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Behind the President's Decision

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WASHINGTON, May 1—The full story of President Nixon's decision to invade the enemy sanctuaries in Cambodia has not yet been told here.

Perhaps only the President knows the whole story, for it may turn as much on psychological as on tactical considerations. Something appears to have happened to jolt the President from a mood of confidence about the war to one of anxiety between

News Analysis

the night of Monday, April 20, when he disclosed plans to withdraw 150,000 more troops from Vietnam in a year, and the night of Monday, April 27, when he decided to move into Cambodia.

At the start of that week Mr. Nixon expressed confidence that a just peace was in sight, that the South Vietnamese could learn to defend themselves and that all American combat troops would be brought home. At the end of it he had concluded that the attacks into Cambodia were indispensable to the American withdrawals and that the winning of a just peace was at stake.

The President did say in the first speech that he would take strong steps if enemy action were increased to the jeopardy of American troops, and he explained his decision last night with general references to such increased action over the last two weeks. But the Administration has given only the vaguest indications of what the enemy had done between the speeches that accounted for such a remarkable change in its estimate of the situation.

There was a great deal of conjecture here both inside and outside the Government about the pressures that crowded in on Mr. Nixon in that week. It ran as follows:

Joint Chiefs' Terminology

One main development was the President's speech on April 20, apparently surprising his military commanders with a firm commitment to pull 150,000 more troops out in a year. The commanders had argued for a pause in withdrawals to await developments in Cambodia and Laos.

Mr. Nixon and his advisers decided that a delay in the announcement—such as they attempted last August—would risk a further loss of support

A Jolt in April Seems to Have Erased His Confident Mood

mitment and its implications for American combat power in Indochina a year from now, the Joint Chiefs of Staff appear to have urgently demanded yet another review of their long-standing request to strike into Cambodia. Some are known to have pushed this argument with the most urgent warning of crisis—a word that Mr. Nixon picked up last night.

At that point—only a week ago—the sentiment of senior policy officials still appeared to be running against extensive intervention in Cambodia. They acknowledged the military temptation to strike at the sanctuaries before a pro-Communist regime had a chance to gain power in Cambodia. But they also feared that the short-term profits of invasion would be offset by the long-term risks of having to defend a still larger area against a provoked government in Hanoi.

The military men counseling an urgent campaign to rescue Cambodia were put down in some official quarters as the same counselors who had dragged the nation into costly but vain escalations in the past.

Confusing Operations

At some point in the discussions, the accounts continue, Mr. Nixon appears to have consulted at length with Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, the field commander in Saigon, who has won respect here as a politically astute tactician who understands the tensions on the home front and has adapted tactics to hold down casualties and turn over combat duty to the South Vietnamese.

There are indications that General Abrams, having lost his appeal for a pause in withdrawals, joined the calls for a quick thrust into Cambodia before American combat strength was drawn down any further and while the weather permitted. He appears to have enlisted Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker in his quest; they were the only advisers cited by name by Mr. Nixon last night.

Simultaneously, Mr. Nixon heard news reports from the confusing operations of different political and ethnic military teams in Cambodia. He was told that the North Vietnamese were extending their base en-

Communist China and lesser support from the Soviet Union, was building a new liberation movement for all of Indochina, pledged, among other things, to the restoration of Prince Norodom Sihanouk to power in Cambodia.

There were further indications to confirm the signs that Moscow's earlier interest in arranging negotiations on Indochina was being opposed in Hanoi and Peking.

Then there came confirmation that Soviet pilots had joined in the active defense of central Egypt, threatening a change in the balance of forces between Israel and her Arab neighbors.

Moreover, that venturesome move by Moscow appeared to be another indication that a hard-line faction, led by the General Secretary of the Communist party, Leonid I. Brezhnev, was rising to a position of dominance in the Kremlin, probably in alliance with leading military commanders.

The effect of the developments on Mr. Nixon's hard rhetoric last night and their effect on the Cambodia decision itself is thought to have been considerable.

In explaining his action, the President dealt much more extensively with the "credibility of the United States" throughout the world and his fear of being mistaken for a "pitiful, helpless giant" and a "second rate power" than with the immediate Communist challenges in Southeast Asia.

'From Within and Without'

In passages markedly different from the "low profile" policy that Mr. Nixon outlined earlier this year, he said small nations all over the world were "under attack from within and from without" and that they would lose all confidence in American power if he failed to act now.

Mr. Nixon has long been beset by fears that he would be found wanting by an antagonist in this nuclear age. Some of his advisers have expressed anxiety—as did their predecessors in the Johnson Administration—that division and dissension at home would be misread as weakness.

President Nixon had gone longer into his term of office than either President Kennedy or President Johnson "without some militant demonstration of his resolve to act strongly