



President Can Say Generals Failed

WASHINGTON—President Nixon is telling us today that we are out of Cambodia and that the operation was an enormous success. He is wrong on both counts, but it is exactly what Lyndon Johnson would have told us, and it still remains to be seen whether this war will number another President among its casualties. It is perhaps not fair to say that Mr. Nixon has been Johnsonized, though ever since the Cambodian operation began he has sounded more and more like his predecessor. It would be fairer to say that both men were caught in a situation where they had to shade the truth in order to seem to be strong, and neither was strong enough to resist temptation.

It is, for example, not true that we are out of Cambodia — as Mr. Nixon promised on May 8 we would be. But last week the Pentagon admitted that our Air Force is very much in Cambodia, each "surgical strike" on a village turning Cambodian neutrality into hatred of America.

It is also not true that our air and logistic support for the South Vietnamese will come out, as Mr. Nixon also promised on May 8 that it would.

"That was a silly suggestion from silly people," Vice President Ky has said. He intends to stay.

But these are trivial shadings of the truth, and the President is forced into them because he dare not or cannot bring himself to admit publicly that the Thieu-Ky government, totally paid for by the American taxpayer, is not totally responsible to the American President.

More significant is the shading of the truth about a military victory in Cambodia.

The President points to the supplies we have captured, to the enemy strongholds we have overrun. There may even be talk about enemy casualties, though this is becoming less fashionable as more and more of his countrymen realize the truth of the soldier's plaint, "You can't tell the Gooks from Charlie." And with over 300 Americans dead in Cambodia, it might be wise to wait before talking of "reducing casualties."

But surely Mr. Nixon, himself a veteran of World War II, knows the other side of the story, that since we went into

Cambodia the Communists actually control more of the Cambodian countryside — including the "sanctuaries" themselves — than they bothered to control before.

He knows that the Cambodians, whose villages we have had to burn and whose civilians we have killed, are no longer — if they ever were — allies.

Mr. Nixon knows that as a result of the operation the South Vietnamese are weaker in their own country than they were before.

Yet he says it was a military victory because he has to. Having done that, and doubting as he must the truth of his own words, he must now at last cross that Rubicon which Lyndon Johnson never had to face.

For as his predecessor could not, Mr. Nixon may now say that we have done everything the generals have asked.

Under John Kennedy, we tried massive economic aid and thousands of "advisers"; we tried "strategic hamlets" and counterinsurgency.

Under Mr. Johnson, we tried bombing of military targets and of cities. We rented Asian armies, we gave the generals half a million men for "search and destroy" missions.

We "pacified," we "won the hearts and minds of the people," we wrote a constitution and installed a government, and we kept it in power.

And now, yielding again to the brass, we have invaded the Cambodian sanctuaries. Nothing has worked; communism is stronger throughout Indochina than when we began. The President's time is now running, as Lyndon Johnson's time began to run in 1966.

"I hope never again to take a job with an administration trying to end an unpopular war," one of the President's aides remarked ruefully the other day. Mr. Nixon does not have the same option.