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The Cambodian Model

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President Nixon last fall described Cambodia as a model recipient of United States assistance—running at about one-third of a billion dollars a year—under his new foreign policy. “Cambodia is the Nixon Doctrine in its purest form,” the President told a news conference. Some model.

Last December, Cambodia’s rapidly over-expanded army suffered a series of shattering defeats along vital Highway 6 leading north from the capital at Pnompenh. Last week the “model” country’s fragile political structure collapsed as its leader Lon Nol abruptly dismissed a constituent assembly, scrapping a constitution that was nearing completion. Lon Nol’s seizure of absolute power—as president, prime minister, chief of state and commander in chief of the armed forces—is a symptom of widespread discontent which his arbitrary actions are more likely to aggravate than assuage.

Since United States and South Vietnamese forces first intervened in Cambodia two years ago, large areas of the country have been overrun by the Communists who have already returned to the border sanctuaries from which they were initially dislodged. An estimated one-third of the population has been made homeless by allied and Communist military action. Precious art objects apparently have been pilfered from the national treasure, the historic ruins at Angkor, which is now in Communist hands and threatened with combat damage. Corruption is said to be rife in Pnompenh and throughout the inflated army. The rich are fleeing the country, taking their fortunes with them.

If this is the Nixon Doctrine in action, Cambodians and others who observe what is happening in that miserable Southeast Asian land may well decide they want none of it. Congress, too, will want to take a hard look at the Cambodian model as it considers a new \$2.15-billion military aid request the Administration submitted yesterday to support the President’s new policies.