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Cambodia: The Handwriting on the Wall

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STATEMENT OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

Mr. President:

A year and a half has elapsed since the military overthrow of Prince Sihanouk and the subsequent U. S. incursion into Cambodia. At the time, these events were hailed as quickening the end of the war in Vietnam. A year and a half later, the war still goes on and this obscure episode of the long tragedy of Indochina is all but forgotten.

It is not forgotten, however, by the families of more than 350 Americans who died in the Cambodian invasion. Nor is it forgotten by the hundreds of other Americans who were wounded in that brief campaign. Nor is it forgotten, I should think, in Cambodian villages which have since been bombed or burned, undoubtedly, in order "to save them."

In retrospect, what was really achieved by the Cambodian gambit? Enemy Vietnamese forces--even the "high command"--were supposed to have been killed or captured in their "sanctuary" along the Vietnamese-Cambodian border by this essay. Well, to the extent that enemy forces were there in the first place, they withdrew from the border and since then, about all of Cambodia has become the enemy "sanctuary." Cambodia has also emerged as another battlefield of the Indochina war over which Americans are flying and dying. The indications are, moreover, that Cambodians are forming into an expanding guerrilla force under the banner of Prince Sihanouk and, together with their Vietnamese allies, have already taken control of most of the countryside.
It should be noted, in this connection, that before the government of Sihanouk was overthrown, nothing--zero--in the way of U. S. aid was going from this nation to Cambodia. Nevertheless, Cambodians were managing to live in a self-supporting and moderately progressive fashion. Their country was an oasis of order in war-torn Indochina. In one and a half years of coup-government in Pnom Penh the picture has been completely reversed. Cambodia is being reduced to chaos and devastation, even as the present Cambodian government is now well on its way to receiving its first billion dollars in direct or indirect support from the United States. The aid is going forth, moreover, notwithstanding our own financial difficulties.

In support of the Cambodian coup-government, this nation has become deeply involved in the internal affairs of still another people of Southeast Asia. The present Cambodian rulers are, for all practical purposes, dependents of this nation and the indications are that U. S. support--direct and indirect--is the sole significant prop which keeps the political-military structure in Pnom Penh from falling apart. To administer this support, the Executive Branch is rapidly expanding a U. S. official mission in Cambodia which already numbers well over a hundred Americans--civilian and military. The increase, I believe, comes to more than ten-fold in U. S. personnel in Cambodia in the year and a half since the overthrow of Sihanouk. At the same time, aid is also being provided indirectly by U. S. bombing here and there and everywhere in Cambodia in support of Pnom Penh's so-called national forces.
I sometimes wonder how we let ourselves get involved in these travesties of foreign policy which, rather than serve the interests of this nation give every appearance of being at complete odds with those interests. Cambodia is not the first case of this kind, of course, but it is certainly one of the most blatant.

The irony of this situation is that the trend of present Cambodian policy, insofar as I can see, runs strongly counter not only to the expressed inclinations of the Congress but also to the Nixon Doctrine which was supposed to provide the guidelines of that policy. Clearly, what is being done in Cambodia in the name of the United States is a complete distortion of the initiatives with regard to Cambodia which were taken by the President shortly after he assumed office. At that time, the President's aim was to restore friendly relations with the kind of inner-based Cambodian government which Prince Sihanouk was attempting to maintain in circumstances of tight-rope difficulty. These were initiatives, may I say, which by request as well as inclination, I sought, personally, to support at the time both here and in Southeast Asia.

A series of three articles on Cambodia by T. D. Allman which appear in recent issues of the Manchester Guardian shed a good deal of light on the factors which lead to the making of "Cambodia's" in United States foreign policy. The articles make clear that much of what has happened there has been guided not so much by the President's initiatives or the intent of Congress but by the availability of copious funds which permit agencies of this government an easy indulgence in these questionable enterprises. In that sense, the source of the difficulty is to be sought, not in Cambodia,
but in certain Southeast Asian obsessions in the Executive Branch and a somewhat indiscriminate readiness in the Congress, in the past, to finance them.

What has happened in Cambodia highlights a problem that seems to me to confront the Senate on an urgent basis. The Cambodian experience is an admonition to curb the easy outflow of the financial resources of the people of this nation which, for years, has been legislated in the name of national defense and foreign aid. In the case of Cambodia, the hundreds of millions of dollars already spent in a year and a half have done hardly anything for the defense of this nation except, perhaps, to weaken it by wastage. Nor have these expenditures helped the Cambodian people who have now been reduced to the common denominator of the irrelevant devastation which has been suffered in Laos and Viet Nam.

The articles previously mentioned are not unrelated to the legislation which is now before us and to the foreign aid bill which will be coming before us in the not too distant future. One might well ask how much of the funds authorized in this bill will go for procurement of military materiel to be exploded in or over Cambodia in the name of the defense of the United States, too, How much of the foreign aid bill that is coming to us shortly will go to support Cambodian military-political groups whose claim to authority in their country rests largely on the support of this nation? And to what end, the loss of American lives in Cambodia, Mr. President, to what end?

I ask unanimous consent that the articles be included at this point in the Record.