

Nixon Admits Ordering Secret Cambodia Raids

Accuses

Critics of 'Cop Out'

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NEW ORLEANS, La., Aug. 20—President Nixon acknowledged for the first time publicly today that he approved secret bombing raids in Cambodia and he vigorously justified them as being necessary to protect American lives.

Mr. Nixon also used a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars here as an occasion to accuse critics in Congress and the press of seeking to "cop out" on U.S. global responsibilities.

Mr. Nixon spoke to a VFW convention after cancelling his motorcade route in downtown

New Orleans because the Secret Service said it had uncovered a "possible conspiracy" to assassinate him.

He had been scheduled to motor down four blocks of Canal Street before arriving at the convention center. He drove along an alternate route.

According to White House officials, Mr. Nixon was informed of the possible danger in New Orleans on Sunday night by the Secret Service, after consultation with the FBI and New Orleans police. This morning, he received the recommendation that he change the route and he agreed. There were no incidents during his stopover in New Orleans.

Mr. Nixon, in his speech, gave the following explanation of why the U.S. bombings in Cambodia were kept secret:

"Had we announced the airstrikes, the Cambodian government would have been compelled to protest; the bombing would have had to stop; and American soldiers would have paid for the disclosure with their lives."

He said, however, that the bombing was disclosed to unspecified government and congressional leaders.

The previously secret raids were revealed last month after former Air Force officers described how they were camouflaged in official reports. Administration officials indicated they had been approved by the National Security Council but today's speech was the first official acknowledgment that Mr. Nixon had ordered the raids.

The President described the situation in Indochina at the time he took office in January, 1969. He said that 40,000 North Vietnamese troops had taken over a 10-mile-wide stretch in Cambodia alongside the South Vietnamese border.

"The Communists had made a mockery of the neutrality of those border regions," the President said. "The United States was under no moral obligation to respect the sham."

He said that there were no complaints from Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who was head of state in Cambodia at the time of the bombings.

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