

GIST

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on U.S. foreign relations

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

CAMBODIA: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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1. Q. The North Vietnamese have had sanctuaries in Cambodia for 5 years. Why did President Nixon wait until now to order U.S. ground operations into Cambodia?

A. While these sanctuaries have long been a problem for our forces and those of our allies in South Viet-Nam, until recently the Cambodian Government was able to limit their use even though North Vietnamese actions were a clear violation of Cambodia's neutrality. In recent months increasing North Vietnamese use of the sanctuaries prompted the Cambodian authorities to place further restrictions on the flow of supplies to Communist forces. In fact, Prince Sihanouk was actually traveling to Moscow and Peking to seek help in reducing Communist use of Cambodian territory when he was ousted from power in Phnom Penh.

When the Lon Nol government replaced Sihanouk, it tried to enforce Cambodian neutrality more strictly by closing Sihanoukville to Communist traffic and seeking negotiations to obtain a Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army withdrawal from Cambodian territory. In April the North Vietnamese began moving more actively out of their sanctuaries and deeper into Cambodia in an effort to establish a solid Communist-held zone reaching to Sihanoukville and the sea along 600 miles of the Cambodian-South Vietnamese border. This would have given them a far stronger position in Cambodia than they had ever had; it would have assured them of potentially unlimited supply and replacement capabilities; and it would thus have posed a critically increased threat to remaining U.S. forces nearby across the South Vietnamese border. This would have called the feasibility of continuing the President's policy of withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Viet-Nam—Vietnamization—into serious question.

The problem presented to President Nixon in late April was thus wholly different, both politically and militarily, than the situation which existed previously.

2. Q. What is the objective and scope of the U.S./Vietnamese operation in Cambodia?

A. This military operation is limited in extent, purpose, and duration. It is a combined U.S.-South Viet-Nam strike which involves several major enemy sanctuaries and adjacent

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Editor: Fahey Black
ext. 20736
For copies: ext. 20783

border territories. In the so-called "Parrot's Beak area, only 33 miles from Saigon, South Vietnamese forces have major responsibility for ground operations with the United States providing air and logistical support. In the "Fishhook" area, and other Communist base areas, American and South Vietnamese units are cleaning out an extensive complex of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong operation and supply depots which have been dug in over a long period.

The direct objective of this military operation is to capture enemy stores and supplies; to disrupt Communist logistics and communications capabilities; and to prevent the enemy from building his forces in the sanctuary areas in preparation for attacks on our troops and those of our allies in South Viet-Nam. When this is achieved our forces will withdraw into South Viet-Nam. Some U.S. forces have already done so; the President has announced that the great majority of U.S. troops will be out by the second week of June, and that the operation will be concluded by the end of June.

3. Q. What have been the results of the operation so far?

A. From a military standpoint the operation has been highly successful. Most of the Communist forces have been obliged to evacuate these areas. Several thousand North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops have been killed or captured. Huge stores of war materiel and food supplies have been taken. The Defense Department, on the basis of present information, estimates that the total volume of enemy ammunition seized so far in the Cambodian operations exceeds the total amount of enemy ammunition expended for the entire preceding year in Viet-Nam.

Based on these achievements in the first week of operations, it is estimated that the Communist war effort in South Viet-Nam has been seriously set back. We have probably gained more than half a year's time for the training of South Vietnamese armed forces, and by destroying Communist ammunition and supplies we have saved many American lives.

4. Q. Are there any international pledges of respect for Cambodia's territorial integrity?

A. Yes. Most important are the 1954 Geneva accords, which provided for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Cambodia and Laos and the withdrawal of Communist forces to the north of the provisional demarcation line in Viet-Nam. In the Final Declaration at Geneva the participants undertook to respect the sovereignty, independence, unity, and

territorial integrity of the three States. They also pledged to refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of these States. North Viet-Nam, a signer of the accords and participant in the Declaration, has flagrantly violated them.

5. Q. Why hasn't the situation in Cambodia been brought before the United Nations?

A. While the Cambodian Government has made a general appeal to the United Nations to take action to compel the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces to put an end to their aggression against Cambodia, it has not requested formal Security Council action.

Speaking on the situation in Indochina on May 5, 1970, United Nations Secretary-General U Thant said:

"In view of the fact that several of the parties concerned are not members of the United Nations, and that many of its members, including some permanent members of the Security Council, are not in favor of United Nations involvement, the Organization has not been in a position so far to play a decisive part in bringing an end to the conflict."

For our part, we would welcome and support any initiative in the United Nations or elsewhere which would lead to serious and constructive consideration of and action on the situation in Cambodia. Meanwhile, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, on May 5 the United States requested the President of the Security Council to circulate as a Security Council document a letter in which we reported the recent United States/Republic of Viet-Nam limited military action taken in exercise of the right of collective self-defense against acts of armed aggression by North Vietnamese forces based in Cambodia.

6. Q. Did the Cambodian Government request U.S. forces?

A. No. The Cambodians could not ask for help from American forces because to do so would be a renunciation of neutrality, and in effect would join them with South Viet-Nam and its allies against North Viet-Nam. Initially, Prime Minister Lon Nol said that no foreign troops would be required; that only additional arms and equipment would be needed for Cambodia's defense. When this proved insufficient he appealed for the assistance of ethnic Cambodians serving with the South Vietnamese armed forces.

While Prime Minister Lon Nol was not asked to approve or agree in advance to the joint military operations against the sanctuaries, he has said that this action represents a positive U.S. response to Cambodia's appeal for help in restoring its neutrality and repelling North Vietnamese and Viet Cong invaders.

7. Q. Isn't this an invasion--a violation of Cambodia's neutrality?

A. This is not an invasion. The areas in which these attacks have been launched are completely occupied and controlled by North Vietnamese forces. Once enemy installations and supplies in these areas are destroyed we will withdraw.

We have not violated Cambodia's neutrality; we are there with the approval of the Cambodian Government, which seeks to restore its neutrality by ending the illegal North Vietnamese occupation of part of its territory. The United States has recognized and respected the sovereignty, independence, neutrality, and territorial integrity of Cambodia since the 1954 Geneva accords. From 1965--when Prince Sihanouk broke off diplomatic relations with us--until August 1969 we did not have a diplomatic mission in Cambodia. We have provided no military or economic assistance to Cambodia since 1963.

8. Q. Won't this action adversely affect our Vietnamization-withdrawal program?

A. On the contrary--we believe it will facilitate it. Destroying the North Vietnamese installations and supplies in the sanctuaries should win at least 6 to 10 months for further strengthening of the South Vietnamese forces to meet future threats from this area without assistance of U.S. units. This will make it possible to continue our withdrawal program. The President has stated that the withdrawal of 150,000 Americans by next year, which he announced on April 20, will take place on schedule.

9. Q. What assurances do we have that as soon as we leave the Communists won't return to rebuild the sanctuaries?

A. None. But this would take considerable time, as indicated above, and during this time the South Vietnamese forces will continue to grow in numbers, experience, and effectiveness, and therefore in their ability to defend their frontiers and to handle the problem unassisted.

10. Q. What is the legal basis for the President's decision to commit American lives and materials in Cambodia?

A. The President was acting under his constitutional authority as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States. Also, as Chief Executive, he has the supreme responsibility for determining and directing our foreign policy. This was basically a tactical decision by the Commander in Chief to protect U.S. forces in the field.

As for the international law basis for our actions, these measures are legitimate ones of collective self-defense. Cambodian neutrality had long ago been violated by North Viet-Nam which turned the sanctuary areas into a war zone directed against our troops.

11. Q. Did the Administration consult with Congress prior to the action in Cambodia?

A. The President has carried out his constitutional responsibility to keep Congress informed. As Commander in Chief it is also his responsibility to protect American lives, and he made his decision with that thought uppermost and mindful of the need for tight security before launching the strikes into Cambodia.

The President considered and rejected the option of large-scale U.S. arms aid, advisers, and U.S. combat forces for the defense of the Lon Nol government. The President stated in his White House meeting with Congressional committees that had he selected this option he would have fully consulted Congress.

12. Q. What political support do we have from other Asian and Pacific countries for our Cambodian operation?

A. Thailand, South Korea, Laos, the Republic of China, and Australia have endorsed President Nixon's decision. Japan's Foreign Minister said he regards military operations in Cambodia as an "unavoidable step" under present circumstances. President Marcos of the Philippines has written the President in support of his decision.

13. Q. Why do we support the Lon Nol government? Wasn't Sihanouk the legal ruler?

A. The question of who governs Cambodia is for the Cambodians to decide. General Lon Nol has been Prime Minister of Cambodia for more than 8 months.

The sequence of events began in August 1969 when Prince Sihanouk, as Head of State, formed a new government. General Lon Nol, as Prime Minister, selected a cabinet which was accepted by Prince Sihanouk and endorsed by the National Assembly.

On January 6, 1970, Prince Sihanouk departed Cambodia for France, for medical treatment. He left behind mounting dissatisfaction with his economic and administrative policies, as well as with his lack of success in bringing about the withdrawal of Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army forces.

On March 18 the Cambodian National Assembly and the Council of the Kingdom, in joint session and in accordance with the Constitution, unanimously removed Prince Sihanouk from office and announced his replacement by Cheng Heng, the President of the National Assembly, to serve until new elections are held.

14. Q. Did the Cambodian Government take any action to end the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong occupation of its territory?

A. Yes. Cambodian skirmishes with and military actions against the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army have become increasingly frequent in the past year. Prince Sihanouk has repeatedly called since early 1969 for the withdrawal of Communist forces, and went to Moscow in March to request Soviet help in persuading Communist forces to leave Cambodia. After the Cambodian National Assembly and Council of the Kingdom removed Sihanouk, the Government appealed to the Geneva conference cochairmen, the U.K. and the U.S.S.R., for the reactivation without delay of the International Control Commission to protect Cambodian neutrality. The British were sympathetic to the request. The U.S.S.R. refused to act. The Cambodian Government also sought earnestly, both before and after Sihanouk's deposition, to engage in negotiations with the Vietnamese Communists for the peaceful withdrawal of their forces.

15. Q. What actions are we taking in the diplomatic field while ground operations in Cambodia are underway? Have we given up hope of a successful outcome of the Paris peace talks?

A. Several countries have advanced proposals for solutions of the problems in Indochina. Great Britain and New Zealand have shown interest in the renewal of the discussions between the parties involved in the 1954 Geneva accords. France has called for consultations on the subject, and Japan and Indonesia have suggested a conference of Asians. Such a meeting has been scheduled for Djakarta in mid-May

with 20 Asian nations invited. U.N. Secretary-General U Thant has recommended an international conference concerning Southeast Asia, which the United States welcomes.

On March 6 President Nixon wrote to Great Britain and the Soviet Union, as cochairmen of the 1962 Geneva conference on Laos, asking them to take the initiative in calling for consultations among the 14 signatories of the Geneva agreements with a view to restoring the neutrality of Laos, which is intensely concerned with the Indochinese problem. The President subsequently wrote in the same vein to all the 1962 Geneva signatories.

We have been in serious negotiation at Paris since May 1968, and we regard Paris as the primary opportunity for the discussion and settlement by negotiation of the Indochinese war. We will continue to be patient and conciliatory at the conference table in working for peace. We have offered to negotiate all issues with only the one condition that the future of South Viet-Nam be determined by the people of South Viet-Nam themselves. The President has said that we will pursue the path of peace not only at Paris but at "other forums that we are presently working on." He stated at his news conference on May 8:

"...what we have to do is to go down the diplomatic trail, and that is why we are exploring with the Soviet Union—with not too much success to date, but we are going to continue to explore it—with Great Britain, with the Asian countries that are meeting in Djakarta, and through every possible channel, methods through which the neutrality of countries like Cambodia and Laos, who cannot possibly defend themselves...is guaranteed without having the intervention of foreign forces."

16. Q. Are the recent air strikes north of the demilitarized zone in Viet-Nam related to the operations in Cambodia?

A. Only indirectly, to the extent that both are concerned with the security of our forces. We have made such attacks when necessary to protect our reconnaissance flights over North Viet-Nam which provide essential information for the safety of our forces in South Viet-Nam. When we stopped the bombing of North Viet-Nam in November 1968, we made it clear that we would continue to fly reconnaissance flights over that area and that if the enemy attacked them we would respond. Our recent responses have been against a very large complex of surface-to-air missile sites—anti-aircraft installations. This does not represent a new policy.

17. Q. How will our action affect negotiations with the Soviet Union on such critical subjects as strategic arms limitations, the Middle East, etc.?

A. It is our hope that they will continue without interruption. The SALT talks at Vienna are proceeding smoothly, free of polemics and propaganda. Our bilateral discussions on the Middle East are also continuing.

The President has stated that despite our differences with the Soviet Union on Southeast Asia and the Middle East, we have mutual interests in arms limitations, and has predicted that there will be an arms limitation agreement.