^{2/} Washington Post, March 30, 1970.
^{3/} Washington Post and New York Times, April 10, 1970.

turn, were seen building bunkers on the Cambodian side of the border. The U.S. Command in Saigon described such border crossings by Americans as "protocol" visits in response to "friendly gestures" by the Cambodians. ^{1/}

On April 15, South Vietnam began large-scale operations into the Parrot's Beak region of Cambodia. While officials of the Nixon Administration stated on April 15 that the United States had warned Saigon against such tactics, American forces along the border reportedly cooperated with the South Vietnamese. Some American advisers reportedly crossed the frontier with South Vietnamese troops. ^{2/} The first crossing, involving over 2,000 South Vietnamese troops, was reportedly assisted by Cambodian forces. ^{3/} On April 19, the New York Times reported that "authoritative" U.S. sources in Washington had disclosed that the United States and South Vietnam had agreed on a policy of limited Saigon attacks against Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia. ^{4/} Between April 15 and 20, South Vietnamese forces made several large-scale incursions into Cambodia, sometimes pushing several miles into the country to attack Communist bases. However, it appears that at this juncture most of the South Vietnamese withdrew after they completed their specific missions. The Allies apparently did not intend these attacks to entail an extended South Vietnamese presence on Cambodian soil--at least not on a large scale.

^{1/} Ibid.
^{2/} Washington Star, April 20, 1970.
^{3/} Washington Post, April 16, 1970.
^{4/} New York Times, April 19, 1970.

IV. Cambodia's Request for Military Aid

As South Vietnam stepped up its attacks into Cambodia, the Cambodian Government asked for military assistance from the United States in the form of weapons and equipment. The first Cambodian appeal, issued April 14, was addressed "to all countries of all blocs" and asked for aid to repel North Vietnam and Vietcong attempts to "conquer" the country. The Lon Nol Government followed this up with direct requests to the United States. These asked for aid to enable Cambodia to increase the size of its army to between 200,000 and 400,000 men. The Nixon Administration hesitated in making a commitment, but on April 23, the United States announced that the Allies would provide Cambodia with captured Communist arms.^{1/} The White House emphasized, however, that this did not constitute a direct U.S. response to Phnom Penh's request. (See Page 15.)

V. Diplomatic Activities

The possibility of new diplomatic action was partially responsible for the delay in the U.S. response to the Cambodian request. This possibility was heightened when Yakov Malik, Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations, suggested on April 16 that a new Geneva Conference might be the best forum to settle the Indochina conflict. However, Malik subsequently backed down and both Communist China and North Vietnam rejected a new Geneva Conference. On April 26, Secretary of State Rogers accused the Soviet Union of "steadily backpedalling" from Malik's statement and charged that "The

^{1/} The Cambodian Army is presently equipped mainly with Soviet and Chinese arms and equipment.

Soviet attitude has been negative toward exercise of its treaty responsibilities."

Indonesia initiated a second diplomatic effort by inviting some 20 Asian nations, including Communist China and North Vietnam, to a conference under the auspices of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, of which Indonesia is a member. Indonesia said that the purpose of the conference was to restore the neutrality of Cambodia. While a number of non-Communist states accepted the invitation, both Hanoi and Peking turned it down, describing it as an effort to bolster the United States and the Lon Nol Government.^{1/}

Simultaneously with the Communist rejection came the summit conference of Prince Sihanouk and leaders of North Vietnam, the Vietcong and the Pathet Lao, reportedly held in South China. Chinese Premier Chou En-lai attended the last session of the conference. The conferees pledged "full support" for Sihanouk's United Front and called for unity among the Indochinese people against the United States.^{2/}

VI. The Allied Attacks

Although there was a slow-down in Communist military operations in Cambodia by the beginning of the last week in April, reports from Washington indicated a shift in the American assessment of Communist intentions.

^{1/} New York Times, April 27, 1970.

^{2/} Washington Post, April 28, 1970. On April 21, Truong Chinh, second ranking member of North Vietnam's Politburo, declared that an "Indochinese Peoples United Front" had been formed against the United States. On May 5, Sihanouk announced the formation of a government in exile. Communist China and North Vietnam recognized it on May 6 and broke relations with the Lon Nol government.

Military and some civilian analysts were now reported to believe that the North Vietnamese and Vietcong did intend to overthrow the Lon Nol government and install in its place a Sihanouk government dominated by Hanoi.^{1/} Moreover, U.S. military leaders reportedly suggested that the continuance of the Lon Nol Government in power would give the Allies the opportunity, long desired by the military, to attack the Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia, while a return of Sihanouk would expose the entire South Vietnam border to attacks from Cambodia.^{2/} American officials, including Secretary Rogers and White House spokesman Ziegler, began openly to express concern for the preservation of Cambodia's neutrality in the face of Communist "invasion." Ziegler described the situation as "a foreign invasion of a neutral country which cannot be considered in any way a pretense of a civil war."^{3/} On April 25, the Washington Post quoted "informed sources" in Saigon as saying that the Cambodian Government had asked the United States to bomb the headquarters of the NLF, located in Cambodia. The South Vietnamese also announced that it would send a delegation to Phnom Penh to discuss the problem of Vietnamese civilians in Cambodia. There was speculation that the South Vietnamese might also talk to the Cambodians about resumption of diplomatic relations.

A statement by White House spokesman Ziegler on April 27 reflected increasing U.S. concern: he said that the United States had "an overriding interest" in "how a possible Communist takeover of Cambodia would affect the security of our forces in Vietnam and the Vietnamization program."^{4/}

1/ New York Times and Washington Post, April 24, 1970.

2/ Ibid.

3/ New York Times, April 25, 1970.

4/ Washington Post, April 28, 1970.

According to subsequent testimony by Administration officials, the President first decided to move against the sanctuaries on April 24 when he agreed to plans for a large-scale South Vietnamese attack against the Parrot's Beak area which juts into South Vietnam some 40 miles west of Saigon. The President approved U.S. air support for the operation. On April 28, the President reportedly made the decision to send U.S. ground troops into the Fish Hook region opposite Tay Ninh province. At that time, he authorized American advisers to accompany South Vietnamese forces in the Parrot's Beak assault.^{1/}

The Administration cited the Vietnamization program to justify the U.S.-supported South Vietnamese thrust into the Parrot's Beak area of Cambodia and the combined U.S.-South Vietnamese attack on the Fish Hook area. The South Vietnamese assault on the Parrot's Beak area on April 29, accompanied by U.S. advisers and air support, was described by the Pentagon as "a necessary and effective measure to save American and other free world lives and to strengthen the Vietnamization program." The Pentagon described its objective as "to destroy an expensive complex of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong bases and depots in Cambodia territory barely 35 miles from Saigon."

President Nixon's speech of April 30, in which he announced the U.S. attack into the Fish Hook area, struck this same theme. The President cited a Communist invasion of Cambodia and expanded Communist control along Cambodia's border with South Vietnam and warned that if this continued "Cambodia would become a vast enemy staging area and springboard for attacks on South Vietnam along 600 miles of frontier..." He described the purpose

^{1/} ibid., May 6, 1970.

of the operations as "cleaning out" the sanctuaries. He denied that the operations constituted an invasion of Cambodia and asserted: "Once enemy forces are driven out of these sanctuaries and their military supplies destroyed, we will withdraw." He stated that the action was intended to eliminate the threat to American troops in South Vietnam and the South Vietnamese people as well, and was "indispensable for the continuing success of" the Vietnamization program. He said that the attack on the Fish Hook area was aimed at destroying the command headquarters used by the North Vietnam-Vietcong forces for their entire war effort in South Vietnam.

The President also dealt with the question of military aid to Cambodia. He promised that the United States would, "with other countries," provide "small arms and other equipment" to the Lon Nol Government. He ruled out "massive amounts of military assistance," which apparently referred to heavy weapons such as tanks and planes.^{1/}

President Nixon reportedly told members of Congress on May 5 that American forces would be withdrawn from Cambodia in three to seven weeks. The Washington Post reported a deadline of July 1.^{2/} The President stated at a press conference on May 8 that the first American troops would be withdrawn at the end of the week beginning May 10 and that the great majority of U.S. forces would be out of Cambodia by the second week of June. He

^{1/} President Nixon on May 8 said that in regard to the future of Cambodia and Laos, "The United States...cannot take the responsibility, and should not take the responsibility in the future, to send American men in to defend the neutrality of countries that are unable to defend themselves." New York Times, May 9, 1970.

^{2/} Washington Post, May 6, 1970.

added that "all Americans of all kinds, including advisers" would be withdrawn "by the end of June."

Following President Nixon's April 30 speech, White House officials asserted that U.S. advisers would not accompany the arms shipments to the Cambodian Government.^{1/} Secretary Laird disclosed on May 2 that the Allies were bombing other sanctuaries besides the Parrot's Beak and Fish Hook areas. He stated that the sanctuaries "will be hit from time to time," thus indicating future attacks. The Secretary also said that the operations would not affect the troop withdrawal program.

In his May 8 news conference, President Nixon stated that if future attacks on the sanctuaries became necessary "the South Vietnamese will be strong enough and well trained enough to handle it alone." He based this on the estimate that the present operation has "bought at least six months and probably eight months of time for the training of the Army--that is the Army of Vietnam, South Vietnam." He said that he would "expect" that the South Vietnamese would withdraw from the sanctuaries on approximately the same schedule as U.S. forces because of their dependence on U.S. logistical and air support. Although some Saigon forces had begun to withdraw from the Parrot's Beak, President Thieu declared on May 8 that the American timetable did not apply to South Vietnam. Thieu said "We have no deadline, no limits."

1/ Ibid., May 1, 1970.

In the days immediately following President Nixon's speech, officials went into greater detail concerning the motivations behind the President's decision. Secretary Laird stated in an interview with U.S. News and World Report (May 11) that the Administration felt that eliminating the sanctuaries was necessary to strengthen South Vietnam's defense as the Vietnamization program proceeded and as American troops withdrew. If North Vietnam were permitted to continue using and expanding its sanctuaries in Cambodia, the Communists would, according to Laird, "pose a continuous and serious threat to South Vietnam's internal security that no amount of progress in Vietnamization or pacification could eliminate."^{1/}

President Nixon reportedly told a group of Congressmen on May 5 that a "subsidiary purpose" was to relieve the Communist pressure against the Lon Nol Government. The President implied this in his speech when he announced his decision to supply small arms to Cambodia. Secretary Laird stated in his U.S. News and World Report interview that "Cambodia presents an opportunity for application of the Nixon Doctrine," which he said meant "a reduction not only in American involvement in Asian combat but an increase in military assistance to our Asian friends so they can defend themselves." Moreover, 1,500 South Vietnamese mercenaries of Cambodian ethnic origin--paid and outfitted by the U.S. Special Forces--arrived in Phnom Penh on

^{1/} William H. Sullivan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, on May 10 said that the North Vietnamese goal was to link up the sanctuary areas, with control over Sihanoukville, and replace the Lon Nol government with Prince Sihanouk.

May 2 to help defend the capital and probably to advise the Cambodian Army.^{1/} President Thieu disclosed on May 8 that South Vietnam had supplied Cambodia with 4,000 American-trained ethnic Cambodian troops and that he expected to send more.^{2/}

Initial reports following President Nixon's address of April 30 indicated that the Cambodian Government privately favored the Allied attacks. Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr., of the Philippines, who came to Phnom Penh on a fact-finding mission for the Philippine Senate, stated on May 2 that General Lon Nol had told him that the Allied move into the sanctuaries represented a positive response to Cambodia's appeal for help. However, the General also said, according to Aquino, that the United States had not consulted him before the operation began and that there was no coordination or exchange of military information taking place.^{3/} President Thieu spoke of Cambodian-South Vietnamese arrangements in a discussion with reporters on May 8. He said that Lon Nol had given approval "in principle" for South Vietnam's attack on the Parrot's Beak and other areas two or three days before President Nixon's April 30 speech. He also asserted that Cambodia had requested South Vietnam's support for general defense of its territory east of the Mekong River. He said that these arrangements had been made through the Saigon delegation to Phnom Penh, which had been sent to discuss evacuation of Vietnamese civilians in Cambodia.^{4/}

1/ Washington Post, May 6, 1970.

2/ New York Times, May 9, 1970.

3/ Ibid., May 3, 1970.

4/ Ibid., May 9, 1970. Washington Post, May 9, 1970.

Militarily, the Allies hope to seize Communist supplies in the sanctuaries and destroy their installations and thus, they say, disrupt Hanoi's plans for use of the sanctuaries for at least eight months.^{1/} By May 11, the Allies had uncovered large stores of Communist weapons and supplies,^{2/} but many officers in the field believe that there remains much in the area that has not yet been found.^{3/} Undersecretary of State Elliot Richardson stated on May 10 that the Allies had discovered more ammunition than the Communists normally use over a ten-month period. U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam Ellsworth Bunker said that because of the Cambodian operation, it would take the enemy ten months before it could function in the "same magnitude" as before the Allied attack.^{4/}

The Allies are still looking for the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), the Communist headquarters supposedly located in the Fish Hook area. The President had listed this as one of the major objectives of the attacks. On May 6, the White House reported that U.S. troops had captured a "major sophisticated base complex" that might be COSVN. However, it now appears that this extensive complex, dubbed "the City," is not COSVN but is

1/ Washington Post, May 6, 1970.

2/ New York Times, May 11, 1970. Official statistics as of late May 9 showed captured weapons and supplies as consisting of: 6,575 rifles; 1,232 heavy machine guns, mortar tubes, rocket launchers, recoilless rifles and antiaircraft guns; 865 tons of ammunition; 1,653 tons of rice, 12 tons of medical supplies; 130 trucks, and thousands of other items ranging from radios to mortar cleaning and repair kits.

3/ Ibid.

4/ Washington Post, May 11, 1970.

instead a vast supply and training area. Some observers have speculated that COSVN is not located in a single headquarters but is a collection of smaller, scattered facilities.^{1/}

Since the initial attacks, the Allies have launched new assaults along other areas of the border. Two are immediately north and south of the Fish Hook area while a third is far to the north opposite South Vietnam's Central Highlands. Generally speaking, North Vietnamese resistance in the sanctuary areas has been light and scattered. Most Communist forces have probably withdrawn, although some may be in the dense jungles or in still undiscovered camps. As of May 10, 64 Americans and 263 South Vietnamese had been killed in the Cambodia operation, while a total of 4,324 enemy troops had lost their lives.

^{1/} The Administration initially placed considerable stress on the need to destroy COSVN but, as the operation progressed, the thrust was on destroying bunker networks and accumulations of supplies. President Nixon in his April 30 statement announcing the entry of U.S. troops said: "American and South Vietnamese units will attack the headquarters for the entire Communist military operation in South Vietnam. This key control center has been occupied by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong for years in blatant violation of Cambodia's neutrality." In his press conference on May 8, President Nixon did not refer to this headquarters. Reports from Saigon indicate that many military officials no longer refer to COSVN as a sort of guerrilla Pentagon but as a dispersed, floating operation, consisting largely of leaders of the Vietcong and the People's Revolutionary Party, the Communist element of the NLF. When "you capture a headquarters that has been evacuated, what have you got? It is like capturing an empty Pentagon." Washington Post, May 10, 1970.

The Communist threat to Phnom Penh has apparently eased. A Cambodian military spokesman disclosed on May 7 that the Communists were 21 miles from the capital and had not advanced in the past 24 hours. He speculated that they were occupied with consolidating their position on the east bank of the Mekong River after being driven from the border sanctuaries.^{1/} On May 9, a flotilla of 150 Allied naval vessels--30 of them U.S. patrol boats--entered Cambodia on the Mekong. The Saigon Government announced that the flotilla would evacuate Vietnamese in Cambodia who wished to go to South Vietnam. However, the vessels also landed elements of 10,000 South Vietnamese troops ashore at several places along the river to clear out Communist troops in the area. The U.S. Command described this phase of the operation as intended "to neutralize Vietcong and North Vietnamese sanctuary bases located in the area."^{2/} The flotilla captured the Communist-held ferry crossing of Neak Luong on May 10.^{3/} The U.S. vessels remained there (just about at the 21-mile limit set by President Nixon for U.S. forces in Cambodia) while the South Vietnamese boats proceeded to Phnom Penh on May 11.

^{1/} Washington Star, May 7, 1970.

^{2/} Washington Post, May 11, 1970.

^{3/} Vietnamese Marines were left in Neak Luong, reportedly waiting for the Cambodian army to link up with them.