

# Nixon defends the bombing

President Nixon acknowledged in his speech before the Veterans of Foreign Wars at New Orleans that he authorized the secret bombing of Cambodia in 1969 and said that if the lives of American soldiers were being threatened he would do so again today. He said the bombing saved American lives and served to bring the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table.

The bombing, of course, had been known thru admissions of Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, and other Pentagon spokesmen before a Senate committee, but now Mr. Nixon has accepted responsibility. His was a vigorous defense and it was cheered by his audience.

Far from bombing defenseless people in a neutral country, the President said, all the bombing was confined to a border strip of 10 to 15 miles in which no Cambodians lived and only North Vietnamese moved over their supply trails into South Viet Nam, where there were then 540,000 American troops.

It was North Viet Nam, not the United States, which violated Cambodian neutrality, Mr. Nixon said, and when his administration took counteraction it did so with the tacit consent of and without protest from Prince Sihanouk, who then was Cambodian chief of state. In fact, Sihanouk invited the President to make a state visit to Cambodia while the bombing was in progress, and this, Mr. Nixon felt, showed that he had no objection.

Appropriate leaders of Congress were informed, but the bombing was concealed from the American public and press because if it had been acknowledged the Cambodian government would have been obliged to protest. Only after recent disclosure of the bombing did Sihanouk, now in Peking after being deposed in 1970, make a pro forma denial that he had ever given his tacit consent.

The President deserves credit for candor in bringing the record into the open, but the fact remains that, despite the plausibility of his explanation now, the American press and public were kept in the dark at the time about a matter of some concern to them. So were most members of the House and Senate.

The enemy knew what was going on, Sihanouk knew it, and certain members of Congress, as well as high officials in the executive branch, knew it, but it was concealed from most Americans and from the media which might have informed them.

Mr. Nixon's New Orleans visit was marred by a possible conspiracy against his life disclosed by the Secret Service and New Orleans police, so that it was necessary to cancel his scheduled motorcade thru the downtown area. Nevertheless, those along his route gave him a friendly reception and that must have heartened a President whose administration has become deeply compromised by the Watergate affair.