

Ghosts from the Past: Richard Nixon, the 1970 Cambodian Incursion, and a Re-Evaluation of His "Plan" to End the Vietnam War

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Ghosts from the Past: Richard Nixon, the 1970 Cambodian Incursion, and a Re-Evaluation of his “Plan” to End the War

On April 30, 1970, as Americans tuned their televisions to the three networks expecting to view the evening’s primetime line-ups, they were greeted instead by the visage of President Richard Milhous Nixon. In what seemed to many ordinary citizens as a stunning reversal of his new policy of “de-Americanization” of the war in Vietnam, Nixon announced that American forces would be joining the Army of the Republic of (South) Vietnam (ARVN) in an invasion of the communist sanctuaries located in the ostensibly neutral nation of Cambodia.¹ Many Americans had not yet learned of the semi-secretive bombing campaigns that had been underway since the very beginning of the Nixon presidency; subsequently, this was their first introduction to the land of the Khmers. Unlike the larger war of which it was a part, the Cambodian incursion would be strictly limited in its duration and geographical scope. All American ground combat forces would withdraw from a small swath of eastern Cambodia by no later than June 30 of that same year. Unfortunately for all sides involved, the events that followed could not as easily be contained.

Historians and lay observers alike mark the Cambodian incursion as a turning point in the conflict, as it was here that the Vietnam War most clearly became Nixon’s own. What historians cannot fully agree upon is what planning process, if any, led President Nixon to make the momentous and politically dangerous decision to expand and further escalate an unpopular war. Much of this debate traces its roots to differing conceptions of just who was Richard Nixon.

¹ Larry Berman, No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam (New York: Free Press, 2001), 50.

William Allen White in his famous biography of President Calvin Coolidge entitled *A Puritan in Babylon* asserted that Coolidge stood as an enigma to Americans.² While Silent Cal certainly was an original, the honor of being the ultimate presidential enigma has since passed to Richard Milhous Nixon. A man who gained political prominence and conservatives' admiration through unyielding attacks on communists in the State Department became a president who employed government price controls to manage inflation, established the Environmental Protection Agency, and initiated programs which would later come to be known as affirmative action. Although Nixon may have been "the man [the left] loved to hate," a contemporary look at the Nixon Administration has left some on the political left almost wistful. As noted feminist historian Joan Hoff remarked in her biography *Nixon Reconsidered*, which sought to define the Nixon presidency outside of Watergate, "Without Watergate, Nixon would probably have been succeeded by another progressive, middle-of-the road Republican." With it, the neoconservatives under Reagan rose to power.³

Efforts to paint Nixon as a domestic progressive have had little effect on interpretations of his administration's Vietnam policy. With the exception of discussions of the antiwar movement and occasional references to Watergate, Nixon's foreign and domestic policies remain in separate spheres. Thus, historians such as Jeffrey Kimball, Larry Berman, and Arnold Isaacs have come to dominate the debate. In both their titles and their texts, Isaacs and Berman seek to turn Nixon's famous promise to remove America from the Indochinese peninsula "with honor" against him by noting that the peace deal initialed by both the United States and North Vietnam in 1973 is disturbingly

² William Allen White, *A Puritan in Babylon: The Story of Calvin Coolidge*, 1st ed. (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1938), 21.

³ Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 335.

similar to that presented and rejected during the administration's first two years.⁴

Consequently, the result of Nixon's "callous, cynical, and wrong" search for honor was the same "unavoidable" conclusion—defeat.⁵

In his two noted volumes on the Nixon Administration's handling of the Vietnam War, Jeffrey Kimball is equally as harsh in his assessment. Kimball lays at Nixon's feet the destruction of the previously existing domestic consensus surrounding America's Cold War foreign policy, the alienation of a generation of American youth, and the paralyzing of America's ability to intervene in third-world conflicts.⁶ Kimball also boldly, and most disturbingly, asserts that Nixon had no actual plan to end America's involvement in the war. The historian paints a picture of an administration steering a zigzag course from escalation to deceleration, seeking to explain its past actions with contradictory doctrines and historical myths. Most thoroughly stating the historical consensus, Kimball argues that the incursion into Cambodia negates the Nixon Doctrine as a source of a coherent administration-wide philosophy and Vietnamization was merely an improvised policy driven by domestic politics, not geopolitical considerations.⁷

Despite the current academic consensus, center-right interpretations have begun to emerge over the past decade. J. Edward Lee and Michael Lind represent two distinctive trends. Lee takes up the argument that first appeared prominently with the Reagan presidency: Nixon and Ford's withdrawal of American troops represented nothing less than a betrayal of our South Vietnamese allies. For Lee, America's shame is not that

⁴ Berman, 50.

⁵ Arnold R. Isaacs, *Without Honor: Defeat in Vietnam and Cambodia* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1983), xii-xiii.

⁶ Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), x.

⁷ Jeffrey Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files: Uncovering the Secret History of the Nixon-Era Strategy* (Lecture presented at Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, D.C.), C-SPAN, Sunday, January 24, 2004.

America became engaged in the Vietnam conflict but that it tired of it and callously left its allies to hang.⁸ Conversely, Lind asserts that the goal of the United States was to establish the validity of its claim to fight communism's advance across the globe. In order to accomplish this, America was correct to resist Ho Chi Minh's efforts in Vietnam; however, the prolongation of the war eventually undermined Americans' support of their government's Cold War policies, endangering its preeminent goal of halting communism's spread worldwide, not just in Indochina. Therefore, the only realistic approach would have been to implement a Vietnam policy based on "flexible response." Such a scheme pictures events in Vietnam not as a war but as a "hot" battle in the far larger Cold War. In order to win the larger war, meeting your enemy on the battlefield is a must. Winning every battle is not. To Lind sacrificing a few pawns to save the king only makes for wise gamesmanship. When the price of defeating Ho Chi Minh became too high relative to America's larger objectives, America should have withdrawn.⁹ In not realizing this, the much-vaunted team of Nixon and Kissinger failed their most important foreign policy test.

With these varied interpretations of the Nixon Administration's Vietnam policies, one could be excused for having difficulty finding a common focal point. Yet, a closer examination reveals nearly all parties to the debate choose to focus on the administration's planning, or lack thereof. Academia's consensus denies the existence of a coherent plan while its dissenters on the right respond that a plan did exist, it was merely ill advised strategically. While debates as to the propriety of the Vietnam conflict

⁸ J. Edward Lee and H.C. "Toby" Haynsworth, Nixon, Ford, and the Abandonment of South Vietnam (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2002),.

⁹ Michal Lind, Vietnam the Necessary War: A Reinterpretation of America's Most Disastrous Military Conflict (New York: Free Press, 1999),256-284.

will likely never be settled, the regular release of new documents from the period in question combined with memoirs penned by the principals make possible a more informed debate as to the issue of whether President Nixon ever truly had a plan to extricate America from the war. With this thesis, the debate is joined.

Although, the majority of the documents from the period remain classified, every additional primary source reveals a new nuance in the overall picture. For the historian, it therefore is fortunate that, as Jeffrey Kimball has noted, “These documents keep turning up.” This thesis seeks to take advantage of the new vantage points declassification and hindsight have allowed and put the historical consensus to the test by asking three deceptively simple questions. What constitutes a plan; did Richard Nixon have one; and how does the Cambodian Incursion fit into it? Focusing on the period from Nixon’s successful 1968 campaign to the commencement of the Cambodian Incursion in April 1970, this paper will employ a variety of sources including National Security Council files, Chief of Staff H. R. “Bob” Haldeman’s handwritten notes, diplomatic dispatches, personal interviews, material from the *Foreign Relations* series, and the memoirs and recollections of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger to find the answers to these pivotal questions. As with the causes of America’s involvement in the Vietnam War itself and the historiography surrounding the Nixon presidency, the answers found are controversial, camouflaged, and consensus-defying.

Backstabbing, Bombing, and Bureaucracy: An Introduction to the Nixon Administration
and Its Indochinese Inheritance

On January 20, 1969, Richard Milhous Nixon raised his right hand and repeated after Chief Justice Earl Warren to take the oath of office as the thirty-seventh President of the United States. Nixon had defeated Vice President Hubert Humphrey in what had been a highly contentious election campaign. Although Nixon's popular plurality was less than one million votes, Americans cast a hopeful glance toward the new administration in anticipation of a promised plan to heal the wounds of Vietnam and end the division that had boiled out into the open during the Democratic National Convention of the previous year.¹⁰ The first task at hand for the nascent chief executive was to assess the immediate legacy of his predecessor's administration.

In many respects, Lyndon Baines Johnson left the office of the presidency a much humbler man. The politician whose famous "Johnson Treatment" earlier had forced a civil rights bill through the southern controlled Senate in 1957 found Vietnam too tough an opponent to tame in 1968. The Viet Cong's Tet Offensive of that year destroyed America's faith in both their president and his ability to successfully conclude the war with a military victory. Following a surprisingly close New Hampshire primary, President Johnson delivered an address to the nation, informing a stunned audience, "I will not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President."¹¹

Devoting himself fully to attempting to bring about an end to the conflict, President Johnson appointed Averell Harriman to begin serious negotiations with the

¹⁰ World Book of America's Presidents, (Chicago: World Book, 1988), 224.

¹¹ As quoted in: Richard Milhous Nixon, The Memoirs of Richard Nixon (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), 300.

North Vietnamese in Paris. The commencement of formal negotiations marked an important turn in the conflict. From this time on, victory would cease to be defined in military terms and instead evolve toward a political settlement that would guarantee South Vietnam's survival.¹² As the election came ever closer, credible rumors circulated that President Johnson was desperate to prop up his vice president's chances against a leading Nixon in November.¹³ Thus on Halloween, as Richard Nixon later remembered an unnamed reporter saying, "President Johnson gave Richard M. Nixon a trick and Vice President Humphrey a treat" by announcing a complete halt to the bombing of North Vietnam.¹⁴

Angered, but not astonished, by Johnson's "October Surprise," Nixon rushed to staunch Humphrey's last minute surge. Both Henry Kissinger, who had served as an early conduit between Johnson and the North Vietnamese, and an unnamed senior Johnson Administration aide had tipped Nixon off to the likely announcement weeks in advance.¹⁵ Nixon had his own surprise waiting in the wings. On November 2, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu announced that his government would not participate in Johnson's new round of negotiations. Through a back channel, candidate Nixon had established a line of contact to Thieu and informed him not to cave in to any election-year pressure from the Johnson Administration. Thieu could expect a better deal from a Republican White House.¹⁶ As Nixon speechwriter William Safire would later

¹² Henry A. Kissinger, "The Viet Nam Negotiations," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 47, no. 2 (January 1969): 230.

¹³ Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 26.

¹⁴ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 328.

¹⁵ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 322-328.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 56-62.

comment, “Nixon would probably not be president were it not for Thieu. Nixon remembered.”¹⁷

In addition to an ongoing negotiations process and a South Vietnamese president expecting a payoff, Richard Nixon also inherited another important tool from the Johnson Administration: permission to attack North Vietnamese base areas just inside Cambodia’s eastern frontier. America’s policy toward Cambodia had vacillated during President Johnson’s tenure. As late as 1964 administration officials had doubted the importance of North Vietnamese concentrations in the neutral nation. The State Department’s Director of Intelligence and Research Thomas L. Hughes summarized the government’s official position toward South Vietnamese claims that North Vietnamese forces were massing in Cambodia’s border region in an April memorandum:

“...there is still no firm evidence to substantiate numerous official GVN charges and reports the Viet Cong make extensive use of Cambodian territory as a base for operations in Vietnam; there is, nevertheless, no doubt that the Viet Cong make limited use of Cambodian territory as a safe haven for infiltrating cadres, supplies, and funds.”¹⁸

Considering these assumptions, the American Embassy in Cambodia had earlier recommended that if the internal situation in Cambodia declined further “then we should logically write off Cambodia, remove all Americans from this country, and concentrate on winning the war in Vietnam without regard to what happens here.”¹⁹

¹⁷ William Safire, Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House (New York: Doubleday, 1975). 88.

¹⁸ Memorandum from the Director of “Intelligence and Research (Hughes) to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Green)- April 16, 1964,” Mainland Southeast Asia: Regional Affairs, 1964-1968 vol. XXVII in Foreign Relations of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2000), Document 130.

¹⁹ “Telegram from the Embassy in Cambodia to the Department of State- March 26, 1964,” vol. XXVII in Foreign Relations of the United States, Document 130. Note that although the date of this document is earlier than that previously cited, it too maintained that even in a worse case scenario Cambodia was of

Cambodia would sever relations with the United States on May 3, 1965, ostensibly over the deaths of Cambodian civilians caused by errant bombs falling in the border region. In reality, Cambodia's mercurial leader Prince Norodom Sihanouk had decided that the North Vietnamese held the upper hand and would most likely succeed in reuniting Vietnam. The Prince did not wish to alienate the future victors.²⁰ However, as more communist forces infiltrated the Cambodian frontier region and the importance of supplies delivered to the North Vietnamese via the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville became apparent, the Johnson Administration soon found itself having to discard its previous assumptions about Cambodia's lack of significance.

In January 1968, President Johnson dispatched a secret mission to meet with Prince Sihanouk led by the United States Ambassador to India Chester Bowles. The secrecy was a result of both the fact that the United States did not have formal diplomatic relations with Sihanouk's government and that the main topic of discussion, the North Vietnamese sanctuaries, was still highly sensitive for both sides. During a series of long-winded and at times purposefully vague statements, Prince Sihanouk acknowledged the rising nationalist resentment in Cambodia toward his decision to tolerate the establishment of communist sanctuaries. Vietnam's many invasions of Cambodia throughout the two nations' histories had led to mutual suspicions and animosities. Wishing to guard himself from rightist political attacks, Sihanouk gave the Johnson Administration what amounted to permission to take action against communist North

only marginal importance and could therefore be disregarded, demonstrating the then consensus opinion of the Johnson Administration.

²⁰William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 60-61;

Vietnamese forces based in far eastern Cambodia. According to notes Bowles kept of these talks, Sihanouk said:

“We don’t want any Vietnamese in Cambodia. I can’t say this officially, on hot pursuit, but you have the opportunity to exercise hot pursuit... We don’t mind if you go into unpopulated areas... We don’t want you to stay in Cambodia, and we don’t want the Viet Cong to stay. We will be very glad if you solve our problems.”²¹

It would be this statement by the Prince recorded by the Bowles Mission that Nixon Administration officials later would cite to aid in justifying their actions in Cambodia.²³

Thus, Richard Nixon ascended to the presidency just as a new phase of the Vietnamese conflict began. During the 1968 campaign, then candidate Nixon had employed the slogan, “New leadership will end the war and win the peace in the Pacific.”²⁴ Every new administration receives a “honeymoon” period in office. The ever-escalating troop totals in Vietnam (Lyndon Johnson’s most important bequest to Nixon), which reached their zenith in April 1969 at 543,400, would guarantee a quick

²¹ As quoted in, “Notes on Ambassador Bowles’ Mission and Prince Sihanouk,” Folder, “Cambodia-Cambodian Bombing,” HAK Confirmation, September 1973, White House Special Files, National Security Council Files, Henry A. Kissinger Office Files, HAK Administrative and Staff Files: Nixon Presidential Materials Project. Note that the date on this source and many others associated with Cambodia and subsequent operations there is 1973. This is because of the fact that Dr. Kissinger (correctly) assumed that the Nixon Administration’s actions in Cambodia would be the source of questioning during his confirmation hearings to become Secretary of State during the second Nixon Administration. Therefore, Dr. Kissinger moved some of the pertinent files to a special folder dated 1973 (the year of the hearings) for quick access to rebuff any senators’ accusations. Unless otherwise noted, all documents cited from the above folder originated from the period in question rather than September 1973.

²² Note: On page 578 of his 1971 memoir entitled *Promises to Keep: My Years in Public Life, 1941-1969*, Ambassador Bowles recounts his meeting with Prince Sihanouk, including the statement about “hot pursuit.” as described here. Bowles, however, adds the caveat, “But I doubted that he meant it.” No such doubts appear in the notes from his private 1968 meeting. Furthermore, no such doubts are recorded in any other found contemporary mention of the meeting. Considering the political climate of 1971, I have chosen to accept the view Ambassador Bowles expressed immediately after the meeting rather than one based partially on hindsight, i.e. after the Cambodian Incursion, an action Bowles did not support.

²³ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 382; Henry A. Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America’s Involvement in and Extraction from the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 67.

²⁴ Nixon, *Memoris*, 298.

reversion to reality unless Nixon's newly formed national security team could expeditiously turn campaign slogans into coherent policy.²⁵

The man who would become the most famous member of the new Nixon Administration was also in many ways its most unlikely appointment. Henry A. Kissinger originally had not been a Nixon supporter. Kissinger had come to prominence early on in his academic career with his landmark study entitled *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*. A member of the Harvard faculty, Kissinger was a supporter of Governor Nelson Rockefeller, the liberal Republican contender for the presidential nomination in 1968. It was Rockefeller who had recommended Kissinger to Nixon, both as a source for Johnson Administration intelligence during the campaign and as the designate National Security Advisor following Nixon's victory.²⁶

As Nixon's National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger would oversee a dramatic change in the functioning of the nation's foreign policy decision-making apparatus. Motivated by both the President's own wishes and his own competitive drive, Kissinger largely centralized within the White House the conduct of foreign policy. This served two complementary objectives. Firstly and most importantly, it allowed for President Nixon to take an active and commanding role in formulating the nation's foreign policy. Nixon had concluded, as had many presidents of both political parties, that the Foreign Service of the State Department had its own foreign policy agenda. The bureaucrats did not owe their positions to Richard Nixon; therefore, they would feel free to drag their feet in carrying out his directives. Centralizing the process, therefore, removed one source of

²⁵ Kissinger, *Ending*, 49.

²⁶ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1979), 3-7; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 322-328.

potential delay.²⁷ Concomitantly, it also diminished the role and power of the State Department, giving Dr. Kissinger rather than the Secretary of State the role of the president's "principle agent" in foreign affairs.²⁸

Dr. Kissinger ran the National Security Council and related committees on a day-to-day basis. The National Security Council (NSC) is an advisory body created by federal statute to advise the president on matters of national security and foreign affairs. The statute provides for the President, Vice President, Director of Central Intelligence, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and National Security Advisor to be the NSC's permanent members. In addition to its advisory role, the council serves to make certain all foreign policy related agencies and departments' views are communicated to the relevant members of the executive branch.

Various committees within or subordinate to the NSC during Nixon's term investigated and debated America's policy toward Vietnam. These included the Vietnam Special Studies Group and the Washington Special Action Group. Lower level staffers of the NSC, State Department, and Defense Department served as the backbone of these committees. Dr. Kissinger would monitor, guide, and chair these sub-cabinet level discussions in order to present a final product to the members of the NSC, who also served as the top officials of these policy committees when in executive session with the President attending.²⁹ As further evidence of the preeminence gained by Dr. Kissinger

²⁷ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 21.

²⁸ Marshall Wright, personal interview, February 13, 2004. Note: Marshall Wright served in the National Security Council staffs of both Presidents Johnson and Nixon. His official role in the Nixon Administration was Director for Long Range Planning and International Organization Affairs.

²⁹ *Ibid*; Kimball, 144; Small, 53.

during the Nixon Administration, the National Security Council informally came to be called and thought of as “Henry’s office.”³⁰

The two remaining members of Nixon’s national security troika were old political hands. Both also offered more moderated views with relation to Vietnam than the more hawkish Kissinger. William P. Rogers was a friend from Nixon’s days as vice president in the Eisenhower Administration. Rogers had ably served as Eisenhower’s attorney general. Nixon, however, had a different role in mind for the affable World War II vet—that of Secretary of State.³¹ Rogers was a decidedly dovish voice in the Nixon cabinet, generally representing the views of both the majority of State Department civil servants and America’s international allies that the proper course to take in Vietnam was one of negotiations, not escalation. Consequently, Rogers would oppose all efforts to expand the war, however temporarily, into Cambodia.³² Tensions between Rogers and Kissinger naturally grew out of the turf war between the Department of State and the National Security Council. As State declined in influence and power, Rogers would often express his contempt for Kissinger to Nixon and his chief of staff H. R. “Bob” Haldeman. Nixon thereby found himself serving as something of a mediator between the battling egos of his competing secretaries of state (Rogers, *de jure* and Kissinger, *de facto*).³³

A more formidable combatant in the foreign policy debates was Nixon’s selection to serve as Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird. Laird had long been active in Republican politics in his native state of Wisconsin, having served as a delegate to Republican

³⁰ Interview with Marshall Wright.

³¹ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 164.

³² Kimball, 201; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 381.

³³ Small 52-53; For example of Haldeman and Nixon’s role in mediating Kissinger-Rogers disputes see “Notes for 9/27,” Folder, “Haldeman Handwritten Notes, July- September 1970, 2 of 2.” White House Special Files, Staff Member and Office Files, H.R. Haldeman, Nixon Presidential Material Staff, National Archives.

National Conventions in the forties and as a US Representative for Wisconsin's Seventh District from 1953 until his appointment as defense secretary.³⁴ Laird's views occupied the ground in between those of Kissinger and Rogers. While Laird would object to certain aspects of both the "secret" bombing of Cambodia and the later incursion, Laird proved to be an individual with whom Nixon could bargain. Secretary Laird, who coined the term "Vietnamization," did understand that before America could leave Vietnam it would have to demonstrate an effective offensive capability.³⁵ He also understood that the continuing effort in Vietnam sapped vital funds away from much needed arms procurement and modernization programs. Living up to Eisenhower's description of him as "the smartest of the lot" but also "devious," Laird demonstrated himself to be a skilled bureaucratic infighter.³⁶ As Nixon himself observed, this could be a good thing, especially when it came to dealing with a recalcitrant Congress.³⁷

With his team now in place, President Nixon set about developing a strategy that would lead America out of its quagmire in Southeast Asia "with honor." Events in the nation of Cambodia would conspire to require a series of decisions that would set the course for the emergence of just such a policy.

The Land of the Khmers

The chief-of-state of the small nation of Cambodia, Prince Sihanouk found himself attempting to maintain a balancing act of his own. Sihanouk had assumed the throne in 1941, during the dying stages of French Imperialism. In a decision that would herald many more divisive ones to come, Sihanouk chose to briefly collaborate with the

³⁴ "The Political Graveyard," <http://politicalgraveyard.com/bio/laird.html> (5 October 2003).

³⁵ Kimball, 42.

³⁶ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 289.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Japanese in order to establish a “sovereign” Cambodian state. Following the conclusion of World War II, Sihanouk successfully positioned his nation to declare its actual formal independence from the French in 1953. As his early involvement in Cambodia’s political history demonstrates, the life of an officially apolitical monarch was not for a man of Sihanouk’s demeanor. Seeking to prevent the loss of his power to elected politicians whom he could not control, Sihanouk abdicated the throne in favor of his father in 1955 to become a formal politician himself. From then until his deposition in the coup of 1970, Sihanouk ruled the land of the Khmers as head of government with the somewhat less grand title of Prince.³⁸

Officially, Cambodia was a neutral nation in the Vietnam conflict. However, North Vietnamese forces gained *de facto* control of the nation’s eastern provinces. This reality forced Prince Sihanouk to spend the majority of his tenure gauging which direction the political winds were blowing in Indochina. Sensing in 1963 that the communists might have the upper hand in the conflict, Sihanouk suspended the receipt of American aid to his nation. Sihanouk followed this action in 1965 with the severing of diplomatic relations with the United States. Leftist sympathizers composed the majority of the ministers during this period’s Cambodian governments.³⁹

As Hanoi’s violations of Cambodia’s neutrality became ever more blatant, Sihanouk’s position moderated; and he became open to the warming of relations with the United States. The sentiments reflected in the minutes of the Bowles Mission’s meetings reveal that Sihanouk understood the shifting domestic political situation in his country. The prevalent political force was now nationalism. Stirred by North Vietnam’s

³⁸ David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 181-189.

³⁹ Chandler, 191-208

usurpations of Cambodian territory, traditional Khmer anti-Vietnamese attitudes began to simmer. With the election of a new administration in 1968, Prince Sihanouk successfully moved through a series of friendly letter exchanges with President Richard Nixon to re-establish diplomatic relations with the United States. In one letter, Prince Sihanouk, noting that Nixon had visited Cambodia during his tenure as vice president in 1958, invited the president to make a return visit on his next trip to the region. Nixon responded with an unspecific acceptance of the invitation.⁴⁰

What makes this cordial correspondence all the more interesting is the background against which it took place. Beginning on March 18, 1969, American planes conducted covert bombing runs over the eastern section of Cambodia, targeting specific North Vietnamese base areas, in an operation code-named MENU.⁴¹ Officials dubbed the first raid Breakfast and targeted Base Area 353 in the “Fishhook” region. Following Breakfast came Lunch, Snack, Dinner, Dessert, and Supper. Each raid focused on one specific North Vietnamese sanctuary. American military planners took steps to limit the number of civilian casualties as best the little intelligence they had on the civilian populations would allow.⁴²

Nixon had decided to take the wink and nod permission Sihanouk offered to Ambassador Bowles and use it to inflict damage on North Vietnam’s cross-border

⁴⁰ “Department of State Translation to 8/23/69 Letter” and “October 20, 1969, Nixon Response Letter”: Folder, “Cambodia- Prince Sihanouk Correspondence,” White House Special Files, National Security Council Files, HAK Office Files, Country File- Far East, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

⁴¹ “Military Operations in Laos and Cambodia”: Folder, “Cambodia-Cambodian Bombing,” HAK Confirmation, September 1973, White House Special Files, National Security Council Files, Henry A. Kissinger Office Files, HAK Administrative and Staff Files: Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

⁴² Ibid.

installations.⁴³ Although the regime of Prince Sihanouk lodged some complaints with the United States about the bombing raids, the correspondence between Nixon and Sihanouk makes clear that the MENU missions caused no permanent harm to relations between the United States and Cambodia. While the State Department privately wanted to tell Sihanouk to “Quit needling us on those goddam (sic) defoliation claims,” Sihanouk’s protests were not loud enough to halt progress on the diplomatic front.⁴⁴ As the notes from the Bowles Mission and later political events would make clear, Sihanouk wanted the communists removed from his nation. They represented a political threat that gave the nationalistic right an opportunity to criticize his rule. Like the consumer of a hot dog, it would be best for Sihanouk if he could remove the North Vietnamese forces with as little knowledge as possible as to how it was accomplished.

In a further effort to guard from rightist attacks, Prince Sihanouk appointed the conservative General Lon Nol as his new prime minister in August 1969. Sihanouk had complained loudly to Hanoi, Pyongyang, and other regional leaders about the increasing number of North Vietnamese forces violating Cambodia’s neutrality. Lon Nol’s appointment sent a message that the government’s position was changing toward one more openly hostile to the North Vietnamese and more conciliatory toward Washington. Nonetheless, these moves would come too late to mollify Sihanouk’s mostly urban nationalistic critics.

Prince Sihanouk left Cambodia in January 1970 for a regimen of medical treatment and relaxation in France. By March, anti-Vietnamese protests had broken out

⁴³ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 382.

⁴⁴ “Department of State Suggested Message- Anonymous Handwritten Note”: Folder, “Cambodia-Prince Sihanouk Correspondence,” White House Special Files, National Security Council Files, Henry A. Kissinger Office Files, Country File—Far East,” Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

in both the eastern provinces and Phnom Penh itself. Rioters attacked both the embassies of North Vietnam and the People's Revolutionary Government, the communist supported government-in-exile for South Vietnam. Prime Minister Lon Nol, who was in charge during the Prince's absence, took advantage of the rising tide of Cambodian nationalism and demanded that Hanoi remove all its forces from Cambodian territory within seventy-two hours. When Hanoi refused, Lon Nol joined forces with Prince Sihanouk's cousin and rival for power Prince Sirik Matak. Together, they convened the National Assembly, which, in a special session on March 18, unanimously voted to remove Prince Sihanouk from power.⁴⁵ Reaction in Washington to the coup was muted, partly because no one really knew who Lon Nol was. One famous cartoon of the era depicted a befuddled Kissinger informing Nixon, "All we know about Lon Nol is that his name spelled backward makes Lon Nol."⁴⁶

The coup in Phnom Penh marked a turning point in the Vietnam War. Nixon and his team of foreign policy and national security advisors would have to analyze the effects of Cambodia's sudden change of government and establish an American policy toward its new regime. Events on the ground in Southeast Asia necessitated a relatively quick decision. Such an expedited decision was possible because of the policy reassessments undertaken by Nixon's administration in 1969. Documentary evidence and reasoned argument will show that contrary to the claims of some, the Nixon Administration was not improvising its Indochinese policy. President Nixon's eventual decision to invade was instead the culmination of an earlier formed and elucidated model.

⁴⁵Prince Norodom Sihanouk, My War with the CIA: The Memoirs of Prince Norodom Sihanouk (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), 27.

⁴⁶ Shawcross, 128.

Three Options, a Doctrine, and a Decision

Between the bloodless coup that shook Cambodia on March 18, 1970, and the formal promulgation of the decision to eliminate the border region's sanctuaries on April 28, 1970. President Nixon and his national security advisors had only forty-one days to establish a coherent American military policy toward the new Cambodian regime. North Vietnamese troop movements seeking to "cut off" the capital of Phnom Penh prevented a more lengthy review.⁴⁷ Despite the time constraints, the Nixon Administration was able to coordinate an American military and diplomatic response to the fluid tactical situation on the ground. The controversial decisions thus undertaken had flowed from a plan to extract America from the Vietnam War that had only made its public debut six months earlier. Notwithstanding the plan's newly minted appearance, one can trace the origins of the two key elements of the administration's Vietnam strategy as far back as October 1967. The decisions reached between 1967 and the "Silent Majority" speech of November 3, 1969, would set the stage for all that was to follow.

Any candidate seriously contemplating a candidacy in the presidential election of 1968 knew that this would be a campaign fought largely around the issue of extracting America from Vietnam. Richard Nixon made his first comprehensive attempt at addressing the issue in an article entitled "Asia after Viet Nam," which appeared in the October 1967 edition of the journal *Foreign Affairs*. The title revealed much about Nixon's thinking. For him, the main issue was keeping America from descending into one of its periods of "angry isolation" in the post-Vietnam War world.⁴⁸ A key tenet of

⁴⁷ "Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. 21 April 1970." Folder. "4/23/70 AM & PM Meeting," WSAG Meeting Cambodia, White House Special Files, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

⁴⁸ Richard Nixon, "Asia after Viet Nam," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 46, no. 1 (October 1967): 121.

his foreign policy would therefore be the realization that “America is a Pacific Power” as well as an Atlantic one.⁴⁹ Vietnam, if left unresolved, had the potential to undermine this shared consensus about America’s foreign policy goals. Such a result would be disastrous, as it could allow China, the “clear and present danger” to the free nations of Asia, to exert a negative influence, unchecked by American diplomacy, across the region.⁵⁰

Having thus defined America’s problem, Nixon proposed a solution, the most famous element of which was a call for the United States to “come urgently to grips with the reality of China.”⁵¹ However, the 1972 trip to China was not the only event in the future Nixon Administration to be foreshadowed in the pages of *Foreign Affairs*. Tucked away in the space of a paragraph was what would reappear in 1969 as a doctrine. Nations of the world, he wrote, would have to “realize that the role of the United States as world policeman is likely to be limited in the future.” Continuing, Nixon noted,

“To ensure that a US response will be forthcoming, if needed, machinery must be created that is capable of meeting two conditions: (a) a collective effort by the nations of the region to contain the threat themselves; and, if that effort fails, (b) a collective request to the United States for assistance.”⁵²

Here stood the first formulation of what historians would later call the Nixon Doctrine.

Nixon’s article gained much attention upon its publication. Not surprisingly, most contemporary observers focused on the call by America’s most celebrated anti-communist for a rapprochement with Red China. The single paragraph on page 114 hung in the background until a July 25, 1969, informal press conference on the island American territory of Guam. Nixon had taken the occasion of the Apollo 11 splashdown

⁴⁹ Nixon, “Asia after Viet Nam,” 112.

⁵⁰ Nixon, “Asia after Viet Nam,” 113.

⁵¹ Nixon, “Asia after Viet Nam,” 121.

⁵² Nixon, “Asia after Viet Nam,” 114.

not only to gain positive press coverage with his active presence but also to tour Southeast Asia. During his meeting with the press, Nixon stunned everyone in attendance, including Kissinger, by using the opportunity to elucidate his new policy formula.⁵³

The press first dubbed the statement the Guam Doctrine; only later, with much prodding from the administration, did the President's name become formally attached.⁵⁴ Nixon made the statement to the press in order to prevent the United States from finding itself drawn into another Asian (later expanded to the rest of the world) conflict by publicly limiting the amount and type of help threatened nations could expect to receive.⁵⁵ Nations threatened by hostile forces would first have to resist their aggressors with the maximum amount of force available to them before seeking American assistance. If a country's best efforts proved less than enough, regional neighbors must show a willingness to provide mutual assistance for the threatened nation's defense. Only with these two prerequisites met would the United States then consider the offering of further aid. In an important addition to the original version tendered in 1967, one which would have serious implications for the administration's future Cambodian policy. Nixon further stated that such aid would be contingent upon a judgment of the American government that the aid proffered would make a demonstrable difference to the threatened nation's chances of successfully defeating its aggressors.⁵⁶ With the conclusion of his press statements, Nixon had established his vision of how future

⁵³ Kissinger, White House Years, 223: note Kissinger's own term is "surprised."

⁵⁴ Kissinger, White House Years, 223; Kimball, Nixon's Vietnam War, 154.

⁵⁵ Richard Milhous Nixon, Setting the Course, the First Year: Major Policy Statements by President Richard Nixon (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1970), 300-301.

⁵⁶ Nixon, Setting the Course, 301-307; Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon, Concerning the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President, 1970 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), 205.

American foreign policy would be conducted. Now to implement this vision, a strategy to remove America from Vietnam without causing the immediate collapse of the government headquartered in Saigon would have to be devised.

Henry Kissinger would not receive a moment's respite in 1969 and not just because of Nixon's unexpected policy formulations to the press. At the same time Nixon revealed his doctrine, Kissinger busily led the administration's effort to review America's policy in Vietnam and recommend a new course of action. Historians have speculated as to what extent Nixon had a plan prior to his inauguration. In his memoirs Nixon states, "I never said that I had a 'plan,' much less a 'secret plan,' to end the war."⁵⁷ However, at a later point in his memoirs, Nixon recalls his confidentially telling "the Cabinet [in March of 1969] that I expected the war to be over in a year."⁵⁸ This optimistic assessment was soon to change, as North Vietnam "yield[ed] nothing" at the negotiating table.⁵⁹ It was this sense of frustration that led Nixon to order Kissinger to establish a new tactical strategy.

Kissinger undertook his review with the intention of providing a blueprint that would steer the administration toward its stated goal of ending American involvement in Indochina without causing the collapse of America's South Vietnamese ally. The September 10 and 11, 1969, memoranda prepared by Kissinger presented a president already familiar with the depth of involvement he had inherited with three options, two of which were actively considered. The options represented the two minds of both the President and his advisors. The process and the eventual decision revealed not only what was to come in Vietnam but also, unknowingly, in the Land of the Khmers.

⁵⁷ Nixon, Memoirs, 298.

⁵⁸ Nixon, Memoirs, 390.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Option one involved a dramatic escalation of the war. Throughout its consideration, option one was known as either Operation Duck Hook or the November Option.⁶⁰ The latter designation referred to the one-year anniversary of President Johnson's announcement of the bombing halt (November 1, 1968) and President Nixon's determination to have a plan in place by that date. Operation Duck Hook reflected a strong desire on the part of the Nixon Administration to win the war in Vietnam by delivering a decisive knock-out blow to its communist North Vietnamese opponents. Kissinger and Nixon refused "to believe that a little fourth-rate power like North Vietnam does not have a breaking point."⁶¹ Kissinger and the Joint Chiefs of staff set out with Duck Hook to find it.

Operation Duck Hook would consist of mining North Vietnam's ports and harbors, "destroying twenty-nine targets of military and economic importance in an air attack lasting four days" beginning on November 1.⁶² Staffers also considered breaching the North's dykes to destroy completely its agricultural sector.⁶³ Attacks would continue every forty-eight to seventy-two hours after the completion of the initial four-day series if North Vietnamese leaders continued to resist serious negotiations.⁶⁴ Key to the success of the Duck Hook operation would be the administration's ability to maintain its resolve to carry the plan through to completion. Kissinger foresaw massive international protest.

⁶⁰ Kimble, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 159. Note: Many of the documents surrounding Operation Duck Hook remain classified. The account drawn here will combine details gleaned from Option One in Kissinger's memorandum and details historians have been able to deduce via interviews with the principals. Although the memorandum does not explicitly make use of the words "Duck Hook" or "November Option," the details of Option One coincide nearly perfectly with what those sources told journalists Tad Szulc and Seymore Hersh belonged to Duck Hook.

⁶¹ As quoted in Kimble, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 163.

⁶² Kissinger, *White House Years*, 285.

⁶³ "Memorandum from Henry A. Kissinger to Richard Nixon, September 10, 1969": Folder, "9/12/69, NSC Meeting 9/11/69- Middle East to NSC Meeting 10/15/69- Latin America [3 of 3]," White House Special Files, National Security Council Institutional Files H Files Meeting Files (1969-1974), Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

⁶⁴ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 285.

as breaching the dikes could lead to thousands of North Vietnamese civilian casualties. While the administration would have the satisfaction of knowing that America had, for the first time, truly taken its gloves off, America most likely would experience a wave of unrest greatly surpassing what it had experienced during the Johnson years. As with any major offensive military operation, American casualty figures also would see an increase.⁶⁵ Kissinger favored option one, seeing it as the only way to have a chance to win the war decisively.⁶⁶ Kissinger's memorandum, however, went on to establish two additional options.

Option two represented an opposing extreme to the November Option. Recognizing that Nixon was in no way responsible for America's entry into the Vietnam War, Kissinger noted that Nixon could begin his presidency with a clean slate by declaring unilaterally a date for the withdrawal of all American forces.⁶⁷ The President could address the nation and remind Americans that it was President Kennedy who initiated direct American military involvement in Vietnam and President Johnson who ineptly escalated it. Considering the toll the war was taking on the cohesiveness of the nation, Nixon would have decided that the cost of continuing the war was greater than the cost of losing it. Kissinger speculated that politically it would be a very popular decision. The troops would come home, and Vietnam would be left for the Vietnamese to settle. Conversely, it could prove devastating internationally. America's abandonment of an ally would lead other nations to call into question the worth of America's security

⁶⁵ "Memorandum from Henry A. Kissinger to Richard Nixon. September 10, 1969"

⁶⁶ Kissinger, White House Years, 284-285; Kimball, Nixon's Vietnam War, 163-165.

⁶⁷ Although, it should be noted that Nixon, as vice president in the Eisenhower Administration, strongly advocated that America intervene in Vietnam when it became obvious that the French would abandon the nation following the fall of Dien Bien Phu. President Eisenhower rejected Nixon's counsel and decided that he could not justify the shedding of American blood for a nation on the perimeter of America's security perimeter.

umbrella. America's prestige abroad would also suffer, as the United States would have lost its first war in its 193-year history.⁶⁸ Kissinger later noted in his memoirs with respect to this option, "Not even the strongest critics in the *mainstream* of American life recommended immediate withdrawal in 1969."⁶⁹ Therefore, placing the long-term international ramifications above the short-term domestic political ones, Kissinger strongly recommended rejecting the second option.⁷⁰ Option two found itself more as a topic of conversation and speculation than serious consideration.

This left option three, which served as an attempt to craft a third way between the two policy extremes represented by Duck Hook and, as Nixon would later deem option two, "Bug Out."⁷¹ Its most prominent proponents were Defense Secretary Laird and, Kissinger's rival, Secretary of State Rogers.⁷² Realizing that if the administration rejected Duck Hook, "...we have ruled out military victory," option three held no illusions about winning the war militarily.⁷³ Instead, option three, which Mel Laird christened Vietnamization instead of the initial designation of "de-Americanization," rested upon two additional conclusions.⁷⁴ "The fundamental problem is time," and the policy must play to three audiences simultaneously: South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and the American public.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ "Memorandum from Henry A. Kissinger to Richard Nixon, September 10, 1969."

⁶⁹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 286. Note: emphasis not in original.

⁷⁰ Memorandum from Henry A. Kissinger to Richard Nixon, September 10, 1969."

⁷¹ "Notes for 4/20," Folder, "Haldeman Handwritten Notes, April - June 1970, 1 of 2." White House Special Files, Staff Member and Office Files, H.R. Haldeman, Nixon Presidential Material Staff, National Archives.

⁷² Nixon, *Memoirs*, 392.

⁷³ "Memorandum from Henry A. Kissinger to Richard Nixon, September 11, 1969," page 14; Folder, "9/12/69, NSC Meeting 9/11/69- Middle East to NSC Meeting 10/15/69- Latin America [3 of 3], White House Special Files, National Security Council Institutional Files H Files Meeting Files (1969-1974), Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives."

⁷⁴ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 392.

⁷⁵ Memorandum from Henry A. Kissinger to Richard Nixon, September 11, 1969," pages 2, 8.

Vietnamization would involve training the South Vietnamese forces to take over their own defense while slowly withdrawing American ground combat forces. Prior to their withdrawal, American troops would attempt to free as much additional territory as possible from communist control so as to provide ARVN with the greatest possible advantage.⁷⁶ At the completion of the withdrawals, the South Vietnamese would be responsible for their own defense with the exception of possible American air support, if requested. Vietnamization therefore attempted to allow America to remove its ground forces, forestall the collapse of the South Vietnamese government, and give President Thieu and his troops a fighting chance to defeat the communists.⁷⁷

Kissinger realized that option three, as with all of the options, had several potential contradictions. Vietnamization could lead to a “salted peanuts” effect whereby troop withdrawals create domestic demand for larger and quicker withdrawals next time.⁷⁸ Americans would become addicted to withdrawal announcements, requiring ever-increasing numbers to generate the same positive political “fix” for the administration. Additionally, Vietnamization ran the risk of increasing domestic political pressure to end the war, as all casualties suffered after the withdrawals would appear to be for naught. As Kissinger stated in his memoirs, “And how would we explain to American families why their sons’ lives should be at risk when a fixed schedule for total withdrawal existed?”⁷⁹

Commanders would be less willing to take risks now that the prospect for military victory had been eliminated. Concomitantly, this would endanger Vietnamization by

⁷⁶ This goal would provide the policy stimulation to “bite the bullet” (in Kimball’s words) and invade the Cambodian sanctuaries. See Chapter 3 for further discussion.

⁷⁷ “Memorandum from Henry A. Kissinger to Richard Nixon, September 11, 1969.”

⁷⁸ “Memorandum from Henry A. Kissinger to Richard Nixon, September 11, 1969,” page 3.

⁷⁹ Kissinger, White House Years, 287.

endangering the effectiveness of America efforts to transfer control of as much territory as possible to South Vietnamese forces. Withdrawals would also place a premium on the heads of the remaining soldiers, meaning that each soldier killed by the North Vietnamese would represent an ever-larger percentage of the total US combat forces. Finally, the North Vietnamese “are the last people we will be able to fool about the ability of the South Vietnamese to take over for us.” Vietnamization in the end could merely validate the communists’ strategy of waiting for the Americans to exit before launching another all-out offensive aimed toward total victory.⁸⁰

As Kissinger’s memo depressingly noted, all of the options left much to be desired. However, Nixon’s own deadline of November 1 quickly approached. The closer the calendar came to the first of November the stronger the arguments for option three, Vietnamization, became. Before Nixon had made his final decision, Washington and several other of the nation’s largest cities fell under the cloud of the Vietnam Moratorium. “[T]he pent-up fury reached full force,” and the Nixon Administration saw that further, large scale escalation was not a politically permissible course at the present time.⁸¹ Consequently, at 9:32 PM Eastern time on November 3, President Nixon went before the nation and announced his plan.

Nixon began by acknowledging the fact that some had advised him “the only way to avoid allowing Johnson’s war to become Nixon’s war” was to order “the immediate withdrawal of all American forces.”⁸² While characteristically claiming “[f]rom a political standpoint this would have been a popular and easy course to follow.” Nixon

⁸⁰ “Memorandum from Henry A. Kissinger to Richard Nixon, September 11, 1969.” page 3

⁸¹ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 400 (quote)-413; Note: the voice in the quote is Nixon’s own.

⁸² Public Papers of the President, 1969, 901-902.

chose to accept his “greater obligation” to the nation and reject the advice.⁸³ The President hinted at what was to come by advising, “In order to end a war fought on many fronts, I initiated a pursuit for peace on many fronts.”⁸⁴ Finally, halfway through his planned remarks, Nixon declared his intent to “put into effect another *plan* to bring peace—a *plan* which will bring the war to an end regardless of what happens on the negotiating front.”⁸⁵

Immediately following that statement of action, President Nixon revealed the first element of his plan to the American people: the Nixon Doctrine. Describing it as “a policy which not only will help to end the war in Vietnam, but which is an essential element of our program to prevent future Vietnams,” Nixon once again took the opportunity to set Vietnam apart as an aberration.⁸⁶ It was a Nixon inheritance, not a pattern his administration would follow. The Nixon Doctrine now governed all future similar situations America would face.

The second major policy shift President Nixon’s administration took came next in the speech’s text. “In the previous administration, we Americanized the war in Vietnam. In this administration, we are Vietnamizing the search for peace.”⁸⁷ Here was the administration’s plan to deal with the Johnson inheritance, the aberration to the Nixon Doctrine. “The primary mission of our troops is to enable to South Vietnamese forces to assume the full responsibility for the security of South Vietnam.” The progress thus far achieved would already allow for 60,000 servicemen to come home.⁸⁸ Future

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Public Papers of the President, 1969, 903.

⁸⁵ Public Papers of the President, 1969, 905; Note: emphasis not in original.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Public Papers of the President, 1969, 906.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

withdrawals would occur based upon two criteria: “the level of enemy activity and the progress of the training programs.”⁸⁹ Thus, the inexorable decline of American direct involvement in Vietnam had begun. It was not “the easy way” but rather “the right way.” Most importantly, “It is a *plan* that will end the war.”⁹⁰

With his famous call to “the great silent majority of my fellow Americans,” Nixon ended his address.⁹¹ He now had publicly revealed his plan and publicly rejected, for the moment, his gut impulse to “go for broke.” Little did he or his advisors realize, however, that the plan just espoused would require an escalation of its own in order to maintain its validity. Cambodia would be the Nixon Doctrine’s hidden corollary.

⁸⁹ Public Papers of the President, 1969, 907.

⁹⁰ Ibid; Note: emphasis not in original.

⁹¹ Public Papers of the President, 1969, 909.

A Plan Is Like Pornography...

President Nixon's November 3, 1969, address accomplished much more than the addition of a new buzzword to the political lexicon. It announced the blueprint that the administration would follow in its future efforts to end American involvement in Indochina. Despite Nixon's own statements declaring the intent of the speech to reveal his plan to the American public, historians continue to assert otherwise. Even those such as Joan Hoff who depicted the Nixon Administration in a much more sympathetic light found themselves almost forced to declare that Nixon's subsequent actions in Cambodia violated "the intent if not the letter" of the Nixon Doctrine.⁹² In his interviews with Hoff, Nixon expressed his main concern surrounding the accepted history: "The problem is not that history repeats itself; it is the fact that historians repeat other historians."⁹³ To end the repetition of the assertion that no plan to end the war was extant, one must address the question that until now Nixon-era historiographers have assumed already was answered: What is a plan?

Historians deal in primary documents, yet a look at any dictionary reveals no requirement that a plan appear in written form. The average person devises innumerable plans during the course of his life. Few appear on a typewritten sheet of legal-sized paper. Thus, if all the elements of a plan do not appear listed in a single bureaucratic document, how can the historian conclude that a plan existed? Criteria must be established.

In order for a plan to exist, there must be some concrete level of prior formulation. Consequently, some level of forethought must be evident for a series of

⁹² Hoff, 166.

⁹³ Hoff, 341.

actions and statements to qualify as a plan. It cannot be “a zigzag course” that attempts to ride the turbulent waves of current events.⁹⁴ Secondly, the plan must describe something to be done. A plan involves action. If a plan is not neatly displayed in its final, bulleted form, one must argue that the actions taken by the individual or organization after the alleged plan’s formulation followed the course of action earlier defined. As the President mentioned in his memoirs, he was the type of individual who believed in coming “directly to the hard decisions on the...major issues and say[ing] ‘we will leave details to the subordinates.’”⁹⁵ Following Nixon’s own advice about what to look for—the “major issues” of the Nixon Doctrine and Vietnamization—and using the above described criteria, one can only arrive at a single conclusion: Nixon’s plan to end the war existed in the same way as did his well-established doctrine.

President Nixon himself and members of his administration put much thought into what policies America’s situation in Vietnam demanded. Nixon’s article in *Foreign Affairs* serves as the first piece of evidence. There lies the Nixon Doctrine in its nascent form. Less than two years later, the doctrine made its debut in an informal press conference. Kimball’s claim that Nixon’s Guam statements “appeared to be impromptu” to the contrary, the only major change between the *Foreign Affairs* and Guam formulations was the added requirement that nations’ expecting large amounts of American aid must demonstrate an ability to use the aid to mount an effective campaign

⁹⁴ Kimball, C-SPAN.

⁹⁵ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 446. Note: Kimball also employs this quote on page 188 of his book *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, pointing to its significance for understanding Nixon’s planning process.

against their aggressors.⁹⁶ Even Kimball must admit eventually “he [Nixon] had been thinking about this policy for quite some time.”⁹⁷

Furthermore, Kimball does not question the existence of the Nixon Doctrine. This irregardless of the fact that twenty-five years after its unveiling, no National Security Decision Memorandum has yet appeared displaying the Nixon Doctrine in a formally codified format.⁹⁸ Kimball is so certain of the existence of the doctrine that he bases his argument that Nixon had no plan upon it, declaring, “Nixon violated the doctrine in Cambodia and would soon do so in Laos.”⁹⁹ If Kimball accepts the existence of the doctrine, he obviously cannot choose to base his main argument against the existence of a Nixon plan to end the war in late 1969 on the fact that a formal document depicting all the plan’s elements has yet to appear.

Kissinger’s September memoranda to President Nixon similarly serve to confirm that forethought was involved with respect to Vietnamization. In a series of multi-page documents, Kissinger examines the case both for and against each potential policy option. Both Kissinger’s memoranda and his memoirs make clear that Vietnamization was not the national security advisor’s first choice as a strategy to end the war. Concerned, “We need a plan to end the war. no only to withdraw troops,” Kissinger still considered Operation Duck Hook a strong and viable option.¹⁰⁰ Defense Secretary Melvin Laird wished to give Vietnamization a chance so as not only to extract America from Vietnam but also to allow more funds for the modernization of the military.¹⁰¹ Each viewpoint

⁹⁶ Kimball, Nixon’s Vietnam War, 154; Nixon, Foreign Affairs, 114; Nixon, Setting the Course, 301-307.

⁹⁷ Kimball, Nixon’s Vietnam War, 154.

⁹⁸ Kimball, C-SPAN.

⁹⁹ Kimball, Nixon’s Vietnam War, 155.

¹⁰⁰ Kissinger, White House Years, 284: “Memorandum from Henry A. Kissinger to Richard Nixon, September 10, 1969”; “Memorandum from Henry A. Kissinger to Richard Nixon, September 11, 1969.”

¹⁰¹ Kissinger, Ending the Vietnam War, 141-142.

was represented and defended strongly within the administration. It was the massive public protest surrounding the Vietnam Moratorium of October 15, 1969, that helped to tip the scales finally toward Vietnamization. The Nixon Doctrine found its basis in a belief that America must remain active in Asia. This would only be possible with public support. The Moratorium made clear that a withdrawal process of some sort would be necessary to begin the process of reestablishing a supportive consensus behind American foreign policy in the East. Vietnamization it was. Consequently, the decision made public during the November 3 address to the nation came as a result of a tortuous process of deliberation, the final outcome of which was not clear to the principals until the deadline day arrived.

One can make many arguments surrounding the notion that the final decision was ill conceived. Such a question strikes at the heart of the debate as to whether the path taken indeed was the correct one. The question of correctness is a very different one from the question of a plan's existence. Therefore, all that has been established is that a deliberative process took place, demonstrating forethought on the part of the President and his principal advisors. Criterion one is met.

Criterion two demands that one can argue that the President's actions flowed from his previously elucidated policy. The Cambodian Incursion was the first major Vietnam-related public policy decision to follow the November 3 speech, and it is here that Kimball and even Hoff argue that the case for a cohesive plan fails. As Nixon would later declare in a 1971 press conference, his decisions with regard to Cambodia were "the Nixon Doctrine in its purest form."¹⁰² In order to determine which view is correct, and,

¹⁰² As quoted in Kissinger, Ending the Vietnam War, 474.

consequently, if a plan did exist, one must examine both what actions others asked of President Nixon and what course of action he actually took.

By April 1970, the collapse of Cambodia seemed imminent. Intelligence indicated that following the removal of the Sihanouk government, North Vietnamese forces, for the first time, began to leave the safety of their frontier sanctuaries and operate farther west within Cambodia, attacking troops loyal to the Lon Nol regime. By the twenty-first, it was clear that communist forces “were moving to isolate Phnom Penh by the systematic interdiction of all the major roads and waterways leading into the city.”¹⁰³ While America had begun to arm the FANK (Armed Forces of Kampuchea), Cambodia’s small army could not hold any large swaths of territory and quickly began to retreat toward defensive positions around the capital. Thus, a newly declassified memorandum brings to light Acting Chief of Staff William Westmoreland’s recommendation that the United States send soldiers and advisors to the border (but not past it) to aid in a to-be-developed action by South Vietnamese troops combining both air and ground forces inside Cambodia. It was General Westmoreland’s hope, “If we react quickly enough, we may be able to exploit the situation to our overall advantage without any substantial involvement by United States forces on the ground.”¹⁰⁴

The main foreign antagonists also chimed in with their advice for the President. Cambodia’s new ruler Lon Nol wrote a lengthy request to Nixon laying out in detail the number of forces necessary to regain the Cambodian territory lost to Vietnamese

¹⁰³ “Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff William C. Westmoreland, 21 April 1970,” page 1: Folder, “WSAG Meeting Cambodia 4/23/70 AM & PM,” Washington Special Action Group (WSAG) Meeting Files. White House Special Files. Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

¹⁰⁴ “Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff William C. Westmoreland, 21 April 1970,” pages 2-3.

communist “invaders.” Lon Nol posited that his government was in need of no less than 410,000 troops to safely secure the country. The President of the Council of Ministers of Cambodia did not definitively state what percentages of the requested forces were to be American.¹⁰⁵ Lon Nol further noted, “We lack arms, material, and military equipment and munitions with which to organize ourselves.” Essentially, Lon Nol asked Nixon for a Vietnam-sized American commitment to Cambodia.

South Vietnam’s President Nguyen Van Thieu was equally as helpful. Thieu sought to draw Nixon’s attention to alleged atrocities committed by Cambodians against non-communist Vietnamese living in Cambodia. With a now actively anti-communist government in Phnom Penh, the Cambodian residents of the sanctuaries felt secure in attacking all communists, which by their definition meant all Vietnamese inside Cambodia. South Vietnam’s leader requested that President Nixon use his influence with Lon Nol to halt the atrocities and allow the South’s government to repatriate its ethnic brothers.¹⁰⁶

Thieu’s letter demonstrates a second complicating factor for the Nixon Administration—old ethnic hatreds. Cambodia and Vietnam are the France and Germany of Indochina. The former’s history is dominated largely by the latter’s invasions. Consequently, the Khmers would immediately suspect any action taken by the South Vietnamese inside Cambodian territory. President Thieu also could not allow Cambodian

¹⁰⁵ “Letter to President Nixon from General Lon Nol,” page 1; Folder, “WSAG Meeting Cambodia 4/23/70 AM & PM,” Washington Special Action Group (WSAG Meeting Files), White House Special Files, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives. Note: The letter is in English as translated by the State Department. The translation itself bears no date; however, its placement in the dated folder may be used as an approximate date for the receipt of the letter. See note on Thieu correspondence.

¹⁰⁶ “Letter to President Nixon from President Thieu”; Folder, “WSAG Meeting Cambodia 4/23/70 AM & PM,” Washington Special Action Group (WSAG) Meeting Files, White House Special Files, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives. Note: The letter is in English as translated by the State Department. The translation itself bears no date but does note it “was delivered today,” meaning the date of the WSAG meeting, April 23, 1970.

atrocities against ethnic Vietnamese to go unanswered. Doing so would leave the South Vietnamese government open to its own domestic critics who would decry the regime's weakness in the face of insults paid by an inferior people.¹⁰⁷ Before President Nixon could make any decision on potential action, the two neighbors would have to come to realize that their true adversary was the North Vietnamese and not each other.

President Nixon had his own factional fighting to contain. Two of his three main advisors found themselves bitterly divided on the issue of what action to take to stem the tide in Cambodia. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger advocated a bold move to destroy the sanctuaries while Secretary of State William Rogers argued against an active American role in any Cambodian operation. Rogers believed that COSVN, the North's command post for South Vietnamese operations located inside Cambodia, would prove an elusive target and that the casualties sustained by American forces in any operation would do more damage to the president domestically than any temporary military advantage gained could counterbalance.¹⁰⁸

Rogers' opposition to action would never abate. Defense Secretary Laird also counseled caution, warning of the political repercussions that would come from any attack on the Cambodian sanctuaries.¹⁰⁹ Lon Nol wished for a complete American commitment to maintain the authority of Cambodia's new stridently non-communist government. Doing nothing would allow the North Vietnamese forces to have free reign inside much of Cambodia, creating a new frontier South Vietnam and the remaining

¹⁰⁷ For background on ethnic tensions and potential consequences see: "Memorandum from Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to Brigadier General Alexander M. Haig, May 26, 1970, page 3; Folder, "Cambodia [2 of 2].," White House Special Files, National Security Council Files, Alexander M. Haig Special File—Berlin Contingency Planning, Foreign Visitor Schedule," Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

¹⁰⁸ Notes for 4/27; Folder, "Haldeman Handwritten Notes, April-June 1970 [1 of 2].," White House Special Files, Staff Member and Office Files, H. R. Haldeman, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

¹⁰⁹ Nixon, Memoirs, 447.

American forces would have to struggle to defend. To make matters worse, as General Westmoreland's report noted, the time left to make an effective decision was coming quickly to an end. Troops surrounded Phnom Penh. On April 28, 1970, President Nixon made his decision.

National Security Decision Memorandum 58 (NSDM) authorized "attacks on identified North Vietnamese/Viet Cong base areas in Cambodia up to a depth of 30 kilometers." America would offer overt tactical air support across the same geographical region. Nixon also authorized US ground forces to directly participate in the attacks, not just as advisors.¹¹⁰ During the meeting where the principals debated the final decision, Vice President Agnew best summarized audibly the President's own internal thought process. If the sanctuaries were a danger to Vietnamization, they should be eliminated. Any operation taken would raise the ire of the war's opponents; therefore, the administration should take the most decisive step possible in order to make the temporary political cost worth the longer-term tactical gain.¹¹¹ With the decision memorandum signed, Nixon set to work crafting the speech that would announce this new phase of his same policy to the public. The address, which Nixon mostly penned himself, would display both the best and worst sides of the Nixon persona.

Nixon began his April 30, 1970, address by declaring, "To protect our men who are in Vietnam and to guarantee the continued success of our withdrawal and Vietnamization programs, I have concluded that the time has come for action."¹¹² The President justified his judgment that communist forces' actions constituted a threat by

¹¹⁰ "National Security Decision Memorandum 58"; Folder, "WSAG Meeting Cambodia 4/29/70," Washington Special Action Group (WSAG) Meeting Files, White House Special Files, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

¹¹¹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 491-492.

¹¹² Public Papers of the President, 1970, 406.

noting that Cambodia could “become a vast enemy staging area and a springboard for attacks on South Vietnam along 600 miles of frontier.”¹¹³ This would mean South Vietnam was “completely outflanked.” American and South Vietnamese military forces would hold “an untenable military position.”¹¹⁴

The current situation left Nixon with the same three choices he had faced only six months before. “[W]e can do nothing...provide massive military assistance to Cambodia itself..[or] go to the heart of the trouble” and clean out the major North Vietnamese sanctuaries.¹¹⁵ As in November 1969, Nixon chose option three. A limited incursion was “indispensable for the continuing success of our withdrawal program.” Nixon further noted that he took “this action not for the purpose of expanding the war into Cambodia but for the purpose of ending the war in Vietnam.”¹¹⁶ In an attempt to demonstrate the magnanimity of his decision, Nixon reminded his audience that he had once again refused “to take the easy political path.” The President then began the final segment of his address.¹¹⁷

The two most important impressions a person can make are his first and his last. The paragraphs with which Nixon chose to end his April 30 address to the nation were an ill-advised attempt at strengthening Americans’ resolve. The only thing his extra prose accomplished was to obfuscate the content laden portion of his speech that had preceded. Nixon warned that America could not “act as a pitiful, helpless giant” and allow the “forces of totalitarianism and anarchy [to] threaten free nations and free institutions

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Public Papers of the President, 407.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Public Papers of the President, 1970, 407-408.

¹¹⁷ Public Papers of the President, 1970, 409-410.

throughout the world.”¹¹⁸ The President then sought to paint himself as bravely standing against the political grain, memorably declaring,

“I would rather be a one-term President and do what I believe is right than to be a two-term President at the cost of seeing America become a second-rate power and to see this nation accept the first defeat in its proud 190-year history.”¹¹⁹

His display of bravado having abated, Nixon wished the nation a “good night” and left the airwaves.

The fact that President Nixon allowed emotionalism to take over during his concluding remarks was an unfortunate one. His critics latched onto his statements, declaring his newly announced decision equally as irrational. Historians would later characterize his address as “disingenuous and artful.”¹²⁰ Even Henry Kissinger admitted that Nixon’s parting shots were “self-pitying” and “vainglorious.” However, one cannot automatically assume, as many historians such as Kimball have, that Nixon’s emotional appeals were symptomatic of an irrational, emotionally driven decision-making process.¹²¹

Reviewing the substantive portion of the President’s text, one immediately sees that Nixon highlighted the success of his Vietnamization policy as the definitive reason he had ordered action along the Cambodian frontier. “The opportunity for 150, 000 Americans to come home in the next month [was] involved.”¹²² While Nixon did express concern for “the plight of 7 million Cambodian” citizens, this did not lead him to order a Vietnam-sized American commitment to rescue the Cambodian government as Lon Nol

¹¹⁸ Public Papers of the President, 1970, 410.

¹¹⁹ Public Papers of the President, 1970, 411.

¹²⁰ Kimball, Nixon’s Vietnam War, 211-212; Kissinger, White House Years, 505.

¹²¹ Kimball, Nixon’s Vietnam War, 197-210.

¹²² Public Papers of the President, 1970, 411.

had requested.¹²³ Publicly, Nixon noted “massive amounts of military assistance could not be rapidly and effectively utilized by the small Cambodian Army against the immediate threat.”¹²⁴ Privately, the President and his advisors realized that Lon Nol’s government likely could not survive indefinitely. When Undersecretary of State U. Alexis Johnson uncomfortably noted the danger of the incursion’s pushing some communist forces “deeper into Cambodia,” Henry Kissinger quickly changed the subject of the meeting back to the incursion’s predicted positive effect on South Vietnam’s stability.¹²⁵ In an earlier memorandum Nixon had directed to Kissinger, Nixon commented bluntly with regard to Lon Nol. “I do not believe he is going to survive.”¹²⁶

Nixon had made a decision that historians ever since have second-guessed. Believing that Cambodia’s government would eventually fall, Nixon chose to limit the aid provided to Lon Nol’s forces. Lon Nol’s government would manage to holdout until April 17, 1975, when troops of the Khmer Rouge captured and then proceeded to evacuate Phnom Penh. Polemicists such as William Shawcross have accused the Nixon Administration of sacrificing the nation of Cambodia and at least 1.7 million Cambodians for the sake of propping up the Thieu regime in South Vietnam.¹²⁷ The eventual descent of Cambodia into the Killing Fields must be a part of any evaluation of the administration’s Cambodian policy; however, the rise of the Khmer Rouge has nothing to do with whether Nixon followed his doctrine and sought to secure the safety of his Vietnamization strategy by deciding to implement a limited incursion of Cambodia.

¹²³ Public Papers of the President, 1970, 407; “Letter to President Nixon from General Lon Nol,” pages 1-2.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ “April 24, 1970, 4:20 PM Decision Summary”; Folder. “WSAG Meeting 4/20/70 Cambodia.” Washington Special Action Group (WSAG) Meeting Files, White House Special Files, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

¹²⁶ As quoted in Nixon, Memoirs, 448; Note: The memorandum is dated April 22, 1970, 5 AM.

¹²⁷ Shawcross, 11, 140-145.

The Nixon Doctrine demands that nations facing attacks from communist aggression must attempt first to defend themselves. As the history demonstrates, Cambodia's military along with civilians living in the sanctuaries attacked North Vietnamese forces but with little success. Phnom Penh was believed to be in danger of falling to communist forces. Cambodia's leader Lon Nol then personally wrote to President Nixon requesting massive aid. Nixon and his advisors examined the situation. They grimly determined that Cambodia most probably would not survive the communist onslaught. The only addition Nixon had made to his doctrine when he announced it in 1969 was the requirement that any aid provided must be able to be used effectively. Cambodia's military failed this test. Therefore, according to the Nixon Doctrine, America was not required to come fully to Cambodia's aid.

This left Nixon's tactical strategy of Vietnamization. The President needed to maintain the withdrawal program in order to halt the domestic dissent and rebuild a coalition to support his vision of an America still able to maintain an active role in Asian affairs. As Nixon had judged allowing a 600 mile communist frontier to go unchallenged would pose a threat to continued American withdrawals, action had to be taken. With Cambodia itself effectively demoted in importance, the American operation would be of a limited nature in both time and geographical scope. The main goal of the incursion was to inflict severe enough damage on the North Vietnamese forces over the frontier to allow ARVN to increase its hold on South Vietnam, thereby giving Vietnamization a continued chance of success and allowing those 150,000 American troops to come home.

During the period from April 30 to June 30, 1970, American and South Vietnamese forces inflicted heavy losses on the North Vietnamese Army. Estimates put

the death toll for enemy soldiers at over 11, 000 while the combined total of American and South Vietnamese troops killed in action was 976.¹²⁸ North Vietnamese forces took substantial material losses, as well. Soldiers seized five and one-half tons of documents detailing VC military strategy and arms supply routes.¹²⁹ One document revealed VC troops' preparations ahead of the expected American invasion: camouflaging bases and conserving troop strength.¹³⁰ Despite their best efforts, the North Vietnamese lost more than 16 million rounds of ammunition and mortars; 435 vehicles; 110, 800 pounds of pharmaceutical products; 14 million pounds of rice; 22, 000 individual weapons; 83, 000 pounds of explosives; and over 100, 000 rounds of large caliber ammunition of the type used against cities and military bases.¹³¹ Four months' worth of food rations for Hanoi's soldiers were gone along with the equivalent of all of the rockets, mortars, and recoilless rifle rounds expended in South Vietnam during the previous fourteen months of warfare.¹³²

Thus, Nixon's stated goal of the incursion was evident in the way in which military commanders tabulated their success. North Vietnamese soldiers could no longer employ the millions of rounds of ammunition and four months' worth of food rations against targets in South Vietnam. Nixon had followed through on his November 3, 1969, commitment. America would leave Vietnam no matter the results at the negotiating table. One hundred fifty thousand American troops withdrew from Indochina following the Incursion.¹³³ The Nixon Doctrine and the policy of Vietnamization did lead to the

¹²⁸ Tran Dinh Tho, The Cambodian Incursion (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1979), 194.

¹²⁹ Kissinger, White House Years, 506.

¹³⁰ Tho, 95.

¹³¹ Tho, 193.

¹³² Kissinger, 507.

¹³³ Public Papers of the President, 1970, 405.

decision of April 28, 1970. One indeed rightfully can debate the decision's morality, but one cannot argue that it was "impromptu" at best.

Conclusion

In October of 1967, Richard Nixon had a vision. It was that of an America freed from the war in Vietnam but still able to maintain an active role in Asian affairs. America would seek to form meaningful relations with Beijing while continuing to contain the contagion of communism. Nixon thought he knew how to conduct American foreign policy in a world of “no more Vietnams.” The only issue that remained unresolved in Nixon’s mind was how to withdraw American forces from Indochina without making solid Cold War allies such as Japan doubt America’s commitment to regional security.

Upon entering the Oval Office, Richard Nixon received for the first time an unbarred look at the tactical situation on the ground in Southeast Asia. Immediate withdrawal was not a viable option, all thoughts of political opportunism aside. As Henry Kissinger observed in 1968, “The commitment of five hundred thousand Americans has settled the issue of the importance of Vietnam.”¹³⁴ For a period of eight months from March to November 1969, Nixon and his team of advisors in both the Cabinet and the National Security Council examined the major options. The Vietnam Moratorium demonstrated that the public support Nixon’s vision required in order to maintain an active American role in the Pacific could not be salvaged by launching an all-out effort to win the war militarily. Subsequently, Nixon decided upon the middle strategic option, Vietnamization—a staged withdrawal over a variable period of time depending upon the ability of South Vietnamese troops to improve their own defensive capabilities.

¹³⁴ As quoted in John G. Stoessinger, Henry Kissinger: The Anguish of Power (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 51.

Unexpected events reared their head in Cambodia. Lon Nol and his supporters deposed Prince Norodom Sihanouk in a coup. Communist forces advanced, endangering the capital Phnom Penh. Nixon determined Vietnamization was at stake. The South Vietnamese could not be expected to advance their current positions or even to maintain them while being attacked from a newly escalating front to their rear. The situation demanded a quick decision: it also put the Nixon Doctrine to the test. Lon Nol requested a Vietnam-sized pledge to save his government. Nixon weighed the options and followed his vision. Serving as a guarantor of Lon Nol's regime would destroy any hopes of creating a consensus back home behind a new, active American foreign policy. Not doing anything would endanger the withdrawals that were necessary to create that consensus. Nixon chose the middle road: intervene to save the withdrawals not to save the Cambodian government.

A policy designed to get America out consequently required a brief American journey farther west. The closing words Nixon chose to use in an effort to rally the public behind his decision demonstrated what would become even more evident in the following years—Nixon was not an ace at managing public relations. The final paragraphs of the April 30, 1970, address put all of Nixon's idiosyncrasies on display. Nonetheless, the earlier paragraphs in the speech revealed his thought process to be cohesive. The connections between the Nixon Doctrine, Vietnamization, and the decision to dive into the Cambodian jungles could be made, even if Nixon's latter prose did serve to obfuscate them for many.

As the events at Kent State and other universities across the country would prove, Nixon's decision would be one of the most controversial of his presidency. Historians

would relive that controversy in their own studies, drawing conclusions that dwelled as much on Nixon's emotionalism as on his policy-making process. This is unfortunate both for history's understanding of the Nixon Administration and current policymakers' efforts to draw lessons from the past. Cambodia was not the last time an American president found himself faced with a decision that weighed protecting an American ally on the one hand with preventing the development of another Vietnam-style quagmire on the other. It is a ghost that continues to haunt the halls of the White House today.

George H. W. Bush chose to allow the Shiites to fail in their effort to overthrow Saddam Hussein in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War. His son, advised by some of those who argued that such a decision was an immoral breach of America's commitment to freedom, chose a different path. Examining the decisions of Presidents Nixon and Bush Sr., one conclusion all can agree upon is that there was no Cambodian or Iraqi quagmire on their watches for historians to write about. The debate over whether or not President Nixon had a plan serves therefore as an unfortunate opening gambit for a much larger debate with no clear answer. What is the proper balance between morality, values, and *realpolitik* in American foreign policy? With the existence of a Nixon vision for American policy in the Pacific and a concomitant strategy to remove American troops from Vietnam so as to allow the United States to realize that vision now demonstrated, historians and policymakers alike can begin to debate openly the issues that all along have existed, haunting the background.

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