

Nixon vs. Congress on Vietnam

President Nixon has set himself against a majority in Congress and the nation with his curt rejection of a Congressional declaration that it is "the policy of the United States" to withdraw all of its military forces from Indochina "at the earliest practicable date . . . subject to the release of all American prisoners of war."

The President may be constitutionally correct in choosing to ignore what is essentially a nonbinding amendment to the military procurement authorization bill. But he has made a grievous political error in slapping down a responsible Congressional offer to share with him the heavy burden of extricating this nation from a costly and still perilous blunder by the best available means. By defying the will of Congress thus moderately expressed, Mr. Nixon invites more drastic measures to curb a Presidential policy that points toward new American disasters in Southeast Asia.

That policy as defined by the President and his aides in recent days repeats mistakes of the past. While spurning opportunities for a negotiated settlement in Paris, the Administration indicates an intention to pursue the illusion of military victory in Indochina through continuing unqualified support for the present Saigon regime. This support will include, according to the President's recent statement, not only vast sums of money and material, but a "residual force" of American ground troops and massive American air power for an indefinite period.

The Nixon policy condemns American prisoners of war to interminable internment. It places the slowly dwindling "residual force" in increasing peril of being overwhelmed by a still powerful enemy. It subjects the long-suffering peoples of Indochina to continuing terror and bloodshed, including the tragic civilian casualties which are the inescapable consequence of the wholesale use of air power.

The fresh dangers into which the Nixon policy is leading the nation is dramatically demonstrated by the current battle in Cambodia, where American helicopter gunships are engaged in close support of beleaguered Cambodian forces fighting only ten miles from their capital at Phnompenh. This new direct American involvement in a widened conflict is only a portent of things to come if the President persists on his present course.