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STATUS ON CAMBODIA

COMMUNICATION

FROM

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

TRANSMITTING

A LETTER NOTIFYING CONGRESS THAT ON JULY 10, 1997, A JOINT TASK FORCE OF APPROXIMATELY 550 U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL FROM THE U.S. PACIFIC COMMAND BEGAN DEPLOYING TO ESTABLISH AN INTERMEDIATE STAGING BASE AT UTAPAO AIR BASE, THAILAND FOR POSSIBLE EMERGENCY NONCOMBATANT EVACUATION OPERATIONS IN CAMBODIA.

JULY 14, 1997.—Referred to the Committee on International Relations and ordered to be printed

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THE WHITE HOUSE,
Washington, July 11, 1997.

Hon. NEWT GINGRICH,
Speaker of the House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: Political animosity between Cambodia's Co-Prime Ministers, Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen, erupted into armed clashes on July 5. Hun Sen, in what he claimed was a preemptive move, acted to disarm forces loyal to Ranariddh in Phnom Penh. Although Hun Sen has outwardly maintained the coalition government, he intends to replace Ranariddh as Co-Prime Minister. After fighting between the rival forces over a wide area of Phnom Penh on the weekend, an uneasy calm has been restored in the capital. No Americans were killed or wounded. Danger remains in Cambodia from increased criminal activity and military mop-up operations (including extralegal arrests) since July 5, and living conditions have deteriorated due to extensive damage sustained during the fighting. The principal area of concern is now the northwest part of the country where elements of the armed forces led by commanders still loyal to Ranariddh are resisting forces loyal to Hun Sen. The potential exists for armed clashes between contending units. U.S. citizens are not the targets of any of the contending forces, but substantial danger exists to the civilian population and any foreign residents or visitors in those regions, principally the northwest, where clashes are likely to occur.

On July 9, 1997, the State Department ordered a drawdown of official American personnel to a minimal staff of 20 persons, and recommended that private American citizens in Cambodia should leave. The departures are being accomplished, safely so far, through commercial air. If the security situation deteriorates, however, that option might quickly become unavailable.

On July 10, 1997, a Joint Task Force of approximately 550 U.S. military personnel from the U.S. Pacific Command and the United States began deploying to establish an intermediate staging base at Utapao Air Base, Thailand. These forces will stage for possible emergency noncombatant evacuation operations in Cambodia, establish communications, and conduct contingency planning. These actions will enhance the ability of the United States to ensure the security of between 1,200 to 1,400 American citizens in Cambodia if an evacuation should become necessary.

The Joint Task Force includes a forward headquarters element, fixed-wing and rotary aircraft, airport control and support equipment, and medical and security personnel and equipment.

The U.S. forces primarily come from elements of the U.S. Pacific Command; other elements are U.S. based units. All the armed services are represented. Although U.S. forces are equipped for combat, this movement is being undertaken solely for the purpose

of preparing to protect American citizens and property in the event that such becomes necessary. U.S. forces will redeploy as soon as an evacuation is determined to be unnecessary or, if necessary, is completed.

I have taken this action pursuant to my constitutional authority to conduct U.S. foreign relations and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive.

I am providing this report as part of my efforts to keep the Congress fully informed, consistent with the War Powers Resolution. I appreciate the support of the Congress in this action to prepare to protect American citizens in Cambodia.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON.