

Vietnam Mirage

The removal from field duty in South Vietnam yesterday of the last United States ground combat troops is a landmark that unfortunately does not signify meaningful progress toward peace in Indochina. The rejoicing would be vastly greater if there were genuine evidence of progress in the deadlocked negotiations in Paris or if Congress were not throwing up its hands in resignation to an Administration apparently still unwilling to recognize that military victory is unattainable for either side in this tragic conflict.

President Nixon's promise of withdrawal has proved a mirage. For while the Administration has reduced troop levels until only 39,000 advisers, logistics personnel, air crewmen and technicians remain in South Vietnam, it has mobilized more than 100,000 airmen, sailors and marines to carry on the fighting from air bases in Thailand and Guam and from Seventh Fleet ships off the Vietnamese coast. Devastating both North and South Vietnam with an unprecedented concentration of aerial firepower, this reconstituted American expeditionary force continues to provide critical support for the Saigon regime of President Thieu.

Despite the inability of that regime to fight its own battles three years after inauguration of Mr. Nixon's "Vietnamization" program, Mr. Thieu reiterated only last week his rejection of any compromise that would create a coalition government including Communists in Saigon. As long as the United States supports these policies, there can be no hope of a settlement in Paris.

In this situation of open-ended war and obstructed peace it is depressing that a substantial House majority, bowing to Administration pressures and swollen by confusion among the Congressional doves, has rejected a moderate withdrawal proposal that would at least have prodded the President to move faster toward disengagement and peace. The House went on to approve a \$2.1-billion military aid bill which gives the Administration almost all it asked to continue United States military involvement around the globe, including substantial sums for Cambodia and Thailand—money that will help prolong the Indochina conflict indefinitely.

By rejecting the plea to set a date for total withdrawal and by voting indiscriminately for additional military assistance, the Democratic-controlled House has made itself a partner in the continuing destruction of American values and Vietnamese lives.