

Nixon Again Deplores Leak on Bombing Cambodia

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WASHINGTON, March 10—Former President Richard M. Nixon has renewed his contention that the public disclosure almost seven years ago of the secret United States bombing of Cambodia forced him to stop the bombing at the cost of countless American lives.

Mr. Nixon's contention, and other reflections on his foreign policy, were given in a long deposition made on Jan. 15 in a civil suit by Morton H. Halperin. Mr. Halperin, a former National Security Council aide, was wiretapped by the Nixon Administration, allegedly for the possibility that he might have been the source of the leak on the secret bombing of Cambodia.

The bombing operation was first disclosed in an article by William Beecher in The New York Times on May 9, 1969.

The dispatch said that American B-52 bombers had raided several Vietcong and North Vietnamese supply dumps and base camps in Cambodia for the first time and that Cambodia had not made any protest. The information was attributed to Nixon Administration sources.

"As a result of that leak," Mr. Nixon said in his deposition, "the program had to be derailed. The net result to me

was that because of this great tragedy of the leak, that we could not take the acts that I considered indispensable and that the Joint Chiefs considered indispensable to stop the buildup or at least abort the buildup of enemy forces in the Cambodian sanctuaries which were making hit and run attacks on our forces in Vietnam."

Bombing Continued

On July 18, 1973, an article in The Times by Seymour M. Hersh quoted Defense Department sources as having said that the bombing had continued after the disclosure. According to that article, B-52s flew at least 3,500 sorties over Cambodia between March 1969—two months before the initial disclosure—and May 1970.

The Pentagon and the State Department acknowledged at that time that the bombing had continued.

Mr. Nixon also repeated the contention, made privately by his Administration in 1969, that Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia had secretly made known that he wished the United States to bomb North Vietnamese forces in his country but that he was not prepared to say this publicly. Mr. Sihanouk has repeatedly denied this.

In the course of the deposi-

tion, Mr. Nixon made some strong remarks about dangers of detente with the Soviet Union—a policy he initiated. Mr. Nixon also gave some insights into Henry A. Kissinger's role as national security adviser in the early days of his Administration, and his current thoughts on the need for continued covert operations and for secret diplomacy.

As Mr. Nixon discussed Cambodia and Vietnam and his policies toward Europe, China and the Middle East, he expressed great pride, saying that even in retrospect his actions had stood the test of time.

Conquest Without War

With respect to detente, however, his comments seemed to diverge significantly from his statements while in the White House. During his tenure in office, he spoke of detente as heralding a "structure of peace" and an "era of negotiation, not confrontation." In his deposition, he suggested that the United States look upon detente, as do the Russians, "not as an end in itself but as a means to an end."

More pointedly, Mr. Nixon added later that "in a period of detente, the risk of war goes down but the risk of conquest without a war through subversion and covert means goes up geometrically."

This statement was made in the context of his defending a continuing need for covert operations by the United States. He said he learned this lesson in 1947 when in his judgment, covert aid to non-Communist parties in Italy saved the country from Communism.

The theme of the need for secrecy ran throughout Mr. Nixon's remarks. He contended, for example, that without secrecy he could not have achieved the opening to China or a Middle East disengagement agreement.

Mr. Nixon lamented that the publication of the Pentagon Papers by The New York Times had made leaks "fashionable" and "rewarding" to Government officials.

Mr. Nixon also confirmed the lengths to which he and Mr. Kissinger had gone to maintain secrecy within the Administration. Speaking of the opening to China, which was set in motion in 1970, he said; "I didn't tell my Secretary of State William Rogers because he had to know at a certain time. I didn't tell him at the beginning."

Mr. Nixon also expressed pride in his decisions to bomb North Vietnam and Laos in 1972, indicating that his only regret was waiting so long to do it.

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