

# A Successful Operation

## ABROAD AT HOME

By Anthony Lewis

BOSTON, Feb. 5—Last December, just before it recessed, Congress put a ceiling of \$275 million on military aid for Cambodia in the current fiscal year. The act used unusually firm language, prohibiting spending beyond the ceiling for "any operation, project or program of any kind, or for providing any goods, supplies, materials, equipment, services, personnel or advisers. . . ."

Six weeks later, the Administration is back asking for more: an additional \$222 million in military aid for Cambodia, almost as much as the amount just fixed by Congress for the whole year. And although the figure is not yet generally known, the Administration wants another \$425 million in military aid for the next fiscal year, starting July 1.

Philip Habib, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, told a House Appropriations subcommittee the other day that the added money was essential—to save the Lon Nol regime in Cambodia, and with it American credibility. The world is watching to see what we do in Cambodia, he said.

Mr. Habib is a skillful and experienced diplomat, and he made a good witness. But his case for more aid—the argument of military need and U.S. credibility—can be convincing only if one is oblivious to very recent history. It is crucial to look at the record: the record of American words and action, and the results in Cambodia.

### 1. The Words

Overt U.S. involvement in Cambodia began with the "incursion" announced by President Nixon on April 30, 1970. Mr. Nixon said his purpose was not to "expand the war into Cambodia" but to hit North Vietnamese sanctuaries. If he had not acted, he said, "the credibility of the United States would be destroyed," and we would seem "like a pitiful helpless giant."

On June 3, 1970, Mr. Nixon pronounced the incursion "the most successful operation of this long and difficult war." He gave assurance that the U.S. was not undertaking a long-term military role in Cambodia. After July 1, he said, the only American military activity in Cambodia would be "air missions" against the Vietnamese Communists' movement of men and supplies—and then only when necessary to protect "the lives and security of our forces in South Vietnam."

On June 30 Mr. Nixon repeated that assurance. He added that there would be "no U.S. advisers with Cambodian

units." And, finally, he said the U.S. would give military aid to Cambodia "in the form of small arms and relatively unsophisticated equipment."

In a television interview the next day, July 1, 1970, Mr. Nixon spoke of what the incursion had done for Cambodia. "Cambodia's chances of surviving as a neutral country are infinitely better," he said, "than they were on April 30."

### 2. The Actions

American military activity in Cambodia after July 1, 1970, was not limited to air missions against Vietnamese forces, or limited to the purpose of protecting U. S. troops in South Vietnam. There was a massive intervention from the air in the Cambodian civil war—bombing that continued after all American forces left Vietnam in 1973, until Congress stopped it.

Aid was not limited to "small arms and relatively unsophisticated equipment," nor were military advisers kept out. Congress eventually legislated a ban on advisers, but current reports from Cambodia make plain that American diplomats and others still play a critical role in advising, if not directing, Lon Nol's tactics.

The United States has spent nearly \$7 billion thus far on bombs in and aid to Cambodia: More than 250,000 tons of bombs were dropped on Cambodia, and at the known rates for the Indochina air war that would have cost roughly \$5 billion. And aid to Lon Nol has totaled \$1.85 billion to date.

### 3. The Results

The civil war has raged on for five more years, with human results that are heart-rending even by the standards of war in Indochina.

Some 700,000 Cambodians have been killed or wounded. That is 10 per cent of the population: the equivalent in the United States of 20 million casualties. According to estimates by the Senate Refugee subcommittee, 3,389,000 Cambodians have been made homeless by the war. That is nearly half the population.

As for the Lon Nol regime, its chances of survival have never been worse than they are now, after five years of American assistance. It is a Government without political will, corrupted almost to the point of disintegration, hanging on in Phnom Penh and a few other towns only because of American subvention.

Can anyone who looks at that record believe that American intervention has helped the people of Cambodia? Would more intervention be likely to bring them peace, or Asia political stability? Yet those are the arguments that Congress is being asked to accept, just a month or two after setting a limit to the tragedy of American intervention in Cambodia.

The operation was "most successful," but the patient is dying.