

No Retreat in Southeast Asia

By MARK W. CLARK

CHARLESTON, S. C.—I just returned from another trip to the Far East which included visits to Korea, Taipei and Vietnam.

On Feb. 21, 1970, The New York Times published an article by me on "Vietnam Options." As I then saw the situation, there were several options open to President Nixon when he came into office:

- Intensify the war to win a military victory. This is politically unsound, having fought too long with a "no win, no bombing" attitude.

- Pull out immediately. By so doing over 40,000 Americans would have died in vain, and a vacuum would be created in Southeast Asia into which the Communists would move immediately.

- Carry on the "no win, no bombing" war. This gave a great advantage to the enemy, with a continuation of the heavy blood-letting so unacceptable to all Americans.

- Continue Vietnamization. We so successfully Koreanized the situation in that country that we now have a very staunch ally. I realize the situations in Korea and Vietnam differ, but the basic goal of preparing Asiatics to defend themselves is the same.

I re-emphasize the feeling I had when I signed the Korean Armistice in 1953. I felt then and still do that in our first test of arms with the Communists we should have defeated them. Had we done so, I believe we would not be involved as we are in Vietnam.

However, for a long time there had been a lack of determination to win the war in Vietnam. As a result, the President adopted Vietnamization. My visit to Vietnam convinced me that he is on the right track, with the splendid leadership of General Abrams, and

South Vietnam's Forces Stand 'Ten Feet Tall' After Latest Tests

assisted at all levels of command by qualified and cooperative officials of the State Department.

In Vietnam I was briefed by General Abrams and echelons of command down to small units. The Vietnamization program is working well, and the training of South Vietnam armed forces is progressing. Recent operations of these forces in Cambodia and Laos provide the most dramatic evidence of their growing strength and capabilities to provide the starch that South Vietnam needs to stand on its own feet and contribute to stability in Southeast Asia.

Long-time observers say South Vietnam forces came out of the first Cambodian operations "at least ten feet tall," with new-found confidence. The Vietnamese fighting man is becoming tough and ready, and is operating in a capable manner. He's cooperating with his neighbors, which is of great importance.

The situation in Laos and Cambodia is confused, with no way to predict accurately the results of intensified Communist actions in those areas. The problem is further complicated by the action of our Congress in restricting the President in the amount of support needed by the South Vietnamese to meet these new threats and assist their neighbors.

However, I believe time is playing to our advantage for the first time. We must not become impatient because of political pressure to bring our

forces home too rapidly and before the South Vietnamese forces are prepared to take over additional responsibilities as our men come home.

Remember that in Korea, eighteen years after the signing of the armistice, we still have over fifty thousand of our men on duty, and what a morale boost they have given the Koreans. If we will have patience and continue to support logistically, and with air and naval power, the Vietnamization program, as long as needed, there is a chance, and one worth taking, that there will be developed in Southeast Asia an effective anti-Communist bloc of Asiatic nations which can defend themselves. If we can bring this about, we will have accomplished the mission we set for ourselves several years ago, and we will have done it honorably and with no retreat.

My earlier New York Times article concluded with these words:

"The sure way to maintain the peace is to be strong militarily and unafraid politically, and to let the enemy know that we will use that strength as necessary to maintain the security of the United States."

I know from long experience with Communists that they despise and exploit weakness, but they sit up and take notice when they are confronted with strength and courage. Let's show that strength and courage. Let's rebuild our declining military establishment. The expenditures involved will be the finest investment we could make, and in so doing we will achieve peace and keep the freedoms we hold so dear in America.

Gen. Mark W. Clark, retired, served as commander of American forces in the Mediterranean during World War II, and in Korea.