

54% Slap Nixon on Cambodia

By Louis Harris

A majority of Americans (54 to 37 percent) believe that it was not "proper and constitutional for the President to order troops into Cambodia without the consent of Congress" and that he "should have gone to Congress first."

Partly as a result of his lack of liaison with Congress on the military move into Cambodia, a narrow plurality (46 to 42 percent) agree with the statement that Nixon has "not been frank and straightforward about the war."

Thus, the American people tend to side with the Congress in the criticism it has voiced over not having been adequately consulted on Cambodia.

And the President has the makings of a credibility gap with the American public.

For some time, Congress has felt uneasy over the fact that the Vietnam conflict was escalated under the Johnson Administration without a declaration of war.

Some of the pressures for a reassertion of the Congressional prerogative to declare war diminished after President Nixon announced his policy of troop withdrawal from Vietnam last November.

Reaches New High

But with the move into Cambodia and its resultant division in American public opinion, the feeling in Congress to take a more active role in the commitment of U.S. fighting forces and military funds reached a new high.

Basically, Cambodia has triggered an explosion of the

THE HARRIS SURVEY

public's emotions over a continuing lack of resolution of the war.

When asked how it assessed the impact on people here at home, by 49 to 43 percent most Americans believe Cambodia has "divided us more."

There is little doubt that the desire to liquidate the war runs deep. When the cross section in the latest Harris Survey was asked if the U.S. should formalize the Indochina conflict and declare war or simply "get out," a majority of 54 percent opted for "getting out." Only 25 percent wanted to see war declared.

Backed Overwhelmingly

On the other hand, when asked if the bombing forays into North Vietnam, explained by the President as necessary to protect our reconnaissance planes, were justified or not, the resumption of bombings was backed overwhelmingly, 60 to 28 percent.

The fact a majority emerges for "getting out" and at the same time will also condone a resumption of bombings of North Vietnam testifies not so much to the confusion of American public opinion as to the depths of frustration which have been engendered.

The key is that the public wants decisive action over the war, but only that which will bring it to a quick end rather than steps which will lengthen or expand it.

By and large, Cambodia has served to divide the

country more sharply rather than to convince large numbers it will lead to a liquidation of the conflict.

Given this deep frustration, the target for public criticism, as happened under the Johnson Administration, is rapidly becoming the President himself.

The credibility of the President himself over communicating the full facts about the war is now also in question by 46 percent of the public. And when asked to rate Nixon on "his handling of the Cambodian war," a majority of the public comes down on the negative side by 38-51 percent.

Only Half Convinced

In the end, perhaps the President's real trouble over Cambodia is that he has only half-convinced the American people of the wisdom of his move. There is no decisive majority or consensus for or against Nixon's Cambodian policy in the 50-43 percent breakdown in the country reported last Monday. This feeds frustration and a sense that the course we are embarked on is likely to tear the country apart rather than to unite it.

Last November 3rd, sizable majorities of the public came to believe that President Nixon had opted for liquidation of the war. Half the people believe he had no choice other than the course he took in Cambodia.

The basic trouble with the move in terms of public opinion is that people see Cambodia as a step away from liquidation rather than toward it.

In the absence of another way to make their voices felt, the public tends to lay the blame for that at the President's doorstep.