AS THE AMERICAN FIGHTING IN INDO-CHINA DRAWS TO A CLOSE—

BARRING A DRASTIC turn of events, America's active combat role in Indo-China finally is coming to an end after a dozen years.

On August 15, under a compromise worked out by President Nixon and Congress, American bombers will halt all air attacks over Cambodia, the only Indo-Chinese nation not yet covered by a cease-fire agreement.

That compromise marked a significant victory for Congress, frustrated for years in its efforts to force the President to share his warmaking powers.

Congress won its battle by threatening to refuse appropriation of billions of dollars the President needed to run the Government. In the end, Mr. Nixon agreed to cease all U. S. combat in Indo-China and to seek congressional approval of any future American military operations in the area.

For its part, Congress accepted an August 15 deadline to end the war, instead of insisting on an immediate halt.

This gave the President just 45 days to convince rebel forces in Cambodia to make peace with the Government of President Lon Nol, which agreed on July 6 to negotiate with the "other side."

Dwindling options. In the limited time allowed him, Mr. Nixon hopes to bring the insurgents to terms by using his two remaining weapons:

- Military power. U. S. fighter-bombers based in neighboring Thailand sharply stepped up the air war in Cambodia in early July from 150 combat missions a day to more than 200—sometimes as many as 300. Heavy B-52 bombers from Thailand and Guam were flying about 40 strikes daily.
- Diplomatic pressure. The White House disclosed that the President was sending his top aide, Henry Kissinger, to Peking for the sixth time to confer with Chinese Premier Chou En-lai. A major purpose of the trip: to persuade China to help arrange a Cambodia cease-fire. Aside from Russia, China has been the principal supplier of arms and ammunition to Communist forces in North Vietnam, hence to Cambodia.

To lay groundwork for the Kissinger-Chou talks, Mr. Nixon met on July 6 at the Western White House in San Clemente, Calif., with Huang Chen, head of China's newly established mission in Washington.

Role of Sihanouk. While in Peking, Mr. Kissinger hoped to confer with Prince Norodom Sihanouk, former Cambodian Chief of State, who fled to exile in China after being overthrown in March, 1970. Sihanouk, however, initially rejected a meeting. Returning to Peking on July 5 from a two-month tour of 11 nations in Africa and Eastern Europe, he said:

"It is useless to talk with Kissinger. I know what he is going to say—compromise and divide. We'll fight on until 1976, 1980, even 1984."

Does Sihanouk speak for all Cambodia?

Some experts in Pnompenh believe he has considerable support among the rural population. Says one authority:

"Peasants remember him as their leader at a time the Communists were not scooping up territory, and the U. S. was not bombing it." But how much control he has over rebel forces is in doubt.

Still, Western diplomatic sources say the Chinese may support a compromise settlement to the Cambodian war calling for Sihanouk's return as Chief of State, the resignation of President Lon Nol, and the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from the country.

After the bombing—. The big unanswered question in Cambodia is, what will happen to the country when the U. S. halts bombing? The official American view is that air power is the only force standing in the way of a Communist take-over.

According to one American officer:

"Without air support, Cambodia's Government forces simply do not have the know-how to win. Their troop strength probably is bigger than that of the Communists' at the moment, but there is a leadership gap which is all in the Communist favor."

Some nonmilitary analysts insist that

U. S. pins hope for Cambodian peace on new Kissinger-Chou talks in Peking. Meanwhile, American bombers keep up pressure on Reds.

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the bombing actually is counterproductive. "B-52s drive the people in the rural areas into the arms of the Communists," says a Western diplomat with years of experience in Southeast Asia.

These authorities also argue that the Communist-led rebels—who already hold roughly 80 per cent of Cambodia—have no intention of seizing the entire nation by military means. Instead, it is said, they would prefer a political settlement that gave legitimacy to a Red-dominated government.

End of American military involvement in Indo-China will leave the U. S. with a huge air armada in Southeast Asia—200 B-52s in Thailand and on Guam, about 350 Air Force and 45 Marine fighter-bombers in Thailand, and a Navy aircraft carrier cruising the South China Sea. One problem facing Mr. Nixon is what to do with this fleet of warplanes.

Some military authorities predict that U. S. air strength in Thailand will be cut 50 per cent by October. Others are convinced it will be maintained at near-

President Lon Nol

Prince Sihanouk

Cambodia's top leaders, once allies, have become bitter enemies in fight for power.

current levels until Communist intentions in Indo-China emerge more clearly.

Red slowdown. In Cambodia, at least, the rebels appear to be biding their time. Despite U. S. air attacks, they are able to close major highways almost at will against ineffective opposition from Government troops. Yet the Red-led insurgents generally are slowing military operations and appear in no hurry to attack the capital, Pnompenh.

Says one American official: "Now that they know the U. S. will halt bombing on August 15, why should they launch a major assault that might change the mind of the U. S. Congress?"

Experts on Indo-China emphasize, however, that long-range prospects for the Lon Nol regime are bleak. According to a Western diplomat:

"The Cambodia Government sits in peril with little control over its own future. It has become a pawn to outside forces, quite at the mercy of any understanding that may be reached by the United States, China, Russia and North Vietnam." **[END]**