

Pentagon Wary on a Cease-Fire

10-9-70
NYT

By WILLIAM BEECHER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 8 — In the view of senior American military planners, a "cease-fire in place" throughout Indochina, as proposed last night by President Nixon, could be disastrous to the Saigon Government unless it was effectively supervised.

If North Vietnam accepted the President's proposal for an internationally supervised truce and sincerely lived up to it, the military planners say, the South Vietnamese Government could solidify its increasing control of villages, improve the training and quality of its 1.2-million-man armed forces and devote increased attention to postwar economic and political problems.

But, on the basis of past performance, most military men would expect that if the North Vietnamese and Vietcong agreed to a cease-fire, they would try in every way possible to improve their military position, which has been eroding steadily for many months. Mr. Nixon's proposal specifically barred an improvement in either side's military position.

Violations Charged

In numerous brief cease-fires for holidays in South Vietnam, the military are quick to assert, the enemy has consistently violated the truces, most notably in February, 1968, when the enemy used the Lunar New Year, or Tet, cease-fire to mount the largest countrywide offensive of the war.

The Pentagon's biggest worry is that the North Vietnamese Government would try to exploit the end of bombing along the Ho Chi Minh Trail of supply lines in Laos to rush forward substantial quantities of weapons and ammunition.

"In a matter of months of unrestricted movement," one general said, "they might be able to reconstitute the large stocks of supplies they lost during the Cambodian operations last summer. It was the loss of those supplies, in our view, that forced them to cool the war in the southern half of South Vietnam."

And if large-scale violations were permitted, the planners continue, the enemy also might attempt to undermine South Vietnamese influence in the countryside by stepping up assassinations of key local officials, and to jeopardize allied air bases by moving up troops and mortars.

Pentagon sources say that Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird and Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were consulted as the President's new initiative was formulated. But some other members of the Joint Chiefs first learned the details of the proposal, they said, only hours before Mr. Nixon went on television yesterday.

The month before he took office as the President's adviser on national security affairs,

Strong Supervision Is Vital to Saigon Planners Say

Henry A. Kissinger detailed his concerns about a cease-fire in an article in Foreign Affairs:

"There are no front lines in Vietnam," he wrote. "Control is not territorial. It depends on who has forces in a given area and on the time of day. If a cease-fire permits the Government to move without challenge day or night, it will amount to a Saigon victory. If Saigon is prevented from entering certain areas, it means in effect partition which, as in Laos, tends toward permanency."

Mr. Kissinger foresaw other problems in January, 1969:

"There might be 'an intense scramble' by both sides to increase their territorial control before the cease-fire went into effect.

"It might become 'next to impossible' to verify any subsequent withdrawal of foreign troops since local officials in Communist-controlled areas would insist that there were no external forces present and 'impede any effort at international inspection.'"

Taxes a Problem

"There would be many other problems," Mr. Kissinger continued. "Who collects taxes how, who enforces the cease-fire and by what means? In other words, a tacit de facto cease-fire may prove more attainable than a negotiated one. By the same token, a formal cease-fire is likely to predetermine the ultimate settlement and tend toward partition. Cease-fire is thus not so much a step toward a final settlement as a form of it."

Last night, however, White House officials insisted that a cease-fire could be separated from a comprehensive settlement and could stand on its own, offering all sides benefits while negotiators worked out a solution.

Pentagon planners say that the size and quality of the supervisory team are the vital factors behind an effective cease-fire. They estimated that thousands of inspectors would

be needed, and that they must have advanced reconnaissance equipment and the right to move freely.

The effects of a cease-fire in Cambodia, officials say, would be mixed. While it would allow the Government of Lon Nol to build up its military forces without pressures the 40,000 to 50,000 North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops there to strengthen their hold on the northeast and much of the northwest portions of Cambodia. Such a partition has existed in Laos from some time, officials say, with 67,000 North Vietnamese and 40,000 Pathet Lao troops in control of the Plaine des jarres and the eastern portion of the Laotian panhandle. A cease-fire should be of mutual advantage to Communist and Government forces in Laos, the planners feel.

In South Vietnam there are some 240,000 North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops. In the southern half of the country, the bulk are either local guerrilla units or North Vietnamese units that have recently broken down into small elements. They are strongest in the sparsely populated war zones west and northwest of Saigon and in coastal enclaves in the Mekong Delta.

Battalion-Size Units

In the northern half of South Vietnam, most of the enemy forces are in regular, battalion-size units concentrated primarily in border areas and just south of the demilitarized zone straddling the border between the two Vietnams.

Enemy military activity is reported to be light throughout Vietnam, but intelligence sources disclosed that infiltration activity along the northern reaches of the Ho Chi Minh Trail had been increasing earlier than usual this season.

Most military men expect Hanoi to reject a cease-fire, as its initial public reactions suggest. "We're pulling out our troops anyway," one senior officer said. "If they still hope for a military solution, it might be wiser for them to lie low for a year or more, when our forces will be way down, before attempting anything really ambitious."