

WXPost

JUL 16 1973

THE WASHINGTON POST, MO

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## The Cambodian Trap

Some of the more experienced members of Congress are beginning to suspect that Mr. Nixon has once again set a trap for them in seeming to go along on the resolution cutting off on Aug. 15 any further bombing of Indochina.

The President is a very resourceful politician and, as will soon be seen, he still has some cards to play in the continuing fight with Congress over ending all U.S. military action in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Congress, if it isn't alert, will end up providing Mr. Nixon with the alibi he needs for failing to achieve "peace with honor" in Indochina.

When the President earlier vetoed the first congressional ban on bombing, the Senate and House threatened to renew the ban by amending other bills, which, if also vetoed by Mr. Nixon, would have brought the government to a halt. So his agents on Capitol Hill put over a last-minute compromise ban calling for termination of bombing on Aug. 15 instead of instantly.

Some of the more trusting legislators thought they had finally cornered Mr. Nixon and reestablished the constitutional warmaking powers of Congress. Well, they did show some backbone for a change, but the fight isn't over yet.

By selling the Aug. 15 compromise, the President avoided an immediate showdown, which he could ill afford on the heels of John Dean's Watergate testimony. Second, he got a breather for more, but probably futile, negotiations. Finally, and more importantly, the deal gives him time to set up Congress for the blame if the Communists take over Cambodia, as now seems inevitable.

Mr. Nixon has already laid the groundwork for this by warning that a ban on the bombing "would cripple or destroy the chances for an effective negotiated settlement in Cambodia, and the withdrawal of all North Vietnamese troops. . . ." He asserts "we are now involved in concluding the last element" of a Cambodian settlement. "It would be nothing short if tragic," he laments, "if this great accomplishment, bought with the blood of so many Asians and Americans, were to be undone now by congressional action."

So we are back again to the arcane diplomacies that Mr. Nixon and Henry

Kissinger specialize in. Stories are being leaked that "diplomatic irons are in the fire," although the spokesman can't "provide details." We are also assured that "this is not an administration flimflam job."

Yet, the man the United States must deal with, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the former Cambodian chief of state, swears it is. The prince denies that either his government in exile in Peking or the Khmer Rouge resistance leaders inside Cambodia are engaged in any negotiations. He also says, "We will not be bombed to our knees, and we will never go to the negotiating table."

In Washington, the line is that Mr. Nixon and Kissinger are secretly dealing with Moscow, Peking and Hanoi in the hope that they will bring Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge rebels into line and force them to settle with the Lon Nol government in Phnom Penh.

A few weeks from now, as the Aug. 15 deadline nears, Americans will be told again that "extremely delicate

negotiations" are near fruition, and their success will be jeopardized if the pressure of more bombing is removed.

Melvin Laird, the new White House adviser, has already warned that "if 45 days are not enough, the President will return to Congress and ask for further (bombing) authority." Meanwhile, the administration will educate the public further on who is to blame if the Aug. 15 deadline is not extended and Cambodia later falls to the rebels.

The contention, of course, will be that Mr. Nixon would have delivered "peace with honor" had not Congress stripped him of his bombing bargaining chip. In the past, the threat of this charge has been enough to keep Congress, especially the House, in line, but as of now it appears that the President may have cried wolf once too often.

Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.), for instance, accused Mr. Nixon of using the word "Communist" as a "scare tactic" in his veto of the first ban on bombing. "Just who are these Communists?" the senator asked. "Can they be the Communists so frequently toasted last week (during the Leonid Brezhnev visit) and whose flags were officially flown throughout Washington?"

Prince Sihanouk admits "Mr. Nixon is very shrewd." He accuses the President of "deceiving the world many times, and the Congress, too." If Congress, the prince adds, "can help us have peace by obliging Mr. Nixon to disengage, it is possible, even probable, that the Cambodia of tomorrow can be reconciled with the United States."

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