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Cambodian Massacres

To the Editor:

Reports about the massacres in Cambodia convey the impression that these acts are only wrong if the victims are not Vietcong.

This is untenable. As a neutral in the Vietnam conflict, Cambodia is under an undisputed rule of international law, only authorized to intern Vietcong (combatants of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, or P.R.G.) apprehended on Cambodian soil. In fact, since neutrals must treat all parties to a foreign conflict equally, Cambodia has the duty to intern, not only "vietcong" but also Saigon troops and U.S. troops apprehended there.

If, in turn, any of those troops behave illegally within Cambodia, they may be punished only after proper trial and conviction.

Finally, assuming Cambodia were at war with the P.R.G., any Vietcong captured in Cambodia must be treated as prisoners of war.

Looked at from whatever angle, the killing or mistreatment of any person regardless of sex and age, because he sought refuge in Cambodia, or is ethnically Vietnamese, or sympathizes with or intends to fight for the P.R.G., is unequivocally criminal.

The proposition that Cambodians may kill anybody out of hand for the sheer reason that he is or is suspected of being a Vietcong is even more untenable than the proposition that the U.S. or the Saigon regime may do so.

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