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August 13, 1972

STATEMENT BY SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD

EXCURSION FROM CAMBODIA

Mr. President:

Apart from Viet Nam, there are other situations in which we are enmeshed in Southeast Asia. It is difficult to keep them continuously in mind, so remote are they from any vital interest of the people of this nation. None-the-less, they go on, these irrelevant involvements. There is the half-forgotten war in Laos. There is the almost completely forgotten war in Cambodia. They cost this nation hundreds of millions of dollars of public funds each year. They cost lives -- some American lives, many other lives -- men, women, and children. They open ever-wider fans of destruction ~~which spread~~ over Indochina.

How many months ago, or years, was it, that we moved into Cambodia? Perhaps it will be only dimly remembered but that blitzkrieg tactic was debated for weeks at the time. The "incursion" into the Cambodian-Vietnamese border region was launched with great fanfare. It was supposed to result in the capture of the enemy headquarters, the destruction of the border "sanctuaries," the hastening of the end of the war and the insuring of the "safe" withdrawal of our forces.

Of course, the Cambodian invasion did none of these things. The high command, if it was ever there in the first place, simply moved out long before the invasion began. To the mounting casualties in Viet Nam and Laos, Cambodia added new accumulations of U. S. and other casualties.

What had been a constricted border hideout for the supply of a limited number of Viet Cong ^{and North Vietnamese} was turned by the incursion into a broad highway for the deployment and movement of any number of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces almost at random throughout most of Cambodia.

In short, the Cambodian gambit brought, not peace, but another costly extension of our involvement in Southeast Asia and one more expensive dependent government. It contributed to converting into one more desert of war, the last oasis of civil stability and modest progress in Indochina--the Cambodia of Prince Sihanouk. This dubious conversion was paid for almost entirely with the money of the American people. How many American lives also paid for it, Mr. President? How many limbs? How many more drug addictions?

Over and over again, the press has documented this exercise in tragic futility in Cambodia. The sorry recitation of internal devastation, corruption, incompetence, disassociation of people from government, mystic militarism, the growth of indigenous revolutionary forces and so on is all too familiar to anyone who has followed the situation in Southeast Asia over the years. Regrettably, the Cambodian situation is one in which we permitted our involvement-- again as we did in Viet Nam, as we did in Laos, to rise from the wetting of a toe up to the level of our necks. Indeed, we played the major part through military aid programs, air-support and B-52 bombing in converting what was a tolerable, productive and certainly peaceful existence for ordinary Cambodians into a life of aimless refugees among the spreading ruins of their towns and villages. All that has been spared, it would seem is the corruption in the capital of Pnom Penh.

So far as I can see, Mr. President, the best thing that could happen to the people of the United States in this situation would be for the Administration to end, forthwith, our military involvement in every form in the Cambodian theater of the Indochina war. As for the Cambodian people, the matter is for them to decide but it would seem to me they would be a lot better off if Prince Sihanouk were to ^{be} return^{ed} to Pnom Penh to head an interim government at least until such time as the war ends in a peace settlement. The Peking government with whom the

President and his foreign policy advisor, Mr. Kissenger, have established such excellent working relations, might well be prevailed upon to assist in the diplomacy of this endeavor. May I add that I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge, as remote, the likelihood of this development's coming to pass in the near future. It looks to me, Mr. President, that we select our lemons and having done so, seem determined to hold on to them until, not they, but we, ourselves, are squeezed dry.