

Confidence in Policy Shaken by Cambodia

In San Diego, Trust Has Weakened While Public Division Has Increased

By STEVEN V. ROBERTS MAY 9 1970
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SAN DIEGO, May 8—“Nixon says he will be a one-term President, and I agree,” said a barber in the shabby North Park section of town. “He hasn’t lived up to his promises. He said he would get out and bring the troops home, but he hasn’t done it.”

A few blocks away, a jeweler looked up from his glass cases and declared: “I approve of what he did and I hope to God he goes in there and wins. I think it will shorten the war and I don’t think Russia or China will come in. Go in there with both barrels and get it over with.”

Since the invasion of Cambodia last week, the Asian war has again thrust itself into the minds and lives of the people of San Diego. Emotions have been aroused, polarization has increased, and trust has weakened.

Support Wanes

Five months ago, a random survey here showed that most people were sick of the war, and supported President Nixon’s effort to withdraw American troops.

Today, many San Diegans still backed the President. But there are also signs that his support is beginning to erode, particularly after Cambodia.

Back in November, President Nixon’s popularity was based mainly on the belief that he was moving quickly to get out of the mess he had not made. And many here accept the explanation that the Cambodian action will permit further troop withdrawal.

“Like any thinking man, I’m of two minds,” said Otis Romine, a bookseller. “I see the necessity of the Cambodian action, but on the other hand, I abhor the necessity.”

“What else can he do?” said the wife of a newspaper reporter, as three small children besieged her in a toy store. “It’s such a ridiculous situation. If you take the troops out, a lot of people in Vietnam will be killed. But if you put more in, you escalate. There’s no easy solution.”

San Diego was a military town, deeply conservative in its politics, and patriotism is the civic creed. A shoemaker with a son in Vietnam spoke for many when he said: “I back my President, whatever he thinks is best.”

Many people here not only believe in the President. They believe in American “honor” and American “commitment.”

Above all, they believe in American power. Five months ago, few people were talking about “winning the war,” but the Cambodian campaign has sent the hawks soaring.

“We should win or get out,” said an appliance store owner. “We’ve lost too many men pussy-footing around and trying to stop the war with talk.”

Chris Spounias, a dental laboratory technician, added: “I say, give it all we’ve got! All the way to Hanoi!”

On the other hand, some people who backed President Nixon in November are now beginning to have doubts. Mr. Romine wondered that “maybe the job is too big for him” and the shoe salesman added: “They say they’re taking troops out but they don’t say how many they’re putting back in.”

“Nixon is just like Johnson,” said Mrs. Sandra Bagley, as she shopped with her small daughter. “Johnson didn’t keep his word on a lot of things and neither is Nixon. It seems like the only good politicians we ever get are assassinated.”

“Patriotism my foot,” added Mrs. Ann Marie Glaeser, “the deeper we get in, the harder it will be to get out.”

Doubt and hostility especially infects the young. To many of them, the American flag is more a source of shame than pride. And besides, they have to do the dying.

Generation Gap

“My customers break down 50-50,” said the barber. “The older people always want to go in and fight, and the younger people usually want to get right out.”

A construction worker and his wife, who talked about their fear of “appeasing the enemy,” mentioned that their daughter was dating an organizer of the Vietnam Moratorium.

“She came into our room the other night yelling about peace and love,” said the wife. “Too many groups are coming in with this militant talk,” added the husband.

Robert Froelick, a long-haired youth employed in a leather goods store, put it this way:

“Nixon was keeping his cool pretty well up until Cambodia. He was making superficial withdrawals and people were playing dead. But this time he really blew it, it’s such a blatant contradiction of his position that he would de-escalate. This might give the anti-war movement a whole new boost.”

In the Ozarks, Some Nixon Backers Give Him ‘the Benefit of the Doubt’

By ROY REED MAY 9 1970
Special to The New York Times

ROGERS, Ark., May 8—As recently as last fall, the people of this relaxed, conservative, all-white town were less concerned about the Vietnam war than about the fortunes of the razorbacks football team at the nearby University of Arkansas.

Concern over the war had begun to rise in some quarters, but when President Nixon announced his troop withdrawal and Vietnamization policy, Rogers in its isolation tended to accept that and went about its business. The people were unhappy with the war, but most trusted the President to end it.

Now, since the American incursion into Cambodia last week, the war has come alive again on the tree-lined streets of Rogers and in the surrounding Ozarks country.

Among Mr. Nixon’s critics, concern has tightened into anger and among his supporters there is less confidence than hope that he knows what he is doing.

Waiting for Results

A 24-year-old national guard sergeant put it this way in support of Mr. Nixon’s Cambodian action: “If we accomplish his task, and if the troops are out by July 1, as he said they would be, then I’m not against this.”

The best guess is that most residents of Rogers (pop. 8,284) still support the President’s war policy. But in some cases the support amounts to little more than giving him “the benefit of the doubt.”

Even those who approve the Cambodian move are not entirely satisfied by the President’s explanation of it or by the way it was handled. Some think he should have consulted Congress and one man said he believed that Congress still should declare war on North Vietnam to legalize the operation.

Some supporters are skeptical of Mr. Nixon’s contention that the operation will last two months or less. They fear, in spite of his assurances, that it might deepen American involvement in Indochina. Others are worried that it might spur more destruction on college campuses.

One elderly lawyer, J. Wesley Sampier, a supporter of George C. Wallace and an advocate of right-wing causes, complained that the Cambodian incursion was only a “start” and the President should order saturation bombing of the Indochina

ese Communists wherever they might be.

“We’re fighting in a steaming jungle where it’s a disgrace to send a white man in the first place,” he said.

People in the Ozarks, where the air is clean and sparkling and full of meadowlarks in the spring, profess not to understand any people who choose to live in a “steaming jungle,” whether it be in South Vietnam or the lowlands of south Arkansas.

Robert Balch, a young department store manager, and Perry Butcher, an architect, lingered at a table after the Rogers Lions Club luncheon today and debated the war intently, but with the gentleness that people here reserve for misguided friends.

Mr. Balch said, “The war’s been going on eight years, and if it goes on another eight years my 11-year-old boy is going to be somewhere in Indochina.”

Mr. Butcher said the country should give Mr. Nixon a reasonable time to make the Cambodian operation succeed. He said he did not want his 10-year-old son fighting in Indochina, but that Communist aggression would crop up again if it were not stopped now.

“I hate to think that those 42,000 American boys that have been killed died for nothing,” the architect said.

“Why send another 42,000 to die with them?” the department store manager asked.

People have little use for antiwar demonstrators but almost everyone interviewed expressed regret over the killing of four students by the National Guard at Kent State University. Some called it tragic.