

## An Old Scenario in Cambodia

History is repeating itself in Southeast Asia. The insidious insertion of American military power into Cambodia in support of a faltering regime ominously parallels the events of early 1965 which entrapped the United States in a major war in neighboring Vietnam.

Faced with political instability in Saigon and a deteriorating military situation in the South Vietnamese countryside, the United States Government in January of 1965 ordered air strikes against Communist supply routes in Laos. Senator Wayne Morse warned that we were heading toward a "massive war," but Richard M. Nixon, then a private citizen, said the United States would be "thrown out" of Vietnam if it did not change its strategy. He called for the use of Air Force and Navy planes to interdict Communist supply routes and destroy military staging areas in both Laos and North Vietnam.

On Feb. 7 American carrier-based aircraft bombed and strafed a Vietcong base in North Vietnam. The White House said the attack was a limited one in retaliation for a raid on Pleiku, an American helicopter base in South Vietnam, and that the United States did not seek "a wider war." Three days later Mr. Nixon declared the air strike an inadequate response and called for "day and night" bombing of Communist supply routes.

The bombing of the North was intensified and later that month it was disclosed that United States jet planes and helicopters were giving direct fire support to South Vietnamese ground forces. Mr. Nixon on Feb. 25 proposed that "we use our naval and air power . . . short of atomic weapons . . . to cut off all supplies from North Vietnam to South Vietnam."

On March 8, the first American combat troops, 3,500 Marines, landed at Danang. The Defense Department said their mission was limited to defending United States bases. The United States Ambassador in Saigon said there had been no "fundamental change" in American policy. In a speech on April 2, Richard M. Nixon offered his support for President Johnson's policies in Vietnam.

During the following two months, the Marines were reinforced and were reported in a number of actions against Communist forces. The State Department conceded on June 8 that the President had authorized the American commander in Vietnam to commit his troops to direct combat. But the White House quickly asserted: "There has been no change in the mission of United States ground combat units in Vietnam."

That is the kind of bland assurance the American public is receiving today about Cambodia. But the elements of the 1965 escalation in South Vietnam are all there—the deteriorating local situation, the sharp increase in American air activity, and the beginnings of a wider commitment of ground forces under such deceptive labels as "airborne coordinators," "logistics personnel" and "military equipment delivery teams."

Has the White House learned nothing from the tragic experience that grew out of President Lyndon B. Johnson's rash decisions and private citizen Richard M. Nixon's bad advice just six short years ago?