

NYT

4-14-72

# Vietnam Recommitment

President Nixon's massive recommitment of American power and prestige in Vietnam is ominously reminiscent of President Johnson's costly and futile intervention that began in 1965, a few months after the Tonkin incidents. Because of the risks of a prolonged and still wider war and the danger that the growing concentration of sea and air forces in Southeast Asia may seriously dilute this country's capacity to deal with emergencies elsewhere, it is essential that Americans take a hard look at the premises upon which this latest escalation is based, as most did not do in 1965.

This Administration's basic justification for its actions is hauntingly familiar—that it is necessarily defending freedom against a clearcut case of Communist aggression across international boundaries, aided and abetted by Moscow. This theme is reflected in President Nixon's admonition to the Soviet Union that "a great responsibility rests upon the great powers, that every great power must follow the principle that it should not encourage directly, or indirectly, any other nation to use force or armed aggression against its neighbors."

The reality is that the United States and the Soviet Union are both meddling in a civil conflict in Vietnam. The crucial question for Americans is whether it is vital for United States interests to preserve the present anti-Communist government in an independent South Vietnam; or at least whether that goal, doggedly pursued by President Nixon and his predecessors, is important enough to warrant the high costs and risks of continuing direct involvement.

The present regime in Saigon is hardly a credible model of democratic freedom. The coalition government that might emerge if the Vietnamese were left to settle their own affairs would not necessarily be dominated by Communists, at least at the outset. Even the Communists in South Vietnam have indicated they are in no hurry to reunite with the North.

In the event the Administration's worst fears were realized, a united Vietnam under Communist rule could pose no serious threat to the United States. Indeed, it could be argued that a united Vietnam would more effectively restrain the extension of Chinese power in Southeast Asia, which was the original objective of United States intervention there.

Prolonging the war does not serve this country's true interests. The massing of United States air and naval forces in Southeast Asia to rain more death and destruction on a small, underdeveloped country represents a grotesque perversion of American power and priorities.