

Proxy Wars in Indochina

The State Department has replied with a *non sequitur* to Congressional criticism of United States support for Thai soldiers fighting in Laos. The department argued the other day that it was entitled to withhold compliance from the Geneva accord neutralizing Laos because of what it termed massive violations of neutrality by 80,000 North Vietnamese now in that country.

Unquestionably, the 1962 Geneva agreement has been rendered virtually meaningless by wholesale violations on both sides. But this has not been the principal cause of Congressional concern. Many members have been alarmed by recent indications of far deeper American involvement in the Laotian fighting than acknowledged.

Particular indignation has been expressed at disclosures that this involvement includes the funding of ten to twelve battalions of Thai troops fighting in Laos. Such underwriting of armed intervention not only violates the Geneva pact but also contravenes the spirit, if not the letter, of a 1970 Congressional resolution barring American aid to foreign troops in Laos and Cambodia.

The belief in Congress that its will is being flouted is likely to be further strengthened by the recent announcement of the acting Prime Minister of Cambodia, during a Washington visit, that his Government plans a new offensive against Communist forces, utilizing "American air cover" and South Vietnamese ground forces.

The conditions surrounding the expansion of war by proxy in the neighboring Indochinese states are disturbingly reminiscent of the early stages of American involvement in Vietnam. Congress can help to check this new escalation by continuing to expose the facts and by imposing strict limits on United States military operations in Laos and Cambodia.