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Congressional Record - The Situation in Cambodia

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THE SITUATION IN CAMBODIA

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, on yesterday, the press carried reports of an urgent request for military aid from the government which is now in control in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh. This request comes hardly as a surprise. What is surprising is the rapidity with which it follows the military coup against Prince Sihanouk.

In the circumstances, it would be desirable to sort out what we know about the Cambodian situation and what we do not know. What was for a decade and a half the only oasis of peace in Indochina has been turned into a bloody battlefield in the space of 1 month. The spreading conflict already involves a civil war between the Cambodians who remain loyal to Prince Sihanouk and those who follow the military government which overthrew him. The conflict already involves deep incursions into Cambodia by North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese, an extension of the battlefields which had been previously avoided throughout the Vietnamese war. The conflict already involves the potential of an ugly genocide by government-stimulated mob action against the several hundred thousand Vietnamese civilians—for the most part farmers, fishermen, and tradesmen who come from both North and South Vietnam and who have lived for decades in reasonable peace in Cambodia.

In short, the Pandora's box which was held shut by the leadership and diplomacy of Prince Sihanouk is now wide open. For years, Cambodia was in the eye of the Indochinese hurricane; now it is swept up in the full fury of a racial, ideological, and militarist storm.

It is scarcely a month since the successor government claimed authority over Cambodia and this government is already in deep trouble. Its urgent appeal for aid is a broadside which has gone to Communist governments and non-Communist governments—apparently, to anybody who will give support. It comes from a government whose earliest acts include a declaration of martial law and a suspension of personal liberties in a country which did not have martial law and which previously had provided a greater degree of personal freedom than most countries in Southeast Asia.

While the appeal for aid is directed to the world in general, it is reasonable to assume that it is aimed primarily at this country. Where else would urgent aid of any consequence come from in this situation if not from this Nation directly or through nations in the area which are supplied by us?

Some may find it difficult to resist an appeal for aid to this country from any source. Some may find the present military government more to their liking than its predecessor and, hence, more "worthy" of aid. Some may ask whether this Southeast Asian country will topple under the domino theory if we do not respond to the appeal for aid. Some may note that it is just some arms-aid that is being sought, not American forces.

If these observations sound familiar, it is because they are the siren's songs which have beckoned us time and again

even deeper into the morass of Southeast Asia. If there is ever a time to resist them it is when they are just beginning to become audible.

The fact is that we do not know anything of the character or competence of the government in Phnom Penh which has issued this appeal for aid. We do not know how far its authority extends outside the capital or beyond the main roads. We do not know what acceptability it may have among the Cambodian people. We do not know what will emerge in the end in the way of a Cambodian government from the present upheaval.

We do know, or ought to know, on the basis of experience that even with a massive infusion of American equipment we are likely to have minimal constructive effect on that upheaval and we will open the door to another destructive impact on our own national interests. We do know, too, or we should know at this late date—after Vietnam, after Laos—that each deepening of our involvement in Indochina began with an input of well-meaning aid.

President Nixon has made a wise start in pointing the national course away from our participation in the tragic war in Indochina. It is to be hoped that there will be no deviation from that course. The way to get out is not to go further in—in any way, shape, or form. The road out of Vietnam for this nation does not lead by way of arms-supply or any other involvement in this new extension of the Indochinese tragedy into Cambodia.