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MOSCOW'S INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS ROUNDTABLE

[Moscow Domestic Service in Russian, 0900 GMT,
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(International Observers Roundtable with Movosti political observer Spartak Beglov; Pravda special correspondent Ivan Shchedrov, and political observer of the Central Television and All-Union Radio Anatoliy Potapov).

[Editor's note: The first portion of "Observers Roundtable," dealing with the 24th CPSU Congress draft directives on the five-year plan of development of the USSR national economy from 1971, to 75, and the treaty banning the placing of nuclear weapons and other types of mass destruction weapons on the sea and ocean beds, does not relate to Indochina and has been deleted].

Shchedrov: In his speech at the treaty-signing ceremony in Moscow, Aleksey Nikolayevich Kosygin stressed that such acts as the treaty can fully serve peace if the practical activity of states in the field of foreign policy is determined by the aims of preserving and consolidating peace and not by increasing international tension and aggression.

Well, one remembers these words again when one reads the late reports from Laos and one thinks that, at present, the practical activities of the main powers of the capitalist world -- the United States -- in the field of foreign policy are by no means directed toward consolidating peace. The invasion (Vtorzheniye) of Laos is continuing. The escalation of the American aggression is continuing on all the fronts of Indochina,

The Americans keep repeating that what is happening is allegedly only an invasion limited in time and scale, as if a limited aggression were not an aggression at all.

Let us, however, in spite of all these allegations, have a look at the true scale of the intervention in Laos and the whole of Indochina. What is the true state of things?

The war has already embraced at present the 50 million population of Indochina. Four or five years ago, only 20 million - 25 million were drawn into the war; now, I repeat, it is already 50 million. In spite of all its reassurances to the effect that the White House is allegedly looking for a way to settle the Viet-Nam issue, the Indochina issue, by political means, Washington is moving to a new escalation of the war. Today, the American interventionists, with Saigon units moving ahead of them, are conducting from Vietnamese territory an offensive

on a frontline which extends from the 17th parallel to the South, over 1,300 kilometers. It is on that frontline of 1,300 kilometers that Saigon troops are conducting, under U.S. command, an offensive against the patriotic forces of Laos and the patriotic forces of Cambodia. Fifty thousand troops are formally participating in that operation. But, this is only formally. In the area where fighting is now going on--here are the calculations which I have quickly made; I know because last year I visited many areas both of Laos and Viet-Nam--in that area, according to the most modest calculations, there are at present about 400,000 men and officers both of the interventionists and of Asian troops--Washington's mercenaries from countries of Indochina. Such is the scale of the operation.

The operation is being conducted at present in the immediate neighborhood of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam--at a distance of only 15 or 20 kilometers. A shock force of 30,000, of which 10,000 are American troops, is now concentrated in that area, where the borders of Laos, the DRV, and South Viet-Nam meet. There are there now armored units and selected air force units. The offensive is conducted along Route 9. I have been on that road, and I think that this is not the object, so to speak, of Washington's longing. The point is that Route 9 cuts through the whole of Indochina--both Viet-Nam and Laos--more or less along the 17th parallel. The Americans want to cut the whole of Indochina into two parts, and to stifle the national liberation movement part by part.

Such is the plan. That plan was worked out long ago--already at the time of McNamara--and now the Americans have for the first time decided to launch that venture. There has been nothing like it in the history of the Indochinese war.

Baglov: When you were talking of the concentration of troops in the immediate vicinity of the DRV's border, I remembered reports coming from abroad, in particular from the United States, in which it is said that the Saigon puppets insist on a ground forces' invasion of the territory of the DRV. L'Humanite wrote a few days ago that the threat to North Viet-Nam is becoming ever more concrete. If they receive the order, the paper points out, the troops can carry out a landing operation within hours. And, note this report from the United States: Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Armed Forces in the Pacific McCain is to meet Abrams in Saigon next week. This is the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Armed Forces in South Viet-Nam. What do you think of this?

Shchedrov: I would like to add that, in the last few weeks, the Americans increased their provocations against the DRV. They are subjecting villages in the northern Demilitarized Zone to artillery fire. On 10 February, ships of the American fleet shelled fishermen's boats from the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam within the territorial waters of the DRV. Many people were killed or wounded.

We know already that three U.S. warships have now entered the waters of the Tonkin Gulf. All this shows that the Americans are conducting a provocative bustle near the borders of the DRV. The United States continues to the escalation, to build up tension in Indochina.

Potapov: It is true that U.S. State Secretary Rogers has denied these reports about a possible intrusion into the DRV.

Shchedrov: But, by the way, (? there is a report) which has not been denied: 1,500 marines have landed on the northern coast of South Viet-Nam. They are now at a distance of literally 10 kilometers from the border of the DRV.

Potapov: (? we know) the value of American denials in general. I would like to recall facts which show how carefully and for how long the American aggression in Laos was prepared. As early as 1968, former Commander-in-Chief of the American troops in South Viet-Nam General Westmoreland suggested an intervention in Southern Laos, and he demanded at the time for that purpose something like 200,000 ground troops. That suggestion did not meet with a positive response in Washington; but that old intention of the American brasshats says much by itself.

In effect, the question of extending the aggression in Indochina arose immediately after the proclamation in 1969 of Nixon's so-called Guam Doctrine--a doctrine of aggressive war, to be practically waged according to jesuitic methods--with the purpose of forcing Asians to fight Asians, with use of the U.S. military support and under U.S. command.

In the opinion of American observers, the aggression in Laos represents the logical development of events after the intervention in Cambodia in May 1970. The President has now undertaken steps in order to complete what he started when he carried out the intrusion (Vtorzheniye) into Cambodia, this is what the well known American observer, Joseph Alsop, stated a few days ago.

The question of a new military intrusion into a neutral country was agreed upon as far back as three months ago, during the talks between American officials and Saigon authorities. On 11 January, when he was in Saigon, U.S. Defense Secretary Laird discussed the aggression plan in detail with the Saigon puppet President Thieu. On his return in Washington Laird reported to Nixon on the results of his trip and got his consent for working out further details of the military situation. At the end of January, meetings followed between commander of U.S. armed forces in South Viet-Nam, General Abrams, and U.S. Ambassador Bunker. On 1 February, Bunker left for Washington to meet Nixon. There he personally signed the order to invade Laos, Souvanna Phouma's Laotian government was not informed of it. He said that he had not been consulted. This statement was met with irritation by Washington's official circles. I would like to quote here a statement by French observer Genevieve Tabouis, who is usually well informed. She wrote in Paris Jour last Thursday that the possibility was not excluded of the replacement of Souvanna Phouma by rightwing forces and of the forming of an openly pro-American government in Vientiane.

By the way, according to the American press Souvanna Phouma had not even been informed of the agreement between the South Vietnamese and rightwing Laotian generals.

Tabouis writes that such a government would mean the forming of a pro-American axis: Saigon-Phnom Penh-Bangkok-Vientiane. Washington has been dreaming of this from the very start of the war in Southeast Asia. The conclusion is reached that this probably was the political aim Washington had in mind when launching its operations in Laos. This is how Washington's official aggressive plans in Southeast Asia are being gradually revealed.

Beglov: Thus once again, as in the case of the Cambodian adventure, the Americans have been faced with a fait accompli. But unlike the intervention in Cambodia, when, as you remember, verbose declarations had been issued in order to camouflage the act of aggression by talking of the necessity to protect the lives of American soldiers (words indistinct).

Now, however, the Washington leaders have not even deigned to do so. The White House is clearly acting on the premise that the less notice it takes of public opinion the more freedom it will have for new actions of that kind. The Washington Post stresses, for instance, that these actions destroy the faith even of those Americans who in the past were prepared to accept the argument that everything was dictated by the wish to successfully insure the gradual withdrawal

of American troops from Viet-Nam. Who can guarantee now, the Americans ask, that under the same pretext we will not have to use the war machine at some other place and against some other country next month?

And what you have said here about the facts of a new aggravation of the situation near the frontiers of the DRV serves as an illustration of these words and answers the question (words indistinct).

Shchedrov: I would like to quote a few facts which expose the false idea which is now given so much publicity by Washington--that Nixon is against the escalation of war in Indochina, that American units are being withdrawn from Southeast Asia, and that peace is in sight.

Here are these facts: In the course of the eight years--from 1961 to 1968 -- under two U.S. Presidents, 2.5 million tons of bombs were dropped on Viet-Nam; tens of towns, thousands of villages were destroyed. But in the past two years, while Nixon has been President 4.3 million tons of bombs have been dropped--twice as many as during the preceding eight years. This is what the "de-escalation" of the war looks like in fact. It is more than all the bombs dropped by the United States during World War II. Two years ago there were 1.6 million interventionists and soldiers of puppet armies in Indochina; but now there are two million under the command of Pentagon generals in Indochina. Such is the diminishing scale of the war; such is the way out of the war, which Washington loves to talk about. The U.S. Air Force is now carrying out the most massed air raids in Indochina. Over 1,000 military air sorties were carried out over Indochina yesterday, including dozens of sorties by B-52 flying fortresses. This is what the White House statement about peace returning to Indochina looks like in reality.

Beglov: The statement made by Denmark's Foreign Minister, Hartling, is significant. Talking of (? the recent events) in Laos he said: "To leave aside the question of military responsibility, I have to state on behalf of the Danish government that we find it difficult to understand how this territorial extension of the war can be made to agree with the proclaimed aim of ending the war--not by means of a military victory by one of the sides but as a result of political negotiations." In fact, what are the American diplomats, who have been entrusted to conduct the talks in Paris, doing? Where are the promised steps to obtain a political settlement? Public opinion, diplomacy, political negotiations--all this has been thrown under the wheels of the war machine which has forced its way into neutral Laos.

Potapov: Ivan Mikhaylovich, you have visited the countries of Southeast Asia more than once; and just recently you visited Indochina once again. In your opinion, to what extent are the statements justified to the effect that Washington is trying to form a pro-American bloc?

Shchedrov: In fact, when I was in the countries of Indochina I also addressed this question to many people who had to deal with U.S. policy and with the policy of the countries which are now carrying out the aggression. With this aim in view I visited the headquarters of the SEATO bloc and had conversations there with a number of officers and former officers of that bloc. I said to them: Your bloc had a session last year and passed a secret decision, which is no longer a secret to anyone on forming of pro-American military alliance. The United States is not to participate in it openly (? but to be present discreetly). The alliance is to consist of Saigon, Phnom Penh, Vientiane, and Bangkok. They did not even attempt to deny the fact. I asked them then: How is that--Laos is neutral, Cambodia is neutral--you have decided to invade these countries? (They said then): Well, if the authorities of Phnom Penh and Vientiane appeal to us, we will form such a bloc. And at the same time CIA agents in Vientiane were making plans to replace the Vientiane government of Souvanna Phouma--Prince Souvanna Phouma--with a new government headed by the same kind of generals as in Phnom Penh, so that these generals could send an official request to SEATO. This is the kind of mechanism that has been and is still being worked out.

The question arises: What do the American aggressors want in Indochina, where no one has invited them and which is situated thousands of kilometers from their country? Reports which appeared in the Western press last week attracted the close attention of many political observers, judging by American sources, oil deposits have been discovered in the region of Indochina, in the coastal stretch of the ocean. Preliminary calculations show that these deposits can almost be compared with the rich deposits in the Middle East. It has been reported that representatives of 10 large American oil companies are already in Cambodia and Thailand in order to carry out prospecting of under-water oil deposits. You see what the American monopolies are trying to achieve. And this is happening now, when the firm action of the 10 largest oil exporting countries, which have stood in a united front against the many years' long plunder of their oil resources by western monopolies, has forced the international oil consortium to retreat; when higher payments to the exporting countries are envisaged for the oil extracted by Western concerns. Have the American trusts now decided to satisfy their appetites elsewhere--in Southeast Asia? The

French newspaper l'Aurore said last week: "So the American boys are now dying in Indochina for oil? America is now beginning to ask."

It can be seen from Western press reports that the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee has become alarmed by such statements. It has sent an inquiry to the administration. "However it may be," the semi-official AFP has stated, "everyone is expecting a serious explanation or a denial by the State Department."

Potapov: So far both the military plans of the Pentagon and the political plans worked out by the CIA have come to nothing. I would like to remind you here that at present, in the 11th year of U.S. armed intervention the situation in Indochina is as follows: Two-thirds of Laos are controlled by the patriotic forces; two-thirds of Cambodia are controlled by the patriotic forces; and, as you know, the greater part of South Viet-Nam also is controlled by the patriots. And I believe--in fact I am convinced--that the new plans also will suffer failure, because it is the people who are fighting the Americans in Indochina; the people who are now united in the great big alliance of the peoples of Indochina. As you know, a conference of Indochinese peoples was held last year. You know that now, during the period of aggression against Laos and Cambodia, in the course of the talks held by the leaders of the main patriotic forces of the countries of Indochina a new agreement has been reached on consolidating the common alliance, the fighting alliance of Indochinese peoples who are fighting against the American aggressors, for freedom and independence.

Beglov: It seems to me that we must now consider the broader consequences of the operations in Laos which will affect the Asian countries. What I mean is that a certain military and political pattern is being proposed for the establishment and consolidation of American supremacy in Southeast Asia a whole. For the American and Saigon invasion in Laos means not only a violation of the country's neutrality and the pledge given by the Americans in Geneva in 1962; there is a clear intention here to create conditions for the installation of a puppet government and to change the Laotian situation completely to the pattern of South Viet-Nam. This is the political face of the Vietnamization which is being forced upon the whole of Indochina. And later this may be the destiny of other countries in Southeast Asia. One could also speak here of the threats which lead from Washington operations in Indochina to the actions of military and political circles of the United States and Britain in other Asian countries. For in reply to the interventionists' invasion of Laos the British Foreign Office found nothing better to say than "Her Majesty's government gives its support to the policy of Vietnamization." Of course; for the conservatives themselves have now come forward with a doctrine of Great Britain's return to the area east of the Suez. In fact, London has pledged itself to be the

United States' partner in carrying out Nixon's doctrine. It is not a disinterested partnership, however. It is based on the principle: a service for a service. And while relying on American military cover, London is at the same time looking for an opportunity to make use of its own possibilities and resources-- political and military-- with a view to finding its own sphere of influence. At present, for instance, British diplomacy, with the help of Australia, is very active in preparing the so-called five-sided pact which is to be signed this spring. In addition to Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, it is to include Singapore and Malaysia. And characteristically, while SEATO policy is cracking, the policy of Vietnamization needs consolidation of the entire rearguard system of alliances which protect the American supremacy. Thus, the recruiting of mercenaries continues. The conclusion is that the Americans and their partners want not only to fight to the last Asian, but also to build up with Asian hands positions from which it would be easiest of all to rule the neo-colonial empire in accordance with the principle "divide and rule." This, in my view, is one of the main lessons of the evil march of Vietnamization and Nixon's doctrine from Laos to the Indian Ocean, which we have witnessed.

Potapov: This policy is now met with indignation throughout the world. The escalation of American aggression in Indochina has been condemned by prominent statesmen and politicians in the west, and even in the United States itself. Mass protest meetings and demonstrations have been held in various countries, including our country. Clearly neither the new intervention which has now been launched, nor the notorious Vietnamization will be able to give anything to the United States. They will not give the Americans a victory over the heroic Vietnamese people, over the courageous Laotian and Cambodian patriots who are defending their freedom and independence. The Soviet Union, like other socialist countries, firmly condemns the aggression and will continue in the future to give every support to the peoples of Indochina in repelling the armed imperialist intervention.

Here, comrades, we end today's talk of the international observers roundtable. Thank you for having listened to our broadcast, All the best to you !