

NYTimes JAN 20 1975

What Is a Man Profited?

By Anthony Lewis

BOSTON, Jan. 19—A few months after the Vietnam peace agreement was signed in January, 1973, a friend of Henry Kissinger's said how wrong he thought it was that American planes were still bombing Cambodia. Don't worry, Mr. Kissinger told him: In 90 days there will be a settlement in Cambodia, and you will understand how right our policy has been.

Such confident claims on Indochina have been a regular thing with Mr. Kissinger. When he went to Washington in 1969, he told friends to moderate their criticism because the war would be over in months. A year or two later, when a newspaper critic said his policy would mean endless war in Vietnam, he complained to the paper that he was misunderstood.

Anyone with eyes to see must perceive by now that Mr. Kissinger's policy produces, indeed requires, war without end in Vietnam and Cambodia. That is because he insists on the maintenance of governments that can never stand by themselves—that can only be kept going by perpetual war fed by American aid.

The war cannot end unless and until the United States stops trying to impose its political solution and lets the indigenous forces arrive at theirs. Mr. Kissinger would rather have war than an indigenous settlement because the latter would show the futility; the cynical brutality, of what he has been doing all these years in Indochina.

The interesting question is not why Henry Kissinger says what he does about Indochina but why anyone goes on believing him. It is now ten years since Americans went into combat in

Vietnam, five since we invaded Cambodia. Can Mr. Kissinger really persuade still another Congress, a heavily Democratic one, that more American weapons and more war will bring peace to Indochina?

Unfortunately, the possibility cannot be excluded. Members of Congress, like journalists, are subject to the particular contamination of Washington: the need to be "respectable," to be on the inside. Mr. Kissinger is a genius at playing with Washington egos, at implying that if his listeners knew what he did . . .

Nor is Mr. Kissinger past invoking some new drama to move Congress: a latter-day Tonkin Gulf incident. With American planes flying reconnaissance missions over Vietnam again, it is not hard to imagine one being brought down—and Mr. Kissinger gravely calling for a U.S. response. To forestall that possibility Congress should now make clear that reconnaissance flights come within the legal prohibition on any American combat role in, over or adjacent to Indochina.

The new Congress will be critically tested by its ability to see through the old fictions on Indochina. The first of those is the claim that one more massive dose of American aid will enable our client governments to stand on their own. Aid has totaled \$6 billion since the 1973 truce alone; does anyone think self-reliance is at hand, any more than peace?

Then there is the argument that Communist regimes in Saigon and Phnompenh would be harsh. We do not make wars against totalitarianism elsewhere—in Moscow, say, or Santiago. Is it possible that Americans would have chosen to "save" the Indochinese from Communism if we had known originally that the price would be unending death and destruction? Do we yet understand what the human beings there suffer?

An American in Cambodia wrote me recently of his difficulty in living with the horror that American intervention has brought to that once-beautiful country. American officials, he wrote, always say it would be "immoral" to wind down military aid—when in truth "the only morality is to end the war." He continued:

"It occurs to me sometimes at night, with the images of the day keeping me awake—the maimed bodies in the overflowing hospitals, the beggars, the military funerals—that Henry Kissinger has never met a real Cambodian. He has flown into Phnompenh a few times to stay a few hours for talks at the Presidential Palace with Lon Nol and his corrupt clique. He has never gone down a road or visited a hospital.

"In these moments I ask myself whether Kissinger would be able to make policy the same way if he actually allowed himself to see what was happening in Cambodia. But perhaps this is simply a private romantic delusion."

Yes, it is a delusion. Henry Kissinger could see any number of maimed human beings without re-examining his premises—or losing a minute's sleep. It is quite clear that he would rather have Cambodia a salt plain than let the war end on terms that would expose to all the monstrous futility of his policy.

But in history, responsibility rests not only on individuals but on societies. Are we prepared to continue sharing with Mr. Kissinger the responsibility for Orwellian war in Cambodia and Vietnam? Congress will decide.

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