

Viet Policy A 'Disaster,' Says Kissinger

By Murrey Marder
Washington Post Staff Writer

Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger says that he "always considered Indochina a disaster" for American policy.

Since the collapse of that policy last April, with the conquest of South Vietnam and Cambodia by the Communists, Kissinger increasingly has expressed public doubt in retrospect about the wisdom of the original policy. Until now, however, he had not claimed that he "always" considered it disastrous.

This strong public statement by Kissinger to disassociate himself from the U.S. involvement in Indochina was made in an hour-long interview with William F. Buckley Jr., taped on Wednesday and broadcast last night on WETA-TV's "Firing Line."

Kissinger was responding to a question from Buckley who said, "It seems to be plain that the disaster of Indochina, against which you struggled, was a disaster nevertheless?"

"Well," replied Kissinger, "I have always considered Indochina a disaster—partly because we did not think through the implications of what we were doing at the beginning."

Buckley: "Does 'we' mean you included?"

Kissinger: "Well—"

Buckley: "Which was it?"

Kissinger: "—pre (before) my being in office. Those decisions were made in the previous administration—and partly because the magnitude of the task we had set for ourselves was not clear when it was set. And then the American public was not prepared to stick with it. So it failed to stick with it. So it failed to stick with it."
Kissinger said, "We let ourselves down by entering too lightly on an enterprise whose magnitude was not understood, by methods which were the ... problem, and then were caught by what I would think was a minority, but nevertheless a very determined minority, in a situation in which the effective public support disintegrated."

Neither the secretary nor his interviewer discussed the paradox of attempting to sustain public support for a policy described as fatally flawed at the beginning."

Although the Ford adminis-

tration last spring blamed Congress for failure to sustain the anti-Communist government in South Vietnam with adequate aid after the U.S. troop withdrawal, Kissinger said in the Buckley interview:

"... I think probably the Congress came to reflect public sentiment so that finally, in the ultimate collapse last spring, there was clearly no public support for any continuation of the American effort. All public opinion polls seemed to show this."

At present in the United States, Kissinger said, there "is an almost metaphysical revulsion against foreign involvements that involve risks."

Kissinger said, "It is one thing to have a crisis that lasts a day or two—such as the Cambodia incident, or the Mayaguez (ship seizure) incident—but the real test is to sustain a crisis over an extended period of time."

"And there," said Kissinger, "I would think that anything that looks to the public like a massive foreign involvement would require the most meticulous justification before it could be supported. This is our difficulty in the Congress."

Kissinger said this problem for policymakers has come to the surface now in the dispute over sending 200 Americans to man warning stations between Israeli and Egyptian forces in the Sinai desert.

He said there is "a considerable debate starting" over this plan to use 200 "volunteers, civilians, unarmed" in the existing United Nations peacekeeping force in the Middle East.

Many independent observers regard the American debate over the 200 technicians as mild.

In a hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last Wednesday, the same day that the Kissinger interview was taped, one public opinion analyst said, "The public has remained remarkably quiet on this issue." Pollster Louis Harris said his survey showed 42 per cent of the public in favor of sending the technicians, 28 per cent opposed, and the remainder not sure.