

Letters to the Editor

Comments on the War in Indochina

To the Editor:

Regardless of its success or failure, the present Laotian incursion by the South Vietnamese army, with American logistical and air support, may quite conceivably result in an earlier end of our involvement in the Vietnam war. Since this is a real possibility, it appears to me that the renewed campaign by some of the "end-the-war" advocates is unnecessary.

I contend that if the present Laotian campaign succeeds in cutting off the North Vietnamese supplies coming over the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the exodus of our troops from South Vietnam will be accelerated, because the North Vietnamese would then be less likely to be a threat to our remaining troops as each American contingent sails for home.

On the other hand, if the South Vietnamese troops suffer a serious defeat in Laos, the doom of the Vietnamization program will have been sounded. We would then have no alternative—with the American public weary over the length and cost of the Vietnam war—to accelerating the rate of withdrawal of all our forces from South Vietnam as rapidly as their safety would allow. This country, under such circumstances, would be forced to wipe the slate clean in Vietnam, regardless of future consequences in Southeast Asia, or elsewhere in the world.

Why should not the active dissenters to our policy refrain from their present attempt to hasten the future? Their past efforts have already influenced our Government to undertake a retreat from our international responsibilities. Is it not time to support our Government's policy, which appears to me to be a sincere effort to comply with the current mood of the American people?

ERNEST T. CLOUGH
Marblehead, Mass., Feb. 25, 1971

To the Editor:

In all fairness, it should apparently be understood that when the Nixon Administration tells us that no United States "ground" troops are being "used" in Laos, the term "ground" does not include those members of chopper and plane crews who lie dead, wounded or missing on Laotian "ground"; they aren't being "used" any longer.

PHILIP C. JESSUP
New York, Feb. 24, 1971
The writer was Judge of the International Court of Justice, 1961-70.

To the Editor:

Evidently President Nixon is going to beat former President Johnson at his own game, enlarging the war. The President, it is to be hoped, is aware of the prizes such a game can accrue, the least of which is a guarantee of just one term in the White House.

As for Vietnamization, nonsense:
G. KERSHAW GREEN
Westfield, N. J., Feb. 23, 1971

To the Editor:

Dr. Leo D. Klauber's letter (Feb. 22) regarding a potential future threat of excessive Pentagon power with an all-volunteer army is at odds with American history. During the peacetime



Claude Johner

years of the 20's and 30's (and before World War I) the War Department did in fact have an all-volunteer army at its command. Conscription is not an American tradition, but a totalitarian one.

What is wrong now is a real imbalance between the executive (President, State Department, Defense Department and C.I.A.) and the legislative (House and Senate) branches of government. Constitutionally the legislative branch is responsible for monetarily preventing the executive branch from exceeding its one-third portion (with the judicial) of power. The legislative is belatedly recognizing its responsibility and beginning to question

the Pentagon hard before appropriating monies for it.

In fact, Dr. Klauber has the picture reversed. If the Defense Department had been required by Congress to call up the career Reserves by the thousands for the Vietnam conflict, chances are that public clamor would have had us out of there long ago. Draft calls to fill the jungles of Indochina with unskilled American boys resulted in virtually limitless Pentagon power to produce the longest war in our history.

WILLIAM C. BOHN
New York, Feb. 22, 1971

To the Editor:

The invasion of Laos brings to light once more the unrelenting question: How far is the U.S. already involved?

It is consistently repeated by American spokesmen in Washington and Paris, that in the spirit of the Geneva agreements, the United States has had no ground troops in Laos, whether as part of this latest invasion or at any other time. Anyone who has lived in Laos in the last five years can tell you that the presence of U.S. troops in Laos is a topic people there talk and chuckle about freely.

I lived in Laos from 1964 to 1967 as a civilian rural development worker with International Voluntary Services. As early as 1966 American fighting



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mén, both in and out of uniform—many of them C.I.A. personnel—were stationed in different parts of Laos. Others moved back and forth from Thailand and South Vietnam into Laos on short reconnaissance and search-and-destroy missions.

This fact is confirmed not only by statements of Pathet Lao leaders, but also by Americans who took part in these operations. Testimony given recently at the Winter Soldier Investigation in Detroit by former Vietnam and Laos veterans provides further evidence against the myth that the United States is not violating the Geneva accords in Laos.

How much longer can Americans go on swallowing the fiction of the White House and Pentagon about U.S. operations in Laos? **LOUIS WOLF**
Philadelphia, Feb. 20, 1971

To the Editor:

Now we hear [from President Thieu] that the Laotian incursion is a success because the five northern provinces of South Vietnam have not been occupied by the enemy (news story Feb. 23). Consider the similarity of this reasoning to the story about the man who travels over the hills of New England ringing a bell. His purpose, so he says, is to keep the elephants away. When someone—seeing the absurdity of this argument—points out that there are no elephants in New England, the man with the bell beams. "Pretty effective method, isn't it?"

CHARLES SHELDON
Amherst, Mass., Feb. 23, 1971

To the Editor:

In your Feb. 13 news report on the application of Cornelius McNeil Cooper Jr. for honorable discharge from the United States Army, you quote him as saying, "... my moral convictions are entirely inconsistent with the duties I am called to perform ..." and that "service in the armed forces is an immoral action."

I wonder if Mr. Cooper's sense of morality is developed to the point where he realizes that he is guilty of an immoral act in receiving free of charge from the United States Government a four-year college education under false pretenses.

The Government provides education at West Point to a selected group of men for the purpose of training future officers of the United States Army. Since Mr. Cooper now says he cannot serve as an officer, the least he can do is to reimburse the Government for the cost of his education — perhaps \$15,000 or \$20,000.

Actually, it seems that the Government has every right, both morally

and legally, to take steps to recover the cost of Mr. Cooper's four years at West Point. Will this be done?

RAY M. HERRICK
Morristown, N. J., Feb. 14, 1971

To the Editor:

Harlan G. Haskell 3d's letter (Feb. 17) states, "It's up to all Americans to stop this slow war of humility and disgust and get the show on the road and do some real bombing, so we can bring our boys home."

Doesn't it seem logical to Mr. Haskell that more of our boys will return alive and well if we bring them home now instead of risking their lives by further perpetuating our participation in the war or would he rather see the American death toll skyrocket during his suggested invasion of North Vietnam?

ROBERT M. WHELAN
Westbury, L. I., Feb. 18, 1971

To the Editor:

Your angry Feb. 21 editorial, "A Wider War," and Tom Wicker's tirade, "A Slaughter of Innocents," of the same date present formidable practical and moral arguments against the incursion into Laos.

However, the same issue of The Times reports that Soviet naval vessels now move freely throughout the Caribbean, as they do in the Mediterranean

and elsewhere. In Asia, Europe, Africa and Latin America the Communists and their allies apply any and all means to subvert legitimate governments and bring about the rule of Communism—all of which seems to perturb you very little.

If the United States is to be held morally accountable for its every action, while the Communists are not subjected to a similar scrutiny, I fail to see how our nation is to survive.

R. AUSTIN WALKER
New York, Feb. 21, 1971

To the Editor:

Few will disagree with President Nixon's hope that soon we may enter upon a generation of peace.

Many, alas, will reflect with sorrow that we would now be some twenty years into a generation of peace but for the miscalculations of four successive Presidents, the abnegation of responsibility by Congress after Congress and the lack of civic awareness by the American people as a whole.

There is guilt enough for all. Let no man point the finger of accusation, lest he point to himself.

But one can hope to learn through adversity. One may hope that we have learned not just the futility but the immorality and injustice of trying to bend little, far-off nations to our will, at such frightful cost to them and to us.

One may hope, above all, that if we have such a view, we will act quickly now to leave Southeast Asia, serene in the knowledge that there is no greater courage than the courage to admit a mistake, and that "he that ruleth his spirit [is better] than he that taketh a city."

WILLIAM WALLACE FORD
Brigadier General, U.S.A. (Retired)
Amherst, Mass., Feb. 22, 1971

To the Editor:

If U. S. military adventures in Southeast Asia have any justification, why doesn't President Nixon use American troops where the action is? The current climate of opinion in the U. S., in which we cry out at American casualties while shrugging off the murder of men, women and children by American bombers and gunships, says much about our national character.

We like to intimidate, but would rather pay someone else to take the bruises. Vietnamization has become the rationalization for American dishonor. Its architect lacks the courage to shoulder the political and military risks of his arrogant interventionism.

JOHN HENDERSON
New York, Feb. 25, 1971