

THE U.S. AND INDOCHINA

by the Indochina Resource Center, 1322 18th St., NW Wash., D.C. 20036 785-3111 No. 2, February 1, 1974

VIEWPOINT: SHOWDOWN OVER INDOCHINA BEGINS

"We must guard against the tendency to express relief at our military extrication from Southeast Asia by "Washing our hands" of the whole affair...We must provide economic assistance (and) the continued military aid grants required to maintain strong, self-reliant defense forces." -- Pres. Nixon, State of Union message, p. 48 Jan. 30, 1974

THE PEOPLE AND CONGRESS

A showdown over Indochina between the US Executive and the American people and Congress has begun. It may well be a drawn-out affair. But a confrontation between a Presidential branch committed to holding Indochina, and a Congress and public which is not, now appears inevitable.

The 1-year anniversary of the Paris Agreement this January 27 not only found Indochina in flames, with casualties over the past year including 200,000 Vietnamese dead and wounded, 818,000 Vietnamese refugees, and over 500,000 Cambodian war victims. (See Special Insert)

This anniversary also found the Administration waging an early 1960s-style covert war, through a giant \$3 billion military aid program, and the covert use of thousands of American personnel. (See adjoining column and page 4)

This Administration decision maintains Indochina as a focus of domestic U.S. conflict.

Vietnam, it will be remembered, spawned the most serious attempt to check the burgeoning growth of Executive power since the end of World War II. Millions of ordinary citizens protesting the war in the 1960s compelled Congress to begin limiting the powers of a Vietnam-discredited Pentagon, White House and State Department.

The 1973 Paris Agreement could have removed Indochina as a key factor in American politics. The Pentagon, CIA and White House could have honored the Agreement by withdrawing, allowed the Indochina to settle their own affairs and attempted to recoup resultant losses in Executive credibility elsewhere.

Instead, the Administration has precipitated a showdown over Indochina.

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THE ADMINISTRATION:

HIDING U.S. OFFICIALS IN SAIGON

"Access to American officials has been sharply restricted since (Ambassador Martin's) arrival in mid-July...Mission (officials) are nervous about talking with (reporters)... The Ambassador personally passes upon interviews... (He) has almost completely cut off journalists' official access to the Defense Attaché's office."

-- James Markham, N.Y. Times, Jan. 17

HIDING 'PENTAGON EAST' CONTROL CENTER

"The U.S. role is still a major one here... The huge 'Pentagon East' building... is as busy as ever... Deep inside the building... there is still a 'defense-operations center'... Manned around the clock by US military men and civilians who are retired or technically separated from the armed forces..."

-- Wendell Merick, US News and WR, Feb. 4

HIDING MILITARY AID FROM CONGRESS

"(Journalists') attempts... to obtain official information on... the US supply effort to Vietnam have been rebuffed by both the State and Defense Departments, and members of Congress have met with the same obstacle... Asst. Sect. of Defense John O. Marsh, Jr., said that (such) information had been given to the Armed Services Committee. A check with the committee revealed, however, that it had received no such information."

-- Stanley Karnow, New Republic, Jan. 5-12

HIDING U.S. GUNSHIP PILOTS

"Robert Ransom, an IBM... attorney... said he was told by a continued, p.2

THE PEOPLE AND CONGRESS (cont.)

U.S. BOMBING: ADMINISTRATION VS CONGRESS

"If the North Vietnamese... launch an all-out offensive... the authority (from Congress to bomb) might be forthcoming."

---DOD Sect. Schlesigner, WETA-TV, Jan. 7

ED HERMAN (CBS): "Schlesinger (has said) the President might come... to Congress... to bomb... Would Congress (agree)?"

SEN. HUGH SCOTT: "No."

--"Face the Nation", CBS-TV, Jan. 20

The groundwork for this showdown has been laid in Congress and among the public during the past year.

In addition to the limiting Executive use of American technology for the first time this century by halting U.S. bombing in Cambodia, Congress has just passed a series of restrictions on American aid which would have been unthinkable 10 years ago: bans have been placed on American ground, sea and air intervention, U.S. funding of third country mercenaries, and U.S. funding of South Vietnam's police and prison system. Congress has also called for media access to U.S.-financed military bases, an end to in-country police training world-wide, and halting aid to governments holding political prisoners.

Public education around South Vietnam's political prisoners has resulted in what both U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin and Canadian MP Andrew Brewin have termed one of the largest pressure campaigns of this century.

Some 20 organized peace groups announced a new strategy eschewing mass demonstrations and focusing instead on direct congressional pressure a few months ago. Called the United Campaign, its goals are ending aid to Thieu, freeing the political prisoners, and preventing further American involvement. One of its major tactics is a Pledge to oppose U.S. involvement, to be signed by Congressmen and organizations.

The showdown which has now begun will center on public pressure to force Congress to implement its restrictions on U.S. involvement, restrictions which the Administration is now covertly avoiding.

If covert U.S. involvement cannot be fully ended, however, this showdown will culminate in a donnybrook over Administration attempts to resume American bombing.

The outcome of this showdown over Indochina will be fateful to the world of the 1970s as was domestic US conflict over Vietnam in the 1960s.

THE ADMINISTRATION (cont.)

former U.S. military adviser... that Americans are still flying gunships from Da Nang airbase... often camouflaged under a Red Cross emblem..."

--- Stephen Werniel, Boston Globe, Jan. 27

HIDING ARMS DOLLARS FROM CONGRESS

"A Congressional source said... 'We can't begin to know what is actually being spent on Vietnam because there is no separate line item in the budget specifically for Vietnam."

--- Leslie Gelb, N.Y. Times, Jan. 24

HIDING THE CIA

Apparently, unknown to the American public, the CIA has taken up some of the slack created by our military withdrawal."

--- Cong. Aspin, revealing doubling of CIA-owned Air America contracts in Thailand, Jan. 8

HIDING ARMS FROM THE ICCS

American officials insist that the United States is faithfully observing the Paris cease-fire agreement... however, no independent verification is possible because of the inability of the two-party Joint Military Commission and the International Commission of Control and Supervision to agree on a method of inspection..."

---David Shipley, NY Times, Jan. 28

HIDING COVERT U.S. AIRMEN

"When American reporters asked to talk with members of this American unit (working with Lao and Cambodian pilots) they were told this could not be done without the consent of the Thai government."

---Jack Foisie, Udorn A.F. Base, Thailand
Los Angeles Times, Jan. 11

HIDING U.S. JETS

"The U.S. is about to send South Vietnam the first of 60 advanced F5E jet fighters... Under article 7 of the... peace accords... new equipment can only go on a one-for-one... basis... Some officials privately admit that the F5E resembles the F5A in name only: But the official position is that (it) has the same 'configuration' as the F5A..."

--- George Sherman, Wash. Star-News, Jan. 8

HIDING THE LARGEST EMBASSY IN WORLD

"By itself, the official US Mission in South Vietnam... is still the largest American Mission in the world. No major reductions... are expected in the foreseeable future... (Ambassador Martin) is trying to discourage any publicity concerning the American presence here... Maj. Gen. John E. Murray, the chief of the Defense Attaché Office... was recently told to stop giving interviews."

--- Daniel Southerland, Christian S.M., Jan. 30

HIDING

"The Pentagon sends to the State Department many news-men's queries that it used to answer. State Department officials suggest that the journalists put their queries to the South Vietnamese Embassy."

--- Gelb, N.Y. Times, Jan. 27

FORMER GREEN BERET'S JOB IN PARACELS: WHAT'S YOUR GUESS?

"Vietnamese military officers said the American was stationed with a four man Saigon meteorological team on Robert Island..."
-- Chicago Daily News, January 22, 1974

"Diplomatic sources said today the American...had gone there last week with the ostensible purpose of looking at the weather station on Pattle Island..." --- Reuters, Jan. 22

"(He) was aboard a South Vietnamese ship making a routine inspection voyage in the Paracels..." UPI, January 23, 1974

"Officials here were vague about Mr. Kosh's job. They said they were unclear on precisely what he and the other liaison men were supposed to observe..." -- NY Times, Jan. 23

"Kosh, a former Green Beret captain in Vietnam, was assigned as an observer to the South Vietnamese navy at Danang..."
-- Philadelphia Inquirer, January 26

SOUTH VIETNAM: THIEU GOES ON THE OFFENSIVE

THIEU, NOT PRG, LAUNCHES LONG-AWAITED OFFENSIVE

"President Nguyen Van Thieu...said pre-emptive actions of the South Vietnamese army had forestalled a Communist offensive, but the fight now had to be carried to zones occupied by the Vietcong under the cease-fire agreement, because the threat of an offensive still remained."

--Phillip McCombs, Wash. Post, Jan. 5, 1974

"The South Vietnamese Government has announced its warplanes are systematically bombing communist-held areas... Although the Saigon government has admitted bombing Vietcong strongholds previously, it was the first open admission of systematic bombing across South Vietnam..."

--UPI, from Saigon, January 10, 1974

For months now, U.S. and Government of the Republic of Vietnam (GVN) officials have been predicting an imminent communist offensive. As we have pointed out in these pages, there has been little or no evidence of such an offensive. (See "South Vietnam: Whose Offensive?" The U.S. and Indochina, December 1, 1973.)

We suggested, moreover, that the real motivation behind such reports was to pressure Congress into passing aid to Thieu and Lon Nol, and prepare public opinion for what was actually an offensive by Thieu caused in part by deteriorating economic and political conditions in his zones.

In January, 1974, this analysis was officially confirmed.

Not only were no predictions of communist offensive reported this month, but several stories appeared saying flatly that American intelligence officials no longer expected a communist offensive in 1974. (See, for example, a piece by Charles Corddry in the Baltimore Sun, January 3, 1974.)

And Thieu openly announced on January 4 his own offensive, while acknowledging that the communist offensive he had been predicting had not occurred. By January 10, Saigon officials were admitting nation-wide bombing, a clear preparation for major ground sweeps to be attempted in the months to come.

It also became clearer than ever, moreover, that Thieu's bellicosity arose more from weakness than strength.

Politics in South Vietnam have been reduced to the kind of feudal rivalries which characterized the years before the fall of Diem. As the New York Times reported on January 10, "Political parties...are moribund, first quashed and now largely ignored by...Thieu...Within the heavily guarded walls of the presidential palace...two factions...have come to the real politics of South Vietnam...One...is led by Hoang Duc Nha, the President's...adopted nephew...The other is led by

Nguyen Ngan...who...operates behind the scenes like a member of a secret society."

The major political event of January was President Thieu's decision to tamper again with the long-ignored 1967 Constitution, and have the National Assembly and Senate change it to allow him to run for a Third Term in 1975. Opposition deputies and Senators, already in the minority due to fixed elections, reacted strongly. Senator Vu Van Mau, leader of the Buddhist opposition slate in the Senate, shaved his head in protest.

Senator Mau had only done this once before: in the final years of the Diem regime.

Economics, however, remained Thieu's biggest headache. Widespread corruption continued, and indeed increased. The New York Times, for example, reported on January 14 that landlords were beginning to return and reclaim land given peasants under the "Land to the Tiller" program. This was particularly true in areas close to Saigon, which were secure for first time in years due to the lack of communist military initiatives. Mr. Vu Cong Minh, a member of the National Assembly's Agriculture Committee, said that "Thousands of farmers...who have got their land titles...are again becoming tenants. Former landowners and corrupt officials are trying by all means to steal away their land..."

The internal economic weaknesses in Thieu zones were added to by a bad rice crop, falling U.S. aid, and higher world prices for Saigon's staggeringly high load of consumer imports. In 1973, for example, imports were \$749 million, exports \$62 million. (NY Times, Jan. 27). Inflation was 65%. (Wash. Star-News, Jan. 13).

And, as has been reported here before, South Vietnam still proved unable to attract any foreign investment. All this could, of course, change if Thieu wins.

WHAT A THIEU VICTORY MEANS

"One Sony executive...noted that a Vietnamese factory worker is paid \$22 a month for doing the same work that brings \$113 a month in Japan. As a result, some businessmen who find costs soaring in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore are looking in the direction of Saigon and waiting."

--David Shipler, New York Times, Jan.27

"The man in charge of (tourism) is Le Thai Khuong, the jovial director of Vietnam's tiny National tourist office..."

At least two gambling casinos are already being planned. Night clubs and bars...And, finally, there are Vietnam's pretty girls.

'Soon I will send up a proposal for "sex tourism,"' Khuong said. 'Many people want to visit Vietnam not to see the mountains or the shopping but to try, just once, our girls.'

--Burris, Honolulu Advertiser, June 20, 1973

THE U.S. AND INDOCHINA: HIGHLIGHTS OF JANUARY, 1974

January - Air Force magazine calls for air offensive similar to Christmas 1972 B52 saturation bombing of Hanoi in event of communist offensive in South Vietnam.

3 - U.S. intelligence officials quoted as no longer predicting a countrywide communist offensive in 1974

4 - US forces in Thailand reportedly to be reduced to 32,000 same level as in the spring of 1972 which shot up to 48,000 as soon as spring offensive began

5 - President Thieu announces "pre-emptive" offensive into PRG zones

6 - Administration reported planning additional \$400 million-\$1 billion in arms aid to Thieu, to supplement \$813 million already allocated

- U.S. Embassy in Thailand admits CIA member sent false letter to Thai government purportedly from Thai insurgents

8 - Administration reported planning to send 60 F5E jet bombers worth \$1.6 million each to Saigon: an apparent violation of "piece for piece" replacement clause of Paris Agreement, since F5Es are reported to resemble the F5As they will replace "in name only".

9 - Congressman Aspin reports CIA-run Air America has increased its contracts in Thailand from \$17.7 million in 1972 to 41.4 million in 1973, making Air America's parent company, the Pacific Corporation, the nation's 91st ranking defense contractor

- Amnesty International in London releases report charging that Thieu government holds 75,000-100,000 political prisoners, PRG several thousand

- The CIA's Joint Liaison Detachment, based in Udorn and serving as the nerve center for CIA activities in Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and South Vietnam, is publicly revealed in Thai press (Bangkok Post) for the first time anywhere.

10 - Saigon government announces extensive bombing throughout South Vietnam, first time such an announcement is made

11 - US Airmen reported drawing combat pay flying illegal reconnaissance missions from Thailand into Laos, Cambodia South Vietnam

12 - Thai students reported holding frequent demonstrations against U.S. Ambassador William Kintner

- Hugh Tovar, former CIA station chief in Laos, revealed to be CIA station chief in Thailand

- Saigon government reported resettling 150,000 refugees in Quangtri province

- Leading neutralist Son Sann, a former Prime Minister, calls upon Lon Nol to leave Cambodia so that negotiations with Khmer Rouge can take place

16 - Hanoi reported to have published White Book proposing diplomatic relations with US for first time, provided that the U.S. halt its interference in Indochina

17 - US Ambassador Martin reported to be giving "uncritical" support to Thieu, restricting information to American press, preventing realistic internal reporting in the U.S. mission, and pushing for \$1 billion in arms aid to Thieu

19 - CIA reported to have 150 operatives in Thailand, most involved in counter-insurgency

20 - Administration reportedly to ask \$99 billion for defense, up from 84.2 billion last year

- Thieu pushes through amendment in parliament to run for third term in 1975

- South Vietnam loses Paracel Islands in dispute with Chinese

22 - President Thieu personally ordered first shots fired on Chinese in Paracel, it is reported

27 - Police keep foreign press away from Madame Ngo Ba Thanh, a major Third Force leader. Madame Thanh's son is arrested, then released the next day

- US Senate Subcommittee on Refugees releases report showing 971,054 Vietnamese killed, wounded, or made homeless, between the ceasefire and December 13, 1973. Calls for massive study of American military practices in Indochina. Reports 500,000 Cambodian newly generated as war victims in 1973

- 4 US TV newsmen from ABC Television released after being held by Saigon police for 24 hours after they emerged from PRG zones

28 - US experts reported questioning ability of GVN airforce, convinced that US airpower would be necessary to stem a major communist offensive.

- US has reportedly given Saigon \$284.7 million worth of arms and ammunition, 75% of armaments level for 1972 in which Spring Offensive occurred

29 - NY Times Bureau Chief Markham detained on his emergence from PRG zones

30 - American presence in South Vietnam officially reported at 6,000, "largest American mission in the world," including 1,000 in Defense Attaché Office, 3,000 civilian contractors to GVN military

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