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Escalation in Indochina . . .

President Nixon, who was elected on a pledge to bring peace in Vietnam, has instead escalated the war into Cambodia in a rash move that has the gravest implications for the United States.

The Pentagon says the move was "necessary . . . to save American and other free world lives and to strengthen the Vietnamization program." If past experience of both France and the United States in Indochina is any guide, the result is more likely to be just the opposite. The war will be not only widened but prolonged, and casualties will rise.

Diversion of South Vietnamese troops and American support units from the Vietnam conflict almost certainly will slow down, if not reverse, the process of American withdrawal.

"Vietnamization" in Cambodia, where Vietnamese of any persuasion are suspect, will only complicate the political struggle there while it diverts Saigon's energies and resources.

Although an American military spokesman in Saigon has said United States ground troops would not become directly involved in the Cambodian fighting, the American public can have no confidence in such assurances. The Saigon command and the Administration in Washington have been less than candid in the recent past concerning the degree of American involvement in Cambodia, and in Laos before that. If the current American-supported South Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia is necessary to protect American and other "free world forces" in Vietnam, how long will it be before we are told that American troops must move into Cambodia to protect the American advisers and "free world forces" that are now there?

The move into Cambodia is a tragic repetition of the mistakes of the past, a virtual renunciation of the President's promise of disengagement from Southeast Asia and of the principles of the Nixon Doctrine itself.