Purpose in Laos: A Shorter War

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That was the reason why the Johnson Administration under-

is to shorten it.

News

took the bombing of North Vietnam, a calculation ulti-Analysis mately abandoned as mistaken. That

May, a move that, with fingers crossed, is tentatively regarded now as a success.

And that was the essence of all the reasoning offered here and in Saigon today for the allied thrust into Laos. By pushing the frontiers of combat into Cambodia and Laos, it is felt, the South Vietnamese can buy time for reconstruction and political consolidation on their own territory and can also deny to the North Vietnamese the chance to rebuild a menacing coalition with indigenous southern elements.

further complicate Hanoi's already difficult supply problems and greatly postpone its chances of major attack in either Cambodia or South Vietnam. Failure, it is said, could be costly to the South Vietnamese but would not leave them much worse off for the long run than inaction.

The idea for the push into Laos is said to have been President Nguyen Van Thieu's. But President Nixon takes clear responsibility for his own en-vision for the withdrawal of ican air power would have to dorsement and appears to have all foreign forces was never obmanaged the affair in a way served by North Vietnam. that minimizes his own risks.

Last April, after President Nixon ordered the incursion into Cambodia, he delivered to dovish members of the Senate, the country an apocalyptic ad-led by Senator J. W. Fulbright, dress suggesting a giant test described themselves as essen-of will and fortitude. This time tially helpless and frustrated. he said nothing directly and They have long urged the Presilet his aides portray the in-dent simply to withdraw under the sense of redeeming prior cursion as merely a large but any agreement that protects investments. And there was an limited tactical exercise. In-the departing American forces, underlying doubt about whether deed, when the operation first without trying to provide for the long-range purpose and took shape 10 days ago, Mr. the long-run viability of the Sai-price would ever prove to have Nixon conspicuously went for gon Government and its army. been worthwhile. a rest in the sun in the Virgin But he has rejected that ap-Islands.

In the week that followed the promise that American elaborate censorship on press ground troops will continue to coverage of the event is now be withdrawn. acknowledged to have built up Though the official rationale an unwanted sense of drama. Mr. Nixon did not add to has often been given before in There is no evidence so far, his influence in Congress by the Indochina war, it was put however, that the period of of-again refusing to culsult its forward again today without ficial silence masked any hes-members before the move into apology or reservation: The purpose of widening the war is to shorten it.

without itation or unscheduled change of plans. And the week-long speculation about an attack those who question the premium of plans. into Laos, although apparently ises of his Vietnam policy could unplanned, served the Admin-have been swayed to support istration's purpose of fully pre- a tactical extension into Laos. paring the country for the

> skepticism today. But their by it.
>
> purpose was not so much to incite a calm public against the incite a calm public against the uneasiness.

> In the military area, hardly anyone here was prepared to question the President's tactical judgments. There was no question of the desirability of choking off enemy supply When leading Democrats as-movements, if that were shown sert that the way out of Vietto be possible, even for a lim- nam does ntt run through Camited time.

Nixon's critics conceded that countries of Indochina are behe had observed the letter of ing progressively sacrificed to legislation adopted last year to the defense of South Vietnam. Success, the argument runs, forbid the use of American They are also saying that enground forces in Laos. In terms larging the field of combat, and disposed to quarrel with the a further mortgaging of Amer-Administration's use of the tra- ican air power, supplies and ditional concept that invasion money for the indefinite future. of neutral territory is permissiof another belligerent.

be legally charged with violation of the 1962 accord on Laotian neutrality, whose pro-

Helpless and Frustrated

As for politics, the most proach and defended it with

Mr. Nixon did not add to

There is little chance that American casualties will in-The Democrats, led by their crease dramatically as a result National Committee and by of the operation. Nor is there former Vice President Hubert much likelihood that the Preswas the reason, for the Nixon Administration's surge into Cambodia last

> policy as to express underlying lated to the larger concept of continuing the war - even aft-

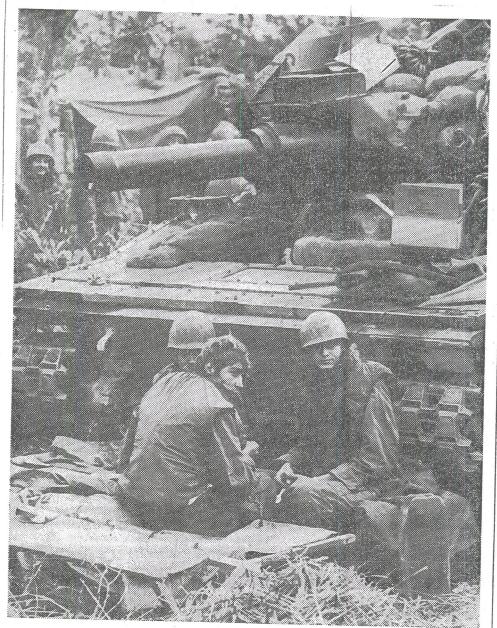
Further Sacrifice Seen

bodia or Laos, they are saying On the legal side, even Mr. that two precariously neutral of international law, no one was the paths of destruction, is only

They are saying that if, in ble in self-defense when the retaliation or frustration, Hahost government proves unable noi should move its forces even to curb the menacing activity deeper into Laos toward Thailand or should reopen some of Nor could the United States the infiltration routes through the demilitarized zone along the and South Vietnam, then Amerrain destruction on an even larger area.

In all, the reaction here bore a remarkable resemblance to the reaction to the latest manne excursion to the moon. There was much less excitement than during previous escalations. There was a vague feeling that the mission may hav value in

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QUIET TIME: Americans sit around tank in South Vietnam two miles from Laotian border