

Rogers Warns of Approaching 'Critical Period' in Indochina

Says Fall of Lon Nol Would Be 'Adverse' but That
U.S. Policy Is Not Survival of Cambodian Regime

BY ROBERT C. TOTH

Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State William P. Rogers, while saying there has been no intensification of the Indochina conflict, warned Friday that "a very critical period is about to ensue" in the region.

Rogers also said that, although the fall of the Lon Nol regime would be an "adverse development," "our objective is not the survival of the government of Cambodia."

Rogers said there was "no limit" to the use of U.S. air power in the area to protect withdrawing American forces in Vietnam.

Asked at a press conference about cross-border strikes by South Vietnamese into Laos in general and whether such activity was anticipated in the near future, Rogers replied:

"We do not rule out the use of air power to support Asians in any effort that they make to fight a common enemy. There is one enemy . . . in Indochina. That's North Vietnam, and it is invading Laos and Cambodia and South Vietnam. And the Asians are fighting that common enemy, and we're going to provide whatever air power is necessary to protect our men while we are withdrawing from South Vietnam."

He insisted again that "we couldn't change (the policy of withdrawal) under any conditions."

"The Administration has no present intention of asking for any additional legislative authority" from Congress, Rogers said.

The Administration is barred by the so-called Cooper-Church amendment from using U.S. advisers or ground combat troops in Cambodia.

On the Mideast, Rogers saw encouraging signs that the Arabs and Israelis may be ready for serious negotiations. He proposed an upgrading of the current indirect peace talks and expressed hope that the cease-fire deadline of Feb. 5 will be extended.

Rogers proposed that rather than continue to exchange official papers via U.N. mediator Gunnar V. Jar-

ring, negotiations between the two sides "should now take part on a more active basis, possibly over an extended period of time, with oral exchanges in private sessions."

Ecuador's seizure of U.S. fishing boats within its 200-mile territorial waters was viewed by Rogers in the "spirit of nationalism" and protection of the Latin American country's domestic fishing industry. He hoped for a practical solution of the dispute, but said U.S. acceptance of the 200-mile limit would be "a very serious matter" for this country in other parts of the world.

Helsinki Estimate

Rogers declined to discuss in detail strategic arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union but said if Moscow wanted an agreement, it could be achieved. The recent Helsinki phase of the talks were "somewhat unproductive," he said, because Soviet negotiators were awaiting guidance from the Communist Party Congress to be held in March.

The Administration's antiballistic missile program for the coming fiscal year, he said, had not yet been "finalized." A possible slowdown of work on four Western sites was being explored, the Pentagon has said, but a new site to protect Washington is contemplated.

The Indochina conflict dominated the press conference, with Rogers being pressed to explain the Administration's current position.

"The United States is not fighting for the defense of

Cambodia," he insisted, but to prevent Communist recapture of the former sanctuaries on the South Vietnamese border from which the enemy can again endanger American troops.

At the same time, he acknowledged "a great similarity" in U.S. and Cambodian objectives. "But that gets to be semantics," he said. "Obviously we would consider it an adverse development if Cambodia fell . . . but our objective is not the survival of the government of Cambodia."

Reiterating that "we will not provide ground combat forces or advisers" for Cambodia, he described U.S. advisers as "Americans sent with combat units into combat environments to give advice on how to conduct combat."

Delivery Teams

The military equipment delivery teams to go with the \$200 million in military aid authorized for Cambodia, Rogers said, "will be essentially auditors" who will keep inventories of the weapons as the law requires. "It is conceivable there could be argument about definitions," he added.

The "very critical period" now coming, he explained, arises because by May 1 another 50,000 Americans will be withdrawn from Vietnam, and the rest of the American force will be largely out of combat. And then the enemy, because of the dry season, will obviously attempt to build up the base areas so that it can attack us."

A
FILE / SUBJ.
DATE / SUB-CAT.
1/71