



U.S. Being Dragged Into Cambodia War

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Saigon

WE ARE CROSSING over into the post-war era," President Nguyen Van Thieu said in Saigon the other day. And that comment unwittingly expresses the political cost of Cambodian border operations.

They have induced among the South Vietnamese a mood of euphoria. And in that heady spirit, the Saigon leaders are moving both to rule out a negotiated settlement of their own war and to drag the United States more deeply into the new conflict shaping up in Cambodia.

The basic view of the South Vietnamese leadership is that the invasion of the enemy sanctuaries has pushed the war near a successful conclusion. According to President Thieu, the North Vietnamese forces have suffered such loss and disorganization as a consequence that today they could no longer launch "a serious attack."

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HIS BEST known commander, General Do Cao Tri, told me that "the war is practically over." His prime minister, Tran Thanh Khiem, said that with the completion of hamlet, provincial, and national elections next year, government authority would be extended to the point where the Communists "will lose the war."

Believing themselves close to victory, the South Vietnamese are not inclined towards a compromise settlement with the other side. On the contrary, they are rapidly moving away from the Nixon Administration's offer of a settlement by elections in which the Communists could participate.

But the Saigon leaders are not content merely to slide off the hook on negotiations. They are now pressing the United States to extend to Cambodia the kind of help given the regime here in South Vietnam. President Thieu said that he had impressed upon both Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker and a visiting Presidential fact-finding commission the need for a strong American commitment to Cambodia.

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THIEU HAS said: "You have to decide, yes or no, what kind of help you are going to give to Cambodia. We cannot permit Cambodia to fall under a Communist regime. We have to support the government." According to Thieu, the Cambodian government was not merely a regime headed by Prime Minister Lon Nol. It was, he said in a formula nicely calculated to make a refusal of American support difficult, "the anti-aggression government."

The Nixon administration is obviously trying to resist the pressures for further entanglement in Cambodia. Hence the President's decision to pull out American troops on June 30, and Secretary of State William Rogers' assertions that the United States has no commitment to the Lon Nol regime.

As things now stand, the force of events is dragging the Nixon Administration, in spite of itself, into a commitment to Cambodia and a war that stretches on and on and on. The only good way to avoid that awful entanglement is through a fixed schedule for total withdrawal of American forces at an early date.