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# The Cambodian-Bloodbath Debate

By Donald Kirk

Our national leader has forecast an "unbelievable horror show," and his opponents have adduced opinions and facts to show it isn't true—that there will not be any semblance of a "bloodbath" if Communist forces win in Cambodia and then in Vietnam. The dialogue resembles a shouting match in which one man accuses the other of lying, and neither has the final evidence to prove his point.

Yet, in a very short time the evidence may emerge—in the form of a "bloodbath" if President Ford is right about the consequences of Congressional refusal to provide aid for Cambodia.

Or, if some of his critics are right, then the Khmer Rouge after having conclusively defeated the Cambodian Army militarily will seek only to install their own peaceful rule in the central seat of power, thus solidifying the hold they have already gained over most of the countryside.

Regardless of the "right" or "wrong" of the bloodbath debate, however, one point emerges more clearly than any other—that the United States should seek to negotiate a surrender that will insure, as much as is possible, no chance of a bloodbath and, at the same time, forestall further fighting and killing of the nonbloodbath variety.

(Since the term "bloodbath" first came into vogue in the Indochinese conflict, no one seems to have applied it to the war itself—only to the possible consequences of ending the war.)

The President, while reiterating the bloodbath theory, should make the final concession in Cambodia by declaring that the United States now is

prepared not only to cut off aid but to assist in the orderly transfer of power to the Khmer Rouge.

The only reason for continuing to proffer any aid at all should be to shore up an interim structure in Phnom Penh and other enclaves until completion of the transition to Khmer Rouge authority. The departure on Tuesday of President Lon Nol and Premier Long Boret provides the perfect pretext, if any were needed, for a clear, public offer of negotiations leading to surrender.

To charges that such a radical departure from previous policy would amount to "betrayal" of our "ally," the only answer can be that we have no choice. The American people have clearly demonstrated their will, not only through polls but through Congress as well.

Yet, a White House or State Department analyst might respond, is it conceivable that the United States can negotiate a surrender? Would the Khmer Rouge hierarchy, ranging from the titular chief of state, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, residing in Peking, to the de facto leader, Khieu Samphan in Cambodia, consider talks of any kind? In view of the frequent refusal of the Khmer Rouge to negotiate at all, the question is legitimate.

One must ask, however, whether any American leader has approached the backers of the Khmer Rouge, notably the Soviet Union and China, with a declaration of intent to surrender.

So far all the "peace" offers emanat-

ing from Phnom Penh have essentially been demands for a cessation of the fighting—something the Khmer Rouge clearly has no intention of doing so long as it keeps on winning. It does not help to accuse the Khmer Rouge of all manner of crimes, of seeking to enforce dictatorial rule, of failure to win the support of the peasantry, many of whom have fled Khmer Rouge regions when they had the chance.

The reality, regardless of the right or wrong, is that the Khmer Rouge has the leadership and the weapons. The American obligation, at this point, is not to encourage endless conflict, with the inevitability of more prolonged suffering and dying, by supplying stopgap infusions of aid. The United States, beyond recognizing the realities, must now acknowledge defeat, whatever the underlying causes, and then sue for orderly surrender. It is the only "way out."

Far from vainly attempting to persuade Moscow and Peking to scale down arms shipments or to dissuade North Vietnam from relaying them to the Khmer Rouge, American officials should admit the utter futility of any tactic other than that of yielding—quickly if not gracefully.

It may be the only way to prevent the "bloodbath" so often predicted by Washington. And, if applied successfully in Cambodia, the formula of orderly but definitive surrender may prove the only viable "way out" of South Vietnam as well.

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