

NYTimes (MDO - COMMENT) JAN 16 1975

# Madness in Great Ones

## ABROAD AT HOME

By Anthony Lewis

BOSTON, Jan. 15—There has hardly been a time when problems so numerous and so profound confronted us at once. The American economy is in deep trouble. The price of oil is shaking the international financial structure. Future world supplies of energy and food are in doubt. War threatens the Middle East. Relations between the United States and the Soviet Union are deteriorating.

In the midst of all this, the leaders of the American Government are thinking about — Vietnam. Vietnam? Vietnam.

Our obsession with a country so remote from American interests has been a puzzle for years. That it should go on now, as half a dozen real problems strain our resources of leadership and character, shows how mad an obsession it is.

Indeed, many Americans will find it hard to believe that their leaders are once again trying to deepen this country's involvement in Vietnam, so irrational is the idea. But that is exactly what is happening. The headlines are all too familiar.

The State Department issues a grave warning against truce violations by the Communist side. Hanoi says that American reconnaissance flights have resumed in violation of the peace agreement and of later explicit undertakings; U. S. officials deny it, then admit it, saying that breaches by the other side allow us to ignore the agreements. The Secretary of Defense warns that American opinion reacts "in anger to outright aggression."

The immediate purpose of all the orchestration is plain enough. The Administration is going to ask Congress for a massive emergency increase in military aid to Vietnam. It knows that it faces great resistance, based on logic and experience, so it raises the cries of alarm to a new pitch of shrillness.

If we do not act in 1975 to save South Vietnam, they say, doom will arrive. But the argument remains as faulty as in 1955 or 1965, and the result of accepting it can only be more tragedy.

The justification for intensified American intervention is that the Communists have upset the peace agreement made two years ago. But the evidence is rather the other way on initial responsibility for the breakdown of the truce. In the current issue of Foreign Affairs, hardly a radical journal, Maynard Parker writes:

"Almost from the moment the agreement was signed, President Thieu took

to the offensive in an attempt to eradicate the Communist ink spots. . . . The second phase, which began on Jan. 4, 1974, with a speech by Thieu ordering the Army 'to hit them in their base areas' and ended in May, 1974, resulted in a marked increase in large-scale offensive operations . . ."

President Thieu also blocked implementation of the agreement's political provisions, including creation of a new national council and assurance of free movement between zones in South Vietnam. In fact he prohibited any public mention of the agreement's terms. Mr. Parker says the other side "evidently did think there would be at least a period of peace and were unprepared for—and staggered by—the aggressiveness of" Thieu's military operations.

But however the agreement has been violated, the fundamental fallacy is the notion that more American intervention can bring peace. We tried that. If the blood we spilled had any meaning, it must have been to teach us that our involvement in Vietnam only escalated the level of fighting and prolonged it.

To escalate the American role now is to chase the old delusion that we can impose our settlement on the Vietnamese. If we start down that road again, no one should expect it to stop at arms aid. Secretary of Defense Schlesinger, in his remarks about "aggression" rousing America to anger, signaled the possibility of U.S. forces going back into combat.

Why are we hearing again the disastrous phrases of a decade ago? The most important source of the official obsession is well-known. Henry Kissinger spent four years fighting that war, and enlarging it into Cambodia, and he does not want to "lose." He wants to keep Thieu in Saigon as long as he is in Washington.

Henry Kissinger complains about Congress restricting his flexibility. The reason it has done so is evident from the Vietnam example. More than any past Secretary of State, he has maneuvered and tricked and distorted the law to get around what he knew was the will of Congress and the nation. He sent most of our food aid to Saigon; he juggled funds; he even asked his lawyers to see whether the War Powers Act, restricting Presidential war-making, might allow him to bomb Vietnam despite a flat legislative ban on bombing.

No one should underestimate Mr. Kissinger's salesmanship now. He can still cry havoc better than anyone. But at least he does have to ask this time—ask Congress. Is there really a new spirit of independence in Congress? We shall know better when we see whether it has the courage to end the grotesque obsession with Vietnam?