

A Dark Look at U.S.

By Terence Smith
New York Times

Saigon

There is widespread doubt among the most experienced American observers in South Vietnam that current United States policies will bring lasting peace.

Although 110,000 American troops have been withdrawn from Vietnam and enormous strides have been made in pacification in the last 18 months, the U.S. still faces vast problems in extricating itself.

At the root of the pessimistic outlook are serious and widely held doubts about the following:



• The efficacy of the Vietnamization program, which has yet to face major challenges.

• The wisdom of the extension of the war into Cambodia, which, despite the immediate military gains it may achieve, seems likely to complicate American efforts to disengage and may eventually involve the U.S.—step by painful step—in the defense of yet another weak and uncertain government.

• The effectiveness of the Saigon government in dealing with increasingly serious economic and political problems in South Vietnam.

• The nature of the progress achieved in the pacification program, which remains fragile and subject to the enemy's will.

PEOPLE

Finally, there is a conviction that U.S. policies fail to come to grips with the central element in the Vietnam puzzle: the need for a negotiated political settlement that reflects the true balance of power among the Vietnamese people.

"We won't solve this war by cleaning out the base areas in Cambodia, or even by replacing American troops with South Vietnamese," an American who has spent five years in Vietnam said the other day.

"We have to go to the heart of the matter and find an acceptable way of distributing political power among the Vietnamese. That's what the fighting is all about, and it won't stop until we solve it."

Asian Policy

SKEPTICS

The skepticism about American policy is shared in many quarters in Vietnam—by young, dedicated Americans working at the province and district level, and by independent observers, including journalists and foreign diplomats.

It is greatest among those whose jobs permit them to travel around Vietnam.

The attitude is also among educated, independent South Vietnamese, people outside the Saigon government who are deeply concerned about the future of their country after the American disengagement.

Through the remarks of all those people runs a common theme: No lasting peace is possible without a political solution. Vietnamization, even if it works, is not enough.

ENEMY

Behind this belief is the conviction that the enemy continues to have the necessary strength, spirit, manpower to continue the struggle in power and determination to South Vietnam — and Laos and Cambodia — for the foreseeable future. Few military men here dispute that assessment of the Commu-



AP Wirephoto

Asian Armies

A South Vietnamese armored column moved past a Cambodian army checkpoint into the battered city of Tonle Bet. The checkpoint was manned by Cambodian troops trained by the U.S. Special forces

in Vietnam. Tonle Bet, heavily damaged in recent fighting, is across the Mekong river from Kompong Cham, second largest city in Cambodia.

Abrams, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, has indicated to friends that he feels that Mr. Nixon drastically oversold the operation and enlarged its goals beyond realizable proportions.

The general has said that the real purpose was to put a dent in the enemy's supply system and not, as Mr. Nixon suggested, to overrun and clean out the Communist headquarters.

PERIL

The greatest peril in the Cambodian venture seems to lie in the period after June 30, when the Americans have withdrawn and the South Vietnamese are likely to continue their operation.

The consensus here is that the President is going to find it far harder to get Americans out of Cambodia than it was to send them in.

In the short run, the Americans may be faced with the choice of either going to the aid of the South Vietnamese or watching them flounder if they come under heavy pressure.

In the long run, the U.S. could find itself committed by proxy, as a result of South Vietnamese pledges and actions, to the defense of the shaky government headed by Premier Lon Nol, which displaced Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

PULLOUT

If the South Vietnamese become overextended in Cambodia, the Americans are going to find it correspondingly difficult to carry out their withdrawals from Vietnam on schedule.

Apart from the complications of the Cambodian venture, Vietnamization faces other serious problems. So far a total of 110,000 American have been pulled out of Vietnam, leaving 429,000 behind: The real test will come

nists' capability.

President Nixon's offer, in his address April 20, to discuss at the Paris peace talks "a fair political solution (reflecting) the existing relationship of political forces in South Vietnam" had barely begun to sink in when it was lost in the furor caused by

the invasion of Cambodia ten days later.

It may have been, as one American here described it, "the first casualty of Nixon's decision to go into Cambodia."

The senior members of the American military command are visibly defensive about

the Cambodian operation and the controversy it has caused. They insist that it was a militarily justifiable tactical operation that got caught up in larger strategic and political questions.

General Creighton W.

Phnom Penh Brawl

--Not an Attack

in the next year, during which 150,000 more will have been withdrawn and the South Vietnamese are to have taken on the heavy fighting.

The first and most obvious danger is military. For the last four years the large American combat divisions have effectively manned the front lines. They have pursued the main North Vietnamese and Viet Cong units relentlessly, gradually driving them from populated areas into the jungles and mountains along the Laotian and Cambodian borders.

SAFETY

As Vietnamization advances, the South Vietnamese divisions will take on the task while the remaining American units fall back into something approaching garrison duty.

Their safety and that of an additional 250,000 or more Americans providing combat and logistical support will depend on the South Vietnamese.

Even conceding substantial improvement on the part of the South Vietnamese armed forces, it is hard to imagine them coping with divisions of the North Vietnamese regulars as effectively as the Americans did. The result may be significantly increased casualties — American as well as South Vietnamese — in the later stages of the withdrawal process.

COUNTRYSIDE

Another consequence may be strikingly reduced security in certain areas of the countryside, most notably in the northern half of the country.

At best, Vietnamization will always be a chancy business in the northern half of Vietnam. The uncertainties of the situation there are some of the factors that con-

Phnom Penh

A barroom brawl was blamed yesterday for a 45-minute gun battle that erupted in Phnom Penh Saturday.

The gunplay involved Cambodian soldiers — paratroopers on one side and U.S.-trained Khmers on the other.

Ten persons were reported wounded in the fighting, which had prompted fears that Communist forces were attacking a section of Phnom

Penh.

The Khmers were flown into Cambodia from bases in South Vietnam last month to reinforce regular Cambodian units after the Communists stepped up pressures in this country.

The Khmers are trained and paid by the U.S. Special Forces at Green Beret camps in Vietnamese territory along the Cambodian border.

United Press

tribute to the overall skepticism about the efficacy of the program.

Vietnamization will also have a drastic impact on South Vietnam's already shake economic structure. The country earns more than 90 per cent of its foreign currency from Defense Department outlays and private spending by American soldiers.

As the withdrawal proceeds, the supply of dollars will be cut back just when they are most needed to bolster a sorely weakened economy.

In addition, the approximately 145,000 Vietnamese who are directly employed by U.S. agencies and companies will have to find jobs.

REGIME

The bleak economic prospects are considered by knowledgeable people here to be a principal threat to the stability of the government of President Nguyen Van Thieu.

The domestic political and economic situation has deteriorated dramatically in recent months. While the attention of the world has been riveted on Cambodia, Thieu has been coping with just about the noisiest political crisis since his election.

Rather than working to rally his non-Communist politi-

cal opposition behind him, as the U.S. Embassy has been urging him to do lately, Thieu has come down hard on any group that has challenged his authority or criticized his regime.

Individuals with the temerity to speak out have been prosecuted or jailed. Groups that have expressed their complaints in public demonstrations have been tear-gassed and beaten by riot policemen.

CRITICISM

Now there is a rising tide of criticism of the government in newspapers and the National Assembly that can only be expected to increase during the Senate election this fall and the presidential contest next year.

In addition, Thieu has failed to create anything approximating a national party that might be capable of mobilizing the country in preparation for a political battle with the Communists. Instead, his basic distrust of politicians — he was a general — and his reluctance to share power remain as great as ever.

As for the pacification program, there can be no question that enormous strides have been made during the last 18 months in the effort to extend the government's control into the countryside.