

Letters to the Editor

Nixon Doctrine on Cambodia

To the Editor:

The recent expansion of U.S. military operations in Cambodia serves to vindicate the position of Eqbal Ahmed and Richard Falk (letter Jan. 3)* that President Nixon has grossly exceeded the publicly stated degree of American involvement in Cambodia.

By the same token, John Lofton Jr.'s defense of the President's military policies (Jan. 17)* is a perfect illustration of the specious reasoning which has characterized the previous Administration and the present one.

The American public has always assumed that President Nixon's frequent warnings to the North Vietnamese meant that increased action by them would lead to retaliatory strikes against North Vietnam itself. But Mr. Lofton's broad application of retaliatory strikes to the Cambodian situation actually amounts to a new Nixon doctrine: that guerrilla successes in Cambodia now will result in punitive air raids against Cambodian targets.

We regard this new rationalization for our aggressive bombing of Cambodia an escalation in our Government's strategy of deception, completely at variance with the sense and spirit of Nixon's eight warnings to the North Vietnamese. [Editorial Jan. 21.]

More important, as the report of the U.S. Senate subcommittee on refugees (September 1970) reveals, these bombings in Cambodia have already produced one million refugees. Thus, the

true nature of the air strikes is not primarily as "air support." Instead, they repeat the destructive policy of saturation raids—on villages inhabited primarily by civilians—which has produced a cumulative total of six million refugees in South Vietnam, to say nothing of two million casualties and one million deaths.

Hence, the policy which Mr. Lofton vigorously defends is one which involves two grave war crimes—one, a violation of Hague Convention IV, Article 25, which prohibits the bombing of undefended villages, and two, a violation of Geneva Convention, Article 3.1 (1949), which forbids the killing or degrading treatment of "persons taking no active part in the hostilities."

We perceive in President Nixon's latest escalation a descent further into a maelstrom strikingly similar to that of Vietnam—with the same inexorable logic of increased military efforts to offset the harmful consequence of the previous increase. At the same time, we perceive a growing reliance by the Administration on duplicity, false optimism and sophistry. These strategies must eventually collapse in a country most of whose people, as Lyndon Johnson discovered, cannot be fooled all of the time.

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