

# Letters to the Editor

## Winding Down the War in Vietnam?

To the Editor:

In a recent letter to *The Times*, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Dennis Doolin cited numerous "facts" to indicate that President Nixon has succeeded in winding down the war. Mr. Doolin concludes that "from these and other indices—in fact, every index by which one could measure the intensity of conflict—the war is clearly winding down." Mr. Doolin's cost-benefit analysis ignores the human costs of the war in terms of Asian land and lives and engages in deceptive statistical and terminological manipulation to make his point.

The human costs of the war since Mr. Nixon took office are gruesome and appalling. Mr. Doolin does not mention civilian war casualties, which in South Vietnam are 5,000 per month; in Laos "since early 1969, it is conceivable that at least 30,000 civilians became casualties over the last eighteen months." (Senate Refugee Subcommittee Staff Report, September 1970.) These figures do not include the marked rise in civilian casualties in Cambodia since the U.S. invasion there.

Refugees are the second human cost of the war, and Mr. Doolin claims that "the active refugee caseload is now about 40 per cent of what it was at the end of 1968." Again, not including the 250,000 refugees created by the air war in Laos and Cambodia, Mr. Doolin ignores the Senate subcommittee's findings that "the U.S. mission in Saigon undertook a deliberate campaign in 1969 to eliminate the refugee problem by systematically classifying it out of existence."

Asian land is another cost which Mr. Doolin treats in an equally off-handed and deceptive manner. The reality of the "fact" that "over 500,000

acres of land have been distributed to the people under the land reform program" is that much of this land is not cultivated because it is not in Government-controlled areas. Land in secure areas has been distributed not to landless laborers but rather by landlords themselves to their own relatives to escape the provisions of the law.

Furthermore, these statistics ignore altogether the U.S. military bulldozing program instituted in 1968, which is turning the Vietnamese forests and fields into ecological wastelands of elephant grass at the rate of 1,000 acres a day. So far 750,000 acres have been devastated in this manner.

Mr. Doolin's cost analysis ignores the proud claim of other Defense Department officials that gains in technology have made the old methods of measuring cost effectiveness obsolete. In testimony before the House Appropriations Committee in March, Deputy Defense Secretary Packard said that with the recent advances in guided weapons and automated bombing systems it is now possible to hit targets, which formerly required over 1,000 sorties at a cost of \$15 million, with twenty sorties at a cost of \$600,000. Recent modifications have tripled the bomb load of B-52's used in Asia. The number of sorties and tonnage of bombs may have decreased but the level of violence and destruction has not.

The goals of U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia remain the same. The mechanism of warfare is not intended to wind down but merely to change in form. JEAN DOYLE, MICHAEL RYAN

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