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EFFORTS TOWARD PEACE IN VIETNAM, 1969 (YEARENDER) (700)

BY BARRY BROWN,

IPS COLUMNIST

WASHINGTON -- IDEALLY, OF COURSE, PEACE MEANS MORE THAN AN ABSENCE OF WAR. IN THAT SENSE, IT MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT PROGRESS TOWARD PEACE IN VIETNAM DURING THE YEAR NOW DRAWING TO A CLOSE HAS NOT RPT NOT BEEN GREAT. BUT THE MORE IMMEDIATE AND LIMITED CONCERN OF MOST PEOPLE NOW PROBABLY IS WITH WINDING DOWN THE FIGHTING, REDUCING THE AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT, AND DIMINISHING THE DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT OF THE VIETNAMESE WAR ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN GENERAL. AND IN THAT SENSE, 1969 HAS INDEED BROUGHT ABOUT A CONSIDERABLE CHANGE IN OUTLOOK. IN SO FAR AS A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT IS ESSENTIAL TO A TRUE PEACE OF RECONCILIATION AND RECONSTRUCTION, THE RECORD AT THE PARIS TALKS HAS BEEN DEEPLY DISCOURAGING. AT THE OPENING OF THE YEAR, JUST BEFORE PRESIDENT NIXON'S INAUGURATION ON JANUARY 20, THE CELEBRATED CONTROVERSY OVER THE SHAPE OF THE CONFERENCE TABLE DID FINALLY END IN AGREEMENT. BUT FROM THAT DAY TO THIS, THE ATTITUDE OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF NORTH VIETNAM AND THE VIETCONG-- REDESIGNATED IN JUNE AS A "PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT" RATHER THAN THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (NLF)-- HAS BEEN COMPLETELY INTRANSIGENT.

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THE REPEATED REFUSAL OF THE OTHER SIDE TO DISCUSS SPECIFIC, CONSTRUCTIVE PROPOSALS PUT FORWARD BY THE UNITED STATES AND SOUTH VIETNAM LEFT THE NEGOTIATIONS IN A HOPELESS DEADLOCK THROUGHOUT THE YEAR. IN NOVEMBER, AMBASSADOR HENRY CABOT LODGE AND HIS DEPUTY FINALLY RESIGNED LEADERSHIP OF THE AMERICAN DELEGATION. ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT NIXON HAS MADE IT CLEAR THAT THIS DOES NOT MEAN THE SEARCH FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT IS BEING DOWNGRADED, HE FOUND IT NECESSARY TO TELL HIS DECEMBER 8 NEWS CONFERENCE THAT THE OUTLOOK AT PARIS IS "NOT GOOD."

BUT IF HANOI HAS BLOCKED THE QUICKEST AND SUREST WAY TO GENUINE PEACE ALL YEAR LONG, THE UNITED STATES AND SOUTH VIETNAM HAVE NEVERTHELESS MADE PROGRESS ON THEIR OWN INITIATIVE TOWARD ENDING THE WAR IN ITS PRESENT FORM. THEIR ALTERNATE ROUTE IS CALLED VIETNAMIZATION--A PLAN TO REDUCE THE AMERICAN PRESENCE BY INCREASING THE CAPACITY OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE TO DEFEND THEMSELVES.

THE TROOP WITHDRAWALS, OF 25,000 ANNOUNCED IN JUNE AND 35,000 IN SEPTEMBER, HAVE ALREADY BEEN CARRIED OUT, AND NOW PRESIDENT NIXON HAS ORDERED A THIRD WHICH WILL PULL OUT ANOTHER 50,000 AMERICANS FROM SOUTH VIETNAM BY NEXT APRIL 15. THIS SIGNIFICANT REDUCTION IN THE TROOP CEILING OF 549,500 THAT WAS IN EXISTENCE WHEN THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION TOOK OFFICE CERTAINLY MEANS THAT THE LONG CONTROVERSY OVER "ESCALATION" HAS BEEN ENDED IN 1969. AS PRESIDENT NIXON HAS SAID, "WE HAVE RENOUNCED AN IMPOSED MILITARY SOLUTION."

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN CALLED "VIETNAMIZATION," THE MILITARY FORCES OF SOUTH VIETNAM HAVE SHOWN A CONSIDERABLE IMPROVEMENT IN THEIR CAPACITY TO TAKE OVER COMBAT RESPONSIBILITIES FROM THE AMERICANS. THE ENEMY'S ABILITY TO INFILTRATE TROOPS FROM NORTH VIETNAM INTO THE SOUTH AND TO SUSTAIN LARGE-SCALE OFFENSIVE ACTIONS HAS DIMINISHED, ALTHOUGH IT HAS BY NO RPT NO MEANS DISAPPEARED. AT YEAR'S END, IN FACT, AN INCREASE IN THE INFILTRATION RATE AND OTHER EVIDENCE HAS INDICATED THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEW WAVE OF ATTACKS. NEVERTHELESS, IF THE 1969 TREND CAN BE CARRIED FORWARD INTO 1970, IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE TO PRESS TOWARD A CONCLUSION OF THE WAR, IN ITS INTERNATIONAL ASPECT, THROUGH THE PROCESS OF VIETNAMIZATION AND REGARDLESS OF WHAT HAPPENS IN PARIS.

PREPARING AND EQUIPPING THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE TO DEFEND THEMSELVES, HOWEVER, IS NOT RPT NOT ONLY A MILITARY UNDERTAKING. ON THE NON-MILITARY SIDE OF THE STRUGGLE, ANOTHER SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT DURING THE YEAR WAS ANOTHER ROUND OF VILLAGE AND HAMLET ELECTIONS IN MARCH, IN WHICH MORE THAN A MILLION SOUTH VIETNAMESE CAST BALLOTS FOR LOCAL LEADERS OF THEIR OWN CHOICE. POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS OF THIS KIND ARE COMMONLY CALLED PACIFICATION, BECAUSE THEY REPRESENT THE FRUITS OF THE PEACE THAT IS BEING SOUGHT BY IMPROVING SECURITY IN THE COUNTRYSIDE.

IF TRUE PEACE HAS NOT RPT NOT BEEN ACHIEVED IN VIETNAM DURING 1969, EITHER AT THE CONFERENCE TABLE OR ON THE BATTLEFIELD, IT IS THUS NOT RPT NOT TOO MUCH TO SAY THAT THE YEAR HAS MARKED A DECISIVE TURNING POINT TOWARD THAT GOAL. ITEM

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