

An Asian Policy for Cambodia

Extension of the Indochina war to Cambodia has been sharply criticized by one of the most important Asian leaders friendly to the United States.

President Suharto of Indonesia startled a White House dinner the other evening when he declared: "We cannot afford just to wait for the sake of peace and stability in Southeast Asia. All efforts should be taken to prevent the war from widening and to insure the preservation of Cambodia's right to sovereignty and neutrality, among other things, by effecting the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Cambodian territory."

The Indonesian leader later made clear that, in calling for the withdrawal of "all foreign forces," he included the South Vietnamese, who have declared their intention to remain on Cambodian soil after the scheduled American withdrawal at the end of June.

President Suharto's opposition to any widening of the Indochina conflict and his emphasis on diplomatic, rather than military, measures to preserve Cambodia's fractured neutrality merit respectful attention because of his position as leader of the largest nation in Southeast Asia as well as his impeccable anti-Communist credentials. President Nixon himself laid great stress on the leadership role he expected Indonesia to play in Asia during his visit to Jakarta last summer shortly after he enunciated his new Asian Doctrine at Guam.

The Suharto remarks gain in significance because they reflect views also expressed in the communiqué of eleven Asian nations which met in Jakarta two weeks ago to discuss the Cambodian problem. It is especially noteworthy that these views are also those of Japan, which shared with Indonesia a principal role in that conference.

If President Nixon's Asian Doctrine is to have meaning he cannot ignore the advice of these important and friendly Asian states which are plainly deeply disturbed by the thrust of recent American actions in their part of the world. Certainly such Asian neighbors as Indonesia, Japan and the Philippines, which has recently turned down a Cambodian request for military aid, can be no less concerned than the United States about the prospects of a North Vietnamese or Communist conquest of Cambodia.

The Jakarta conferees have initiated a broad effort to reinstitute the International Control Commission for Cambodia and to convene a new Geneva Conference on the broader Indochina problem, both directly with former Geneva participants and through the United Nations. If this move could gain enough support from other nations in Asia and Africa and perhaps elsewhere, it might help persuade the reluctant Russians to join Britain in reconvening the Geneva Conference. The United States could give a push in this direction by reconsidering the ill-advised attempt to "save" Cambodia through the use in that country of troops of Cambodia's traditional enemies, South Vietnam and Thailand.