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An Endless War In Indochina?

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A FEW MONTHS AFTER the Vietnam peace agreement was signed in January, 1973, a friend was that American planes were still bombing Cambodia. Don't worry, Kissinger told him: in 90 days there will be a settlement in Cambodia, and you will understand how right our policy has been.

Such confident claims on Indochina have been a regular thing with Kissinger since he went to Washington in 1969. But anyone with eyes to see must perceive by now that Kissinger's policy produces, indeed requires, war without end in Vietnam and Cambodia. That is because he insists on the maintenance of governments that can never stand by themselves — that can only be kept going by perpetual war fed by American aid.

The interesting question is not why Henry Kissinger says what he does about Indochina but why anyone goes on believing him. It is now 10 years since Americans went into combat in Vietnam, five since we invaded Cambodia. Can Kissinger really persuade still another Congress, a heavily Democratic one, that more American weapons and more war will bring peace to Indochina?

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THE NEW CONGRESS will be critically tested by its ability to see through the old fictions on Indochina. The first of those is the claim that one more massive dose of American aid will enable our client governments to stand on their own. Aid has totaled \$6 billion since the 1973 truce alone; does anyone think self-reliance is at hand, any more than peace?

Then there is the argument that Communist regimes in Saigon and Phnom Penh would be harsh. We do not make wars against totalitarianism elsewhere — in Moscow, say, or Santiago. Is it possible that Americans would have chosen to "save" the Indochinese from communism if we had known originally that the price would be unending death and destruction? Do we yet understand what the human beings there suffer?

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AN AMERICAN IN CAMBODIA wrote me recently how hard it was to live with the horror that American intervention has brought to that once-beautiful country.

"It occurs to me sometimes at night, with the images of the day keeping me awake — the maimed bodies in the over-flowing hospitals, the beggars, the military funerals — that Henry Kissinger has never met a real Cambodian. He has flown into Phnom Penh a few times to stay a few hours for talks at the Presidential palace with Lon Nol and his corrupt clique. He has never gone down a road or visited a hospital," he wrote.

"In these moments I ask myself whether Kissinger would be able to make policy the same way if he actually allowed himself to see what was happening in Cambodia. But perhaps this is simply a private romantic delusion."

Yes, it is a delusion. It is quite clear that Henry Kissinger would rather have Cambodia a salt plain than let the war end on terms that would expose to all the monstrous futility of his policy.

But in history, responsibility rests not only on individuals but on societies. Are we prepared to continue sharing with Kissinger the responsibility for Orwellian war in Cambodia and Vietnam? Congress will decide.

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