

NYTimes
Cambodian Debacle . . .

President Nixon grossly distorts the facts when he accuses Congress of "abandonment of a friend" because it ordered funds for United States bombing in Cambodia cut off after Aug. 15. The President himself acquiesced in that cut-off date. Indeed, when it was set in late June, he sent a message to Congress praising the legislators' "cooperative spirit" in putting off for six weeks the deadline for an end to military action throughout Indochina.

Congress, even then, did not absolutely rule out further military intervention in Cambodia. Rather it insisted that the President must seek Congressional sanction for any such action in accordance with constitutional procedures, a position that has recently won support from a Federal district judge.

If Mr. Nixon is so concerned about the fate of his "friends" in Phnom Penh, why does he not ask for authority to continue the bombing, instead of attempting to shift the blame to Congress for a rapidly developing debacle that is largely of his own making? The apparent answer is that he cannot offer a persuasive case for further United States involvement in Cambodian affairs, especially since the Administration has repeatedly stated that the United States has no commitment to the Government in Phnom Penh. That statement alone removes any real question of what Mr. Nixon calls "abandonment of a friend."

Worse still, events of the last few weeks and days have demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that, even with massive American air support, the corrupt and inept Cambodian regime is incapable of defending itself. In the face of relentless aerial bombardment, opposition forces have fought their way to the very outskirts of a lethargic Cambodian capital.

To persist in the bombing would be both militarily futile and morally indefensible, since the closer the battle moves to the capital the greater the risk of high civilian casualties. It is equally futile and foolish for the Administration to promise other forms of military support to the Lon Nol regime, even if that support is kept "within the letter of the law," as a State Department spokesman has promised. There is no way of avoiding a debacle made inevitable by mistaken policies dating back to the secret bombing of Cambodia in the early months of this Administration.

The Administration is trapped in the same hopeless position as the peasant in a threatened village near Phnom Penh who told a Times correspondent: "They have cut the road behind us and in front of us. . . . We cannot move forward or backward. There is no place to go."