

May 4, 1970

The military situation in Indochina is serious and escalating rapidly. The American invasion of Cambodia is the biggest single action of the war. There are now approximately 32,000 allied combat troops in Cambodia, and probably 300,000 support troops. Bombing raids over Laos have increased from an average of several thousand sorties per month before Nixon took office to an average of 20,000 sorties per month since January. Most Laotian peasants live in caves and attempt to farm only at night, as their villages have been completely destroyed. This massive bombing is directed against the Pathet Lao, an indigenous revolutionary movement that numbers at most a million people and controls two-thirds of the territory of Laos. Noam Chomsky points out that, "the population of the Pathet Lao find it increasingly difficult to fight a people's war with fewer and fewer people." (N.Y. Review of Books, Jan. 1, 1970). The bombing of North Vietnam has resumed; as of May 1, 120 American planes bombed population centers there. Having failed to win over the populations in Southeast Asia, America now is attempting to combat people's war by eliminating the people.

Indigenous Forces

This article attempts to analyze 1) what led up to this dramatic escalation, 2) the options available to Nixon and, 3) possible scenarios for the future.

While Nixon and the American government have tried to make the American people think that the war is being de-escalated through staggered troop withdrawals, and that a compromise negotiated settlement is possible, the reality is quite different. The expanded air war and the invasion of Cambodia make it clear that the war is escalating. Negotiated compromise is impossible because the main point of conflict between America and the Viet Cong is over whether the U.S. will maintain a military presence in Vietnam. Either America will win the war, remain in Vietnam and control Indochina militarily or it will lose the war and be forced to withdraw. No compromise is possible.

Nixon's April 30 speech was a clear statement of his intention to win the war in Indochina. This objective was implicitly stated in his November 3 speech, and the intensified bombing of South Vietnam and Laos have existed since the day he took office. All along Nixon has sought to combine political expediency and deception at home with military victory abroad. Unfortunately for him the war has not gone well. The Pathet Lao controls most of Laos; the Viet Cong controls most of South Vietnam. The Tet offensive of 1968 demonstrated clearly that Johnson's pacification program in the countryside was a complete failure. It became clear that the U.S. could not control the South Vietnamese population without the constant presence of occupation forces in the thousands of villages. This was a practical impossibility because of the sheer

magnitude of troops that would have to be employed in such an operation.

The other alternative which had been pursued partially for some time, but has become the dominant policy under Nixon is the policy of forced urbanization. Large number of Vietnamese peasants are forcibly relocated into a few large urban populations centers. The deserted countryside is then destroyed by saturation bombing. This strategy is effective because a relatively small number of U.S. ground troops can defend the urban centers and a lifeless countryside offers little threat to stability. If insurrection breaks out inside the cities, then the U.S. simply destroys the cities with B-52 bombers, as it did with Cholon and Hue during the Tet offensive. A similar

"I would rather be a one-term President than to be a two term President at the cost of seeing America become a second rate power and see this nation accept the first defeat in its proud 190 year history."

NIXON

policy of total victory through total destruction is being implemented in Laos.

While Vietnam and Laos are rapidly becoming a depopulated land of craters, Prince Sihanouk has been able to keep Cambodia from suffering the same fate. Sihanouk tolerated Viet Cong sanctuaries on the eastern border of Cambodia and did not interfere with shipments of supplies to them; in return, the NLF agreed not to interfere with Cambodian life in the border areas. Because the U.S. wanted to eliminate the sanctuaries and cut off the supplies, they backed General Lon Nol's right-wing, pro-American coup which ousted Sihanouk. Apparently the CIA has backed previous attempted coups in 1959, 1962, and 1966, and since the late '50's, the CIA has armed and organized the Khmer Serei, a right wing guerilla force, in order to overthrow Sihanouk. (The recent successful coup, however, may have been backed by the Pentagon rather than the CIA).

The ouster of Sihanouk has unleashed a civil war in Cambodia which poses an immediate threat to the pro-American regime.

Left-wing guerilla forces, the Khmer Rouge, have organized into a National United Front headed by Sihanouk, including many of the 600,000 ethnic Vietnamese who live in Cambodia. Most of the American news media has called the uprising a North Vietnamese invasion, but in fact it is an indigenous uprising of Cambodians who now control at least three key provinces and partially control five others. More accurate is the Oakland Tribune headline: 'Civil War in Cambodia.'

General Lon Nol has even less support among Cambodians than Thieu and Ky do among South Vietnamese. Most of his army has either defected or deserted. The main loyal forces are the CIA-trained Khmer Serei who were mysteriously integrated into the Cambodian army last summer right after the resumption of U.S.-Cambodian diplomatic relations. The possibility is imminent of the Khmer Rouge toppling the Lon Nol regime. The U.S., then, has two alternatives. One is to allow a communist government to