



Two Big Reasons For Nixon's Gamble

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"THERE WERE 16 good reasons against doing it, and there were only two reasons for doing it. But if you analyzed them, the two reasons for, completely outweighed the 16 against — which were mostly domestic political reasons anyway."

Thus President Nixon himself, concerning his second great Southeast Asian gamble, to support the current, critically significant South Vietnamese drive across the border of Laos. The two reasons that outweighed all the rest in the President's mind can be easily summarized.

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THE FIRST REASON was the need to force the Hanoi war-planners to take the hardest kind of hard new look at their own situation and future prospects. A new look in Hanoi will hardly be avoidable, if the Laos trails are cut in the area around the little town of Tchepone — which is the obvious aim of the big effort now in progress.

The intent, if the operation succeeds, is to keep the trails cut until the full onset of the rainy season in late spring. The big rains always make the Laos trails all but impassable, particularly for serious supply movements, until the dry season begins again. This will be about the beginning of next December.

For ten months, then, about 130,000 North Vietnamese troops and other personnel in Cambodia and southern Laos, will have their unique existing lifeline sev-

ered—if all goes according to plan. These men number rather more than the total of one of North Vietnam's year classes of men reaching military age.

Yet if their unique lifeline is in fact severed as planned, they will get almost no replacements, or ammunition or other military supplies. In South Laos, where virtually no food is locally available, they will also get none of the rations they need from the north. The catastrophic potential should therefore be obvious.

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AS TO THE President's second decisive reason for his gamble, it should also be obvious. It was to leave the South Vietnamese in a solid position to defend their own independence, after the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

There is nothing to prevent the South Vietnamese from cutting the Laos trails next dry season, if they manage to do so this time. In sum, the President has now moved to finish what he began when he invaded the Cambodian sanctuaries.

The great result of the Cambodian operation was to close off the main lifeline of the North Vietnamese invaders of their neighbor countries. This was the sea-borne supply route, running through Sihanoukville and Cambodia.

Untold blood and untold treasure have been wasted, in truth, because the courage to do what President Nixon has done was not found long ago.

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