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'The Common Denominator'

A Senate Foreign Relations Committee vote to limit economic and military assistance to Cambodia to \$250-million and to put a ceiling of 200 on the number of American civilian and military personnel assigned to that country represents a timid attempt to prevent Cambodia from going the way of Vietnam—too timid, in our view. Like the \$350-million limit on spending in Laos already voted by the full Senate, the proposed Cambodian restriction is too generous to check effectively a deepening United States involvement in what formerly were fringe areas of the Indochina conflict.

Last year, when the Administration was seeking \$136-million in additional military aid for Cambodia, Secretary of State Rogers told a House Committee that Washington had turned down a request from Pnompenh for \$400 million in assistance because "we recognized that if we complied . . . we might have had to establish a large American presence to go along with the aid. We were concerned that we would be gradually sucked into greater and greater involvement as we had been in Vietnam and finally would be pressured into extensive use of ground forces."

This year the Administration is seeking \$341 million for Cambodia. Some \$200 million of this would serve as the first installment on a grandiose Pentagon scheme to expand Cambodia's military and paramilitary forces by 1977 to 500,000 men—nearly one-half of the male population of that tiny country of seven million. The generals, evidently ignoring lessons from Vietnam, are eager to start all over again in Cambodia where the prospects for success are even more dubious than they were in Vietnam.

The record of the past eighteen months should serve as warning to Congress against being "sucked in" further by Pentagon schemes that exceed the wildest expectations of Cambodia's military leaders only a year ago. Since American and South Vietnamese troops intervened to eliminate Communist sanctuaries and protect Cambodia's "neutrality," Communist forces have overrun large areas of the country, which has become another battle zone in an expanded Indochina war. Although the Cambodian Army already has been expanded from 30,000 to 180,000 men, the regime in Pnompenh is largely dependent on hated South Vietnamese troops and destructive American air power for its precarious survival.

The people of Cambodia, as Senator Mansfield has observed, have been "reduced to the common denominator of irrelevant devastation which has been suffered in Laos and Vietnam."

The Administration's plan to continue military aid to the Cambodian Government on a rising scale can only be seen as part of a broader scheme to perpetuate the Indochina conflict indefinitely, attempting to achieve with American air power and indigenous troops of doubtful determination and skill what could not be achieved with over half a million American fighting men.

This reversion on a broader scale to the mistakes of the early 1960's can only bring further suffering to the people of Cambodia and their neighbors and fresh disasters for the United States. It is time Congress put teeth into its plea for a negotiated settlement in Indochina by refusing to provide additional funds for military schemes that would serve only to perpetuate and expand the conflict. All moves to end the war would be strengthened by favorable House action next week on the Mansfield Amendment to the military procurement bill, calling for withdrawal of all American military forces from Indochina within six months, contingent on the release of American prisoners of war. Administration moves to enlarge the United States commitment in Cambodia add to the already formidable arguments in favor of such House action.