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It's A New War

by O. EDMUND CLUBB

IN HIS REPORT of June 30, President Nixon affirmed that the U.S.-South Vietnamese military action in Cambodia had accomplished the destruction of enemy base areas along the Cambodian-South Vietnam frontier, with the capture of much military booty and the infliction of heavy manpower losses on the foe. The operation, he said, "should enhance the prospects for a just peace." The fast reader was permitted to infer that "Operation Total Victory" had advanced the program for withdrawal of U.S. forces from the war in Asia.

That partisan report naturally did not tell the whole story. The Cambodian operation was directly related to earlier events in Laos. There, in the early fall of 1969, the United States in one of its little-advertised operations seized upon an "opportunity" to give massive air support to Royal Lao forces in an offensive against the Pathet Lao on the Plaine des Jarres, to tip the balance against the rebels. There was the usual first "victory." But the Pathet Lao staged a counter-attack, and by March 1970 they had restored the *status quo ante,* and their drive was continuing. In neighboring Cambodia, North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces occupied "sanctuaries" bordering on South Vietnam, but the occupancy was based upon an understanding which kept the Communist guest forces on their good behavior *as regards Cambodia,* and preserved that country from hostile action. Prince Norodam Sihanouk had kept his country modestly neutral.

Prince Sihanouk was abroad at the moment. On March 13, the day he left Paris for Moscow and Peking with the reputed intent of trying to enlist Russian and Chinese support for an attempt to reduce the size of Communist forces in Cambodia, Premier Lon Nol at Pnom Penh chose—and who can say where the inspiration might have come from?—to call upon the Communist forces in the eastern border areas to leave the country within forty-eight hours. The demand was practically impossible of satisfaction even by troops that might choose to leave heavy equipment and supplies behind them, and evidenced an intent to force the issue, not to seek compromise. Then, on March 18, Lon Nol deposed Prince Sihanouk as Chief of State.

The development in Laos had demonstrated an American readiness to expand the American sphere of influence, by the exercise of military force, as occasion might offer. The Cambodian events had all the earmarks of a flanking operation in circumstances where the Laotian enterprise had turned sour. It would have been only natural for Southeast Asian revolutionaries to conclude that the handwriting they saw on the wall was—American. Their answer to the moves was given at a conference held April 24-25 on Chinese soil, near the Indochina border, under the leadership of Prince Sihanouk, with North Vietnam Premier Pham Van Dong, National Liberation Front President Nguyen Huu Tho, and Pathet Lao chieftain Prince Souphanouvong in attendance. In a joint declaration, the conferees condemned "American imperialism," announced an engagement to render each other mutual aid, and proclaimed their objectives as comprising "independence, peace, neutrality, and the interdiction of the presence of foreign troops and military bases on their territory." Laos and Cambodia, together with Vietnam, had become integral parts of the theater of war.

It was against that background that, on April 30, the American and South Vietnamese forces invaded Cambodia.

The enemy forces did indeed suffer losses of men and supplies as a result of the military incursion, but that gain was quite outweighed by debits in the political ledger. The American action destroyed the last vestiges of Cambodia's frail neutrality—which had been of some advantage to the United States as well as to the rebel Vietnamese. The war had been widened; it had probably also been lengthened. The invasion had aroused Cambodian nationalism—in opposition to foreign power. In the larger theater, the revolutionaries of the new united front were consolidated in their alliance. And the aims of the revolutionaries had become such as could not be met by the Thieu-Ky duo at Saigon, Prince Souvanna Phouma of Laos, and General Lon Nol of Cambodia. As André Fontaine, writing in *Le Monde,* described the situation, there now existed in the former Indochina federation a triple civil war, with the United States engaged on the side of governments incapable of holding out by themselves against armed revolt. The United States, by the Cambodian invasion, had automatically acquired additional clients to protect.

There were fresh economic charges on the United States as well. The two months' operation in Cambodia had shattered that part of the economy on which the country depended primarily for its foreign exchange—and particularly the rubber-producing sector. Cambodia's small factories and processing plants, and the tourist trade as well, had been hard hit. The American intervention made Cambodia economically and militarily dependent upon the United States. Washington, after rushing $7.9 million in military

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supplies to the Lon Nol regime, was soon found drafting plans for an additional $50 million program of military aid for Cambodia in the new fiscal year.

The cost of supporting our chief Southeast Asian dependency, South Vietnam, had also automatically increased. A strong force of the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) remained behind in Cambodia after the June 30 deadline for U.S. troop withdrawals, with the intent to stay as long as "necessary." But there were new costs to be met, at a time when Saigon was already facing an economic crisis. By July it was being speculated that President Nixon would ask Congress to increase, by some $100 million, the $366 million in support assistance requested for South Vietnam for fiscal year 1971. This is in addition to our projected expenditure of $6.2 billion over the next five years on ARVN itself. "Vietnamization" does not come cheaply. And, while waiting for the Vietnamization program to bear the expected fruits, the United States is still called upon to pay out $20-plus billions annually for the direct costs of the Southeast Asian War.

And then, there are Laos, and South Korea, and Thailand.

On the basis of President Nixon's Guam Doctrine, Washington naturally hoped that such "allies" as the Thais and South Koreans, and perhaps other Asians, would come to the aid of the Pnom Penh regime because some of them now, for a price paid by the United States, help prop up the American puppet regime at Saigon. At a meeting of Asian nations at Djakarta in mid-May, and in the annual Allied Nations Ministerial Conference held at Saigon at the beginning of July, moves to that end were initiated; but they proved fruitless. The Seoul regime is currently engaged in complaining bitterly over a projected reduction of the U.S. garrison in South Korea. The Thais, who were paid handsomely by the United States for one division of troops provided for the "common cause" in Vietnam, have shown notable reluctance to engage themselves in an undertaking for which there is *no* pay. It appears probable that the only "other Asians" in the Cambodia picture will be the Saigonese (governed by political ambitions which may or may not coincide with our own), and such mercenaries as we may be able to hire. The war in Cambodia, too, is American.

Secretary of State Rogers attended the unfruitful Saigon conference. As he returned to Washington with his Asian tour behind him, *New York Times* correspondent Tad Szulc reported that the Secretary was expected to inform President Nixon that the United States had to brace itself for a protracted war in Southeast Asia. The reasoning underlying such a position would appear sound: our Asian "allies" have evidently decided against shouldering the main burden of the American war on revolution, at a time when the revolutionary forces have been notably strengthened. Then, there is an additional prime factor in the equation: China had come closer to the revolutionaries as a result of the developments in Laos and Cambodia.

Mao Tse-tung views himself as master, even creator, of the doctrine of protracted war; and China has traditionally regarded Southeast Asia as falling primarily within its sphere of interest. Peking's strategy with respect to Southeast Asia had been based upon the assumption that, if China refrained from direct military support of the Vietnamese revolutionaries, the United States would advance no threat against China itself. So the Maoist leadership preached protracted warfare to Hanoi and the National Liberation Front, but restricted its aid to the supply of munitions and of engineering troops to help maintain North Vietnam's communications system under American bombing.

And yet, there was the underlying fact that the American strategy in Asia aims ultimately at the "containment" of China. Peking, even as Hanoi, the Pathet Lao, and Prince Sihanouk, was thus logically driven to view the recent developments in Southeast Asia as evidence of expanding American objectives. The menace to China's national security was clear enough: The levering of Laos, in particular, into the American camp would advance American military controls, even if they were indirect, to the very border of China; and landlocked Laos' fate was linked to that of Cambodia to the south.

It was therefore of especial significance that not only did China play host to the April 24-25 conference of revolutionary Indochinese delegations, but Chinese Premier Chou En-lai on that occasion presided over a banquet for China's guests and delivered a speech in which he vowed that the Chinese nation would fight shoulder to shoulder with the three Indochinese peoples in the common struggle against American imperialism. Three days later, on April 28, the Chinese government broadcast an official warning to the United States to the same general effect. China had formally associated itself with the revolutionary struggle in Indochina.

The American incursion of April 30 into Cambodia intervened. But Peking did not draw back. On May 4, the Chinese and North Korean governments issued parallel declarations in which they committed themselves to support of the Indochinese revolutionaries. The Chinese statement charged that the American action constituted a "provocation" to China as well as to the Indochinese peoples, and effectively reiterated the pledge of a week earlier. Then, on May 20, Chinese Communist Chairman Mao Tse-tung issued a personal declaration condemning the U. S. invasion of Cambodia.

Mao, indeed, seemingly dulled the

point of his declaration by giving it broad application and voicing support for not only the Indochinese countries but other countries "in their revolutionary struggles against United States imperialism and its lackeys." That proclamation, joined with the Peking government's statements of April 28 and May 4, nevertheless patently bore a significance over and above the usual Peking propaganda blasts: clearly, China had at least undertaken to provide increased support to the Indochinese revolutionaries.

A protocol was signed at Peking on May 25 which provided for the delivery by China of an undisclosed amount of supplementary economic and military aid to North Vietnam in 1970. And on June 6, Prince Sihanouk in a broadcast interview stated that China was loaning him money for support of his government-in-exile and providing, gratis, arms and transport for his undertaking to overthrow the Lon Nol regime. China was increasing its involvement in what it obviously regarded as a protracted war to expel the United States, in the first stage, from Southeast Asia. Peking's ultimate objective in that protracted war is to force withdrawal of the American military presence from all Asia, thus relieving China of the pressures of "containment" on the sea side. The Maoist commitment to that policy cannot easily be altered, or even reduced.

There was a notable feature in the Chinese stance with regard to Southeast Asia: excepting the association with North Korea, China still maintained an independent stand instead of associating itself with the Communist community generally, or the Soviet Union in particular.

The Sino-Soviet treaty of alliance of 1950, with ten years still to run, would not apply in case China were involved in a war originating in Southeast Asia. Mao Tse-tung would presumably like to borrow the Soviet shield for China's protection during the period of danger ahead. But the attainment of that aim would be difficult. During the period from the beginning in 1963 of open polemics between China and the Soviet Union down to October 1969, when negotiations began at Peking with the aim of resolving issues between the two, Moscow had publicly manifested a readiness for restoration of friendly relations with the "fraternal" Chinese power. Even in April of this year, Soviet Communist Party chieftain Leonid Brezhnev was found stating that "we will do everything possible to normalize state relations with the Chinese People's Republic." But Peking's bargaining stance seemingly remained inflexible during the negotiations from October onwards, and as late as April 22, on the centenary of Lenin's birth, official publicity organs at Peking published an article characterizing the Soviet regime as "a dictatorship of fascist type," and charging again that the actions of the "Soviet revisionists" in Europe, Southeast Asia, the Near East, and with respect to Japan, proved collusion with "American imperialism." The impasse between the two Communist powers thus continued down to the date when the American intervention in Cambodia transformed the Vietnam struggle into a new war.

The Cambodian development doubtless resulted in a Soviet reassessment of the situation. It is reported (without official confirmation) that, when Soviet negotiator Vasili Kuznetsov returned to Peking in early May to resume his discussion of border problems with the Chinese, he carried with him a Soviet proposal for the coordination of aid rendered by the two powers to the revolutionary forces in Indochina against "imperialism." But Soviet policy at this juncture would obviously have been framed to fit the Soviet Union's national interests first and foremost. After the Cambodian invasion, any Soviet proposal for collaboration would at best have been accompanied by conditions unpalatable to the Chinese. Moscow would in all logic have insisted upon having a full share in both strategic planning and political operations, which would in the end have spelled *Soviet* restrictions on policies designed by Peking to serve the *Chinese* national interest first and foremost. Besides, Moscow would have demanded a large share of any political fruits—even though the harvest were reaped in Asia.

Peking has refused collaboration with the Communist world with respect to the Vietnam War in the past; and the evidence indicates that if Moscow, in fact, this time again proposed collaboration, the movement was rebuffed by Peking. On May 18, *Pravda* published a strong attack on the Chinese leadership, charging that Peking, by its actions, was demonstrating "that it does not intend to take concerted actions with the U.S.S.R. and other socialist countries against imperialist aggression." On June 5, the Soviet foreign affairs weekly *New Times* charged the Maoist leadership with endeavoring to assert Chinese domination over South and Southeast Asia and voiced a warning, presumably intended for the attention of Asian revolutionaries, that Peking's adventurist tactics, then being pressed upon "some segments of the Communist and national liberation movements in Southeast Asia," threatened disaster for those movements. The military detente on the long common border of China and the Soviet Union persists; but political collaboration has not yet been resumed.

Some observers have suggested that

Moscow is jealous because Peking has now seized the initiative and come out to act as vanguard of the revolution in Southeast Asia. This does not necessarily follow. The Soviet Union is in the enviable position of being uninvolved directly in a situation where its two chief competitors move toward open conflict. While the United States and China strive to win ascendancy over each other in Southeast Asia, in an essentially military confrontation, the Soviet Union is left free to maneuver politically, and to benefit from the mistakes of others. Peking perhaps now truly believes (instead of simply playing make-believe as heretofore) that war with the United States is impending. The major political forces operative over the longer term in fact thrust the United States and China toward such a war. Where Peking had proposed in its earlier strategy to "sit on a mountaintop and watch the tigers [the U.S.S.R. and U.S.A.] fight," China itself is in the end found facing the other tiger. The Soviet Union, for its part, occupies a comfortable mountaintop. There seems to be no good reason why it should choose to come down.

"Minor" events upon occasion have major consequences—a truism which sometimes seems to escape Washington. What began in 1961 as our private "counter-insurgency" operation, in due course became a Vietnam War of monstrous proportions. Now, as a result of the thrust last year at the Pathet Lao position on the Plaine des Jarres and Lon Nol's "clever" overthrow of Prince Sihanouk the following March, the United States is found engaged in an even bigger war that risks a direct conflict between itself and China, with neither supported by other major world forces. That war in Southeast Asia is destined to continue, and to grow larger, for so long as the Indochinese revolutionaries find greater promise of attaining their ends through protracted warfare than in political negotiations dominated by Saigon's veto power; or until such time, by hypothesis, as the U.S. Congress may force an end to the war—even if it be deemed "lost." A protracted Sino-American confrontation does indeed appear to bear grave dangers for the two major antagonists—and, not least, for the Indochinese peoples involved.