

IN GRAHAM A. MARTIN, President Thieu of South Vietnam has a warm friend and a forceful and highly placed advocate—a fine ambassador, you might say. Indeed, Mr. Martin's recent attack on a New York Times report on American aid to Saigon—an 18-page attack which Mr. Martin asked the State Department to make public—could hardly have pleased President Thieu more. It mirrored precisely Mr. Thieu's own view that the fount of all criticism of his rule is Hanoi.

The catch is that Graham Martin is not the ambassador of South Vietnam to Washington. He is the American ambassador to Saigon. This would seem to be an elementary distinction but Mr. Martin, in his blindered devotion to President Thieu, has evidently lost sight of it. We have his devotion (and his low boiling point) to thank for the fact that he has come out from behind the wall of discretion, behind which professional diplomats ordinarily work, in order to challenge a reporter for the *Times*.

It is, first, outrageous that Mr. Martin should preface his challenge with the suggestion that press and congressional criticism of South Vietnam is being orchestrated by Hanoi. The charge is false—and mischievous. That an American career envoy in the year 1974, should be sniping in a cheap political way at the motives of Vietnam policy critics is a sad commentary on how little the old cold-war-oriented hands have learned from our Indochina experience. Moreover, it is an old and unworthy ploy for an official to disdain to talk with a reporter on grounds that the reporter is "biased," and then denounce him for alleged errors. In short, Mr. Martin is paying a heavy price for Mr. Thieu's affection.

Secondly, Mr. Martin's critique is a throwback to the bad old days of one-sided, self-serving, over-simplified

reporting on Vietnam and, as such, is altogether out of line with the more nuanced requirements of a policy that no longer needs to depend for its effectiveness on misleading the American people. We had thought, or hoped, the objective now was to help move the Vietnamese parties toward a real settlement. By the evidence of Mr. Martin, however, the policy is to supply President Thieu the resources and encouragement to let him sidestep the Paris accords and to keep pressing the war. For it is obvious that Mr. Thieu, seeing Mr. Martin's uncritical devotion to him, can have little incentive to heed whatever cautions the U.S. Government may simultaneously offer. We apparently have here a classic case study of how an ambassador loses influence with the government to which he is accredited.

As to the specifics of the aid program as discussed by the *Times* and Mr. Martin, we believe, as we have previously said, that Congress should itself go deeply into the whole program. The *Times* article charged that American military aid "continues to set the course of the war"; various American violations of the Geneva accords were alleged. Denying these allegations, Ambassador Martin responded that the course of the war is set by "the continuous and continuing Communist build-up" and by Saigon's response to "actual military attacks mounted by the other side." These are, we submit, differences of perception which the Congress ought to try to clarify before it votes further aid for South Vietnam. The administration is asking for \$1.45 billion in military aid in fiscal 1975—up from the \$829 million approved in 1974. Whatever total it finally approves, the Congress should be convinced that the money is being given in an amount and in a way designed to reinforce the Paris accords, not to undermine them.