

NYTimes AUG 21 1973
**NIXON SAYS RAIDS
ON CAMBODIA IN '69
WERE 'NECESSARY'**

**He Defends Secret Bombing
as Way to Save U.S. Lives
and Spur Peace Talks**

TALK TO WAR VETERANS

**Assailing Critics, President
Asserts He Would Make
Same Decision Again**

By JOHN HERBERS

Special to The New York Times

NEW ORLEANS, Aug. 20— President Nixon, speaking to a friendly audience of war veterans, today defended his order for secret bombing of Cambodia in 1969, saying it had been "absolutely necessary" to save American lives and to move the war in Southeast Asia to the negotiating table. To a rousing ovation, Mr. Nixon denounced the "great anguish and loud protest from

*Excerpts from Nixon speech
appear on Page 20.*

the usual critics" that this had been "a secret attack on tiny Cambodia," and he said he had no regrets about his action.

"If American soldiers in the field today were similarly threatened by an enemy," he went on, "and if the price of protecting those soldiers was to order air strikes to save American lives, I would make the same decision today that I made in February, 1969."

Bombing Reports Falsified

It was the first time the President had spoken out on the subject since recent revelations that the United States carried out air strikes across the Cambodian border from South Vietnam while reporting them to the American people as strikes against the Communist forces within Vietnam.

The President contended that "the fact of the bombing" had been disclosed to "appropriate Congressional leaders." In Washington today, most Congressional leaders who could be reached said they were unable to comment pending research on Mr. Nixon's account.

A spokesman for Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, said that Mr. Church had not been advised of the Cambodian bombing and did not know of any member of the Senate who had been.

American Flags Waved

Mr. Nixon spoke to an enthusiastic audience of several thousand delegates to the national convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in the Rivergate Convention Center in downtown New Orleans.

The President spoke at noon, keeping to his schedule despite the disclosure earlier in the day that the Secret Service had discovered a "possible conspiracy" to assassinate him. The President's spokesmen said the route of the motorcade from the international airport to the convention center, published before Mr. Nixon's arrival, had been changed when word of the threat was received.

Even so, small clusters of people, some waving American flags, stood along the expressways and streets and waved to

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Mr. and Mrs. Nixon, who rode in a bullet-proof Presidential limousine.

The President stopped here on the way from his vacation home in Key Biscayne, Fla., where he spent the weekend, to his vacation home in San Clemente, Calif., where he plans to remain through Labor Day.

His address was devoted exclusively to national defense and he did not mention the Watergate disclosures that have crippled his Administration in recent weeks. He was tanned and his face flushed with excitement at the rousing response he drew from the men in brown and yellow caps, who turned out with bands, flags and welcome signs.

Peace Award Presented

He was further spirited by a peace award presented to him by Mrs. James Reid of South St. Paul, Minn., the president of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary.

But Mr. Nixon showed some signs of the strain that he has undergone recently in the Watergate disclosures. At times during his speech he seemed to stumble over his words in a way that he seldom has in the past.

And there was an incident involving his press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, when the Presidential party arrived at the convention center. The streets were lined with crowds, mostly friendly. A small band of protesters waved anti-Nixon signs. As the President stepped through the entrance and as Mr. Ziegler, followed by reporters and cameramen, sought to follow, an expression of anger passed over Mr. Nixon's face.

Ziegler Pushed Away

He grabbed Mr. Ziegler by the shoulders, spun him around and pushed him away, saying, "I don't want any press with me and you take care of it."

Mr. Ziegler, asked later about the incident, said, "It was nothing."

The President delivered his address without a text, except for the section dealing with the Cambodian bomb-

ing, which had been carefully composed and distributed to the press in advance. Mr. Nixon paraphrased many parts of this, however, and added a number of comments not included in the original text.

"I think the time has come," he began, "to answer those who criticize the policy which helped to bring American peace with honor in Vietnam."

"Now specifically, as some of you know, the President of the United States has been accused of a secret bombing campaign against the defenseless and neutral country of Cambodia in 1969."

Then he went on to explain "the truth." When he assumed the Presidency in January of 1969, he said, North Vietnamese forces had overrun the entire border area of Cambodia adjacent to South Vietnam. He said the Cambodian population had been driven out and the North Vietnamese were operating a network of supply lines and bases along a 10-mile strip on the Cambodian side.

"It was not the United States but the North Vietnamese Communists who violated the neutrality of Cambodia," he said. In February, he said, the North Vietnamese launched "a countrywide offensive in the South in which hundreds of Americans were killed every week and thousands every month."

U.S. Leaders Told, He Says

In response, he said, "I ordered American air power employed directly and continually against the enemy-occupied base areas from which Communists soldiers had been attacking and killing American soldiers."

The attacks, he said, were directed at "the North Vietnamese invaders, "not the people of Cambodia."

"The Cambodian Government did not object to the strikes," the President declared. In fact, he said, while the strikes were in progress, "Prince Sihanouk, then the leader of the Cambodian Government, personally invited me very warmly to make a state visit to the Cambodian capital."

"That's a pretty good indication of what he thought about what we were doing,"

Mr. Nixon declared. The President did not go to Cambodia.

As for secrecy, he said, "the fact of the bombing was disclosed to the appropriate Government leaders" and to Congressional leaders—those, he said, "who had any right to know or need to know."

The President's critics have charged that the raids were kept secret from the American people to prevent opposition to his conduct of the war.

After the bombing started, Mr. Nixon continued, there was a steady decline in American casualties and "the enemy was provided with one more incentive to move to the conference table."

"The secrecy was necessary to accomplish these goals," Mr. Nixon said. "Had we announced the air strikes, the Cambodian Government would have been compelled to protest, the bombing would have had to stop and American soldiers would have paid the price for this disclosure and this announcement with their lives."

Then he read a letter he said he had received from the father of a soldier who served along the Cambodian border in 1969.

The father, who was not identified, wrote that when his son was killed on March 1 of that year, "I felt you let him down" by not having ordered the bombing of supply lines.

After reading recently that the President had approved such bombing in 1969, the man wrote, "I now believe the Lord led you to make a proper decision in this matter."

"I sincerely feel your action saved many lives and shortened that dreadful war," the letter said.

Mr. Nixon added as a "post-script" to the letter his statement that he would order such air strikes again to save American lives.

The rest of Mr. Nixon's address consisted mainly of reiteration of his views on the necessity to maintain a strong military posture to insure peace and discussion of his efforts to establish peace for future generations with the Soviet Union and China.

He attacked, in harsher terms than usual, the critics of his over-all war policies.