

The Not-So-Limited War

The barriers to a perilously wider war in Asia are crumbling fast. Last spring, when President Nixon ordered an allied attack against Communist sanctuaries inside the Cambodian border, he denied he was enlarging the war and indicated the "incursions" would be limited in time and space.

Yet today South Vietnamese troops are back in Cambodia in strength, operating at times well beyond border areas in direct support of the threatened government of ailing Premier Lon Nol. American aircraft are giving direct support to the South Vietnamese and Cambodian Government forces.

This week, President Nixon has authorized a South Vietnamese thrust into Laos, also with American air support. Administration officials again deny the war has been enlarged. South Vietnamese President Thieu said the operation would be "limited in time and in space." But Vice President Ky has declared that South Vietnamese forces will remain in the Laotian panhandle at least until May and that they expect to return.

Marshal Ky went on to suggest that an allied thrust into North Vietnam may be necessary to reinforce the Laotian operation. "To be sure to win," he said, "one must realize that at a certain point, one will have to . . . attack the rear bases of the North Vietnamese troops on their own territory."

The candid Mr. Ky may be speaking out of turn. He does not speak for Washington and he may not even speak for Saigon. But his prediction of further escalations of the Indochina conflict is consistent with, and perhaps an inevitable extension of, the narrow military logic that has persistently eroded efforts to keep the Vietnam war within manageable limits.

By yielding to this myopic reasoning, by abandoning even the inadequate restraints imposed by his predecessors, President Nixon is moving along the path fol-

lowed by General MacArthur in Korea when he pushed north to the Yalu, inviting war with China. Extrication from the Vietnam quagmire becomes more remote with each thrust down that road.