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Military Hallucination—Again

The assurances that the American-backed South Vietnamese drive into Cambodia is a limited, one-strike operation, an integral part of American operations in Vietnam and designed only to protect American and "free world" forces there, have a familiar and wholly unconvincing ring.

This is the same kind of reassuring rhetoric Americans have heard from their leaders at every stage of this country's long, misguided plunge into the Southeast Asian morass. Time and bitter experience have exhausted credulity of the American people and Congress. Presidential assurances can no longer be accepted in an area where actions, as Mr. Nixon's aides have observed in another context, speak louder than words.

The President's action in sanctioning the South Vietnamese invasion of Cambodian territory, with American advisers and air and other support, goes far beyond the Cambodian policy followed by Mr. Nixon's predecessors, even at times when the predicament of allied forces in Vietnam was far more perilous than anyone would claim it is today.

This latest and largest in a series of allied intrusions onto Cambodian soil which have occurred regularly since the change of government in Phnompenh has far-reaching and serious implications even if the immediate objectives are limited, as the Administration avows.

If reports from Phnompenh that the attack was launched without consultation with the Cambodian Government are true, the strike is a clear breach of Cambodian neutrality, the Geneva Accords and the principles of international law which the Administration has repeatedly cited in connection with the long-known and equally illegal Communist Vietnamese presence on Cambodian soil.

The allied drive into the Parrot's Beak will almost certainly provoke some reaction from Hanoi, and perhaps from Peking, with consequences throughout Southeast Asia that cannot be predicted but which could be fateful. At the very least, new threats to Phnompenh and fresh appeals for further American assistance can be expected.

Whatever he may plead to the contrary, President Nixon has rejected his own Nixon Doctrine in Southeast Asia, escalating a war from which he had promised to disengage. This is not the "new" Nixon who campaigned on a platform pledged to peace. It is more like the old Nixon who as Vice President in 1954 said the United States would have to send troops into Indochina if there were no other way to prevent its fall to the Communists, then on the verge of defeating the French.

Fortunately, now as then, Mr. Nixon's tough approach has produced strong opposition in both houses of Congress, even among some former staunch supporters of his Vietnamization policy. If the President does not promptly pull back from this dangerous adventure, Congress will have to assert its constitutional powers of restraint in the name of a people who have been asked once too often to swallow the military hallucination of victory through escalation.