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Letters to the Editor

Indochina: A War America Didn't Want

To the Editor:

Has a majority of the American people, in any nationwide expression of opinion, ever endorsed the active participation of their Government in the war in Indochina?

They certainly did not do that in the Presidential election of 1964, when they cast nearly twelve million more votes for Lyndon Johnson than for an opponent who appeared as an activist not adverse to dropping bombs on Indochina. On the other hand, Mr. Johnson stood for an opposite course. "You don't get peace," he said, "by rattling your rockets. You don't get peace by threatening to drop your bombs." More specifically, President Johnson spoke against sending American soldiers to fight in Asia.

Early in 1965, the duly elected President ordered the bombing of North Vietnam. That was soon followed by large-scale activity of American ground forces. The first opportunity for voters to speak out came in the Congressional elections of 1966, the results of which were that President Johnson's party lost 47 members in the House.

In March of 1968, the New Hampshire primary registered so little support for the war that President Johnson soon decided not to seek re-election. In the campaign of 1968, both Richard Nixon and Hubert Humphrey solicited votes as apostles of peace.

During Nixon's first term, two groups

opposed each other. A large majority of the Democrats called for the withdrawal of American military forces from Vietnam; Richard Nixon and his followers spoke of a generation of peace and proclaimed that the President deserved great credit for bringing the boys home from the war.

Peace had not arrived in November 1970, when the midterm elections went decisively against Nixon and Agnew, and the peace bloc in Congress made substantial gains in each house.

On the eve of the voting in 1972, Secretary Kissinger announced that the war in Vietnam was virtually over. That the large vote for Nixon that year was essentially a peace vote is indicated by the fact that, when he had failed to attain peace by May 1973, large majorities in both houses of Congress voted to prohibit further United States military action in Indochina. Not long afterward, Congress adopted the War Powers Act, which was designed to prevent a repetition of the Indochina fiasco.

Finally, the Congressional elections of 1974 emphatically asserted the desire of most of the voters to end American participation in the conflict.

Of the six nationwide elections held since 1963, none may properly be construed as an endorsement of the course that embroiled the country in a ten years' war.

CURTIS P. NETTELS
Ithaca, N. Y., April 17, 1975

Who Can Commit the U.S.?

To the Editor:

Cadet Murphy shows courage in defending a minority view of our obligations to South Vietnam (letter April 16).^{*} His defense, however, depends on a fundamental misunderstanding of our Constitution and our history.

The United States cannot "through Mr. Kissinger and ex-President Nixon" guarantee anything, explicitly or otherwise. The United States cannot be committed to any agreement with any foreign state without the advice and consent of the Senate, nor can any agreement which involves appropriation of money be made without legislation initiated in the House of Representatives.

If I can be bound, legally or morally, by a secret, unilateral decision of one executive and his Secretary of State, then I no longer live under a constitutional republic.

I hope the instructors at West Point understand this fact. Is there any sentiment for monarchy up the Hudson?

WILLIAM R. EVERDELL
Brooklyn, April 16, 1975

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