

*see Jack Anderson,
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A Confused Capital

Drive Into Cambodia Viewed as Posing Biggest Policy Crisis of Nixon's Rule

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WASHINGTON, May 3 — President Nixon's decision to send troops into Cambodia — and particularly the manner in which it was carried out — has transformed and troubled the spirit of this capital.

Coming on top of Moscow's direct intervention in the air war in the Middle East and Peking's increasingly aggressive policy in South-east Asia, the Cambodian venture is clearly regarded here as the most serious domestic and foreign policy crisis of the Nixon Administration.

There was anxiety here a few weeks ago about the Vietnam war and how it was dividing the nation. Now there is a bitter and ugly spirit, not only because honest men divide on the likely consequences of the latest offensive but because powerful men in Congress and even in President Nixon's own official family feel that the Cambodian decision was reached with undue haste and carried out by deception.

The reason for this feeling is fairly clear. The first news of the big military operation on which United States advisers accompanied South Vietnamese forces into Cambodia, with American air and logistical support, came to Washington not from officials of the Nixon Administration but in an announcement from the South Vietnam Defense Ministry in Saigon.

This was then confirmed not by the President or the Secretary of State, but by an Assistant Secretary of Defense and then by a press spokesman at the White House.

Accordingly, since everybody seems to have been surprised by the sudden lurch into Cambodia except the enemy, the main question here this weekend is not what is happening in Indochina but what is happening in the White House.

There is obviously a change. A few months ago the President was talking about unity at home, consultation and co-operation with Congress and compromise with the Communists on arms control, the Middle East and other critical questions.

But lately he has been challenging the authority of the Senate on his Supreme Court appointments, scolding the college radicals as "bums," attacking such Republicans as Senator George D. Aiken of Vermont, announcing 10 days ago that peace was in sight in Vietnam, and then bombing North Vietnam and entering Cambodia without consultation with Congress or even an invitation from the Cambodian Government.

Anger and Perplexity

The capital is angry about all this on the surface, but underneath it is puzzled and troubled. It cannot understand or explain the events of the last 10 days. It was told a little more than a week ago that peace was in sight at last, that the South Vietnamese were getting military control of their country and that while there were some dangers in Laos and Cambodia, the President felt confident enough to withdraw 150,000 more American servicemen from Vietnam in the next 12 months.

Then, within a week, everything was changed. Last Monday, Secretary of State William P. Rogers, who was regarded as the most candid and objective member of the Cabinet, listened to the warnings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee against giving even major supplies of arms to the Cambodians. The only member of the committee who argued for arms for Cambodia was Senator Gale W. McGee of Wyoming.

Yet two days later, without there having been the slightest suggestion from Mr. Rogers, it was announced that American officers were going to participate as advisers in an offensive by South Vietnamese forces into Cambodia.

The following day, without consultation with the Senate, the President announced that he was sending American combat troops into Cambodia. And the day after that, it was announced by Hanoi, more than 100 American planes bombed North Vietnam. When reporters here tried to obtain information about the raid, they were asked by a top official at the White House not to embarrass the Government by printing the details. *

To add to the confusion, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird warned the North Vietnamese in a public statement that if they responded to the American troop movement into Cambodia by invading South Vietnam across the demilitarized zone, he would recommend the bombing of North Vietnam.

This was followed almost immediately by a statement from the Republican leader of the Senate, Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, to the effect that Secretary Laird was speaking for himself and not announcing policy on behalf of the Administration.

Against this background, the Administration authorized Vice President Agnew and Secretary Rogers to appear on television today and try to explain the latest developments. They denied that Secretary Rogers had willfully misled the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and they dealt with the domestic politics of the Vietnam problem, but they did not deal with the larger world political problem.

President Nixon is up against a difficult situation. Both the Soviet Union and Communist China have gone through political and economic crises at home and they are still going through a savage competition for control of the Communist world.

Brezhnev taking Bolder Line

But lately Leonid I. Brezhnev, the Communist party chief, with the support of the Soviet armed services, has apparently prevailed over Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin, and is now taking a much bolder line in the Middle East. Meanwhile, Chairman Mao Tse-tung has got control of his domestic crisis and is asserting himself in Southeast Asia.

It is this, according to the President's advisers, that Mr. Nixon is now reacting to in Cambodia.

"Small nations all over the world," he said last Thursday, "find themselves under attack from within and from without. If, when the chips are down, the world's most powerful nation—the United States of America—acts like a pitiful, helpless giant, the forces of totalitarianism and anarchy will threaten free nations and free institutions throughout the world. It is not our power but our will and our character that are being tested tonight."

The heart of the political struggle here is not that President Nixon's analysis of the problem is wrong, but that he may be attempting to solve it in the wrong place. He has apparently been convinced, as President Lyndon B. Johnson was before him, that one more military victory—this time in the enemy sanctuaries in Cambodia—would persuade the enemy to make peace. His political opponents, as well as many of his own advisers, think he is wrong.

Enemy Defiance Foreseen

They are afraid that the enemy forces, driven out of the Cambodian refuges, will retreat to other areas elsewhere in Cambodia or in Laos or even in China itself. They think that the more the President seeks to force the Communist world to submit in areas close to its frontiers—especially when he has committed himself to withdraw American troops from Vietnam—the more they will fight and the more weapons Moscow will provide to avoid a Communist surrender.

This is the fundamental argument now in Washington, dividing the parties and even the President's own advisers. He is asserting that one more victory in the Cambodian sanctuaries will force the enemy to negotiate a fair compromise settlement. His opponents do not believe this and they resent his argument that unless they accept his foray into Cambodia, "all other nations will be on notice that despite its overwhelming power, the United States, when a real crisis comes, will be found wanting."

There is general agreement here that the Communist world is now pressing hard in South Asia and in the Middle East, and that it is important to recognize this. The difference—and it is a fundamental difference—is how and where to meet this challenge.

President Nixon is saying that it should be met in Vietnam and Cambodia. He appears to be falling back on the old anti-Communist, anti-intellectual, antiuniversity, antinews-paper and antitelevision line to prove his point, and this is dividing the capital of the United States as it has not been divided since the days of the late Senator Joseph R. McCarthy.