



## The Cambodian Campaign: The 1970 Offensive and America's Vietnam War

*By John M. Shaw*

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When American and South Vietnamese forces, led by General Creighton Abrams, launched an attack into neutral Cambodia in 1970, the invasion ignited a firestorm of violent antiwar protests throughout the United States, dealing yet another blow to Nixon's troubled presidency. But, as John Shaw shows, the campaign also proved to be a major military success.

Most histories of the Vietnam War either give the Cambodian invasion short shrift or merely criticize it for its political fallout, thus neglecting one of the campaign's key dimensions. Approaching the subject from a distinctly military perspective, Shaw shows how this carefully planned and executed offensive provided essential support for Nixon's "decent interval" and "peace with honor" strategies-by eliminating North Vietnamese sanctuaries and supply bases located less than a hundred miles from Saigon and by pushing Communist troops off the Vietnamese border.

Despite the political cloud under which the operation was conducted, Shaw argues that it was not only the best of available choices but one of the most successful operations of the entire war, sustaining light casualties while protecting American troop withdrawal and buying time for Nixon's pacification and "Vietnamization" strategies. He also shows how the United States took full advantage of fortuitous events, such as the overthrow of Cambodia's Prince Sihanouk, the redeployment of North Vietnamese forces, and the late arrival of spring monsoons.

Although critics of the operation have protested that the North Vietnamese never did attack out of Cambodia, Shaw makes a persuasive case that the near-border threat was very real and imminent. In the end, he contends, the campaign effectively precluded any major North Vietnamese military operations for over a year.

Based on exhaustive research and a deep analysis of the invasion's objectives, planning, organization, and operations, Shaw's shrewd study encourages a newfound respect for one of America's genuine military successes during the

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#### About the Author

John M. Shaw has taught military history at the U.S. Military and Air Force academies and has most recently served as military assistant and speechwriter to the Secretary of the Army. He is coauthor of *Atlas of Warfare* since 1945.

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