

Opinion Swings Against

By Louis Harris

The tide of American public opinion has now turned decisively against the war in Indo-China. This latest shift of public opinion against the war was triggered by the feeling, 45 to 24 percent, that the recent South Vietnamese move into Laos was a "failure."

Here are some signs of the decline of public support for the war:

For the first time, by a narrow plurality of 42-39 percent, most Americans would agree to a "coalition government in Saigon which included the Communists in it," if that course were "the only way we could get peace in Vietnam." In late 1969, the public opposed such a coalition government by a margin of 49 to 33 percent.

- By 60 to 26 percent, a majority of the public now would favor continued withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam, "even if the government of South Vietnam collapsed."

- For the first time, by 58 to 39 percent, a majority of the public now agrees that it is "morally wrong" for the U.S. to be fighting in Vietnam.

'A Failure'

A cross section of 1580 households was asked between April 12th and 15th: "Do you feel the South Vietnam move into Laos was a success or a failure?"

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| | Total Public |
| Success | 24% |
| Failure | 45% |
| Neither (vol.) | 8% |
| Not Sure | 23% |

By nearly a 2-to-1 margin, people feel the Laotian incursion was a failure. In turn, this has led to grave doubts on the part of the American people that the entire policy of Vietnamization is capable of working.

Question: "If the U.S. withdraws all its combat troops from Vietnam, do you feel the South Vietnamese

THE HARRIS SURVEY

army will be capable of keeping the Communists from taking over South Vietnam or not?"

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| Capable | Total Public |
| Not capable | 24% |
| Not Sure | 57% |
| | 19% |

A month before this latest poll, between March 16th and 21st, a similar cross section of the public was asked about the ability of the South Vietnamese army to hold its own against the North Vietnamese and most people, 46 to 26 percent, thought they could.

Opinion Reversed

Then the precipitous withdrawal of South Vietnamese troops from Laos took place and public opinion dramatically reversed.

Question: "In general, do you feel the pace at which President Nixon is withdrawing U.S. troops from Vietnam is too slow, too fast, or about right?"

| | | | |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| | April | March | Jan. |
| Too slow | 45% | 34% | 46% |
| Too fast | 5% | 3% | 4% |
| About right | 45% | 53% | 42% |
| Not Sure | 5% | 10% | 8% |

The determination of the American people to liquidate U.S. participation in the war can be seen most clearly in the question:

"If the reduction of U.S. troops continued at the present rate and the government of Vietnam collapsed, would you favor or oppose continuing withdrawing our troops at the present rate?"

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| | Total Public |
| Continue withdrawal of U.S. troops | 60% |
| Oppose continued withdrawal | 26% |
| Not Sure | 14% |

the War

The other striking change emerged when for the first time the Harris Survey recorded more Americans in favor than opposed to a coalition government in Saigon.

Question: "Suppose the only way we could get peace in Vietnam were to agree to a coalition government which included the Communists in it. Would you favor or oppose such a coalition in Saigon?"

| | Favor | Oppose | Not Sure |
|-------------------------|-------|--------|----------|
| Nationwide | 42 % | 39 % | 19 % |
| By Region | | | |
| East | 50 % | 28 % | 22 % |
| Midwest | 37 % | 47 % | 16 % |
| South | 38 % | 43 % | 19 % |
| West | 49 % | 36 % | 15 % |
| By Age | | | |
| 18-29 | 47 % | 39 % | 14 % |
| 30-49 | 46 % | 38 % | 16 % |
| 50 and over | 37 % | 37 % | 26 % |
| By Race | | | |
| Black | 41 % | 30 % | 29 % |
| White | 43 % | 40 % | 17 % |
| By Income | | | |
| Under \$5000 | 32 % | 44 % | 24 % |
| \$5000-\$9999 | 40 % | 40 % | 20 % |
| \$10,000-\$14,999 | 45 % | 39 % | 16 % |
| \$15,000 and over | 57 % | 32 % | 11 % |

The forces joining together to favor a coalition government with the Communists in Saigon as a last ditch way to obtain peace is drawn from the East and West Coasts, the young, blacks, and those with the highest incomes. Opposition can be found in the South and Midwest, among older people, and those who are less affluent.

The trend of public opinion, however, now is clearly with the forces for change who want to see fast liquidation of U.S. involvement in Vietnam replace the policy of a gradual winding down and Vietnamization of the war.

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