

# Once More Into The Big Muddy

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

Les Aspin, the young Wisconsin Democrat who is proving there is useful work for a member of Congress if he wants to do it, has learned that contracts for Air America, the CIA's transparently phony airline, have doubled to more than \$41 million. It is assumed by those who study the outfit's murky doings the money will be spent encouraging our mercenaries to muck around Laos anew.

Our government disguises what we are shipping into Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam with the same care the Russians use in hiding their military expenditures so only a spy or a detective can hope to know the truth. Not only do we appropriate munitions under such categories as Food for Peace but since the Pentagon places the dollar value on our war shipments, they can conceal enormous amounts by assessing tanks at \$1 apiece and airplanes at \$5 a throw. The Pentagon has told Aspin that the inventory of what we're sending is classified, and therefore not available to the unstable, national security risks whom the voters send to Congress.

Nevertheless, by the end of Fiscal Year 74, next July that is, our military costs in that part of the world will be running at above \$4 billion a year. This necessarily means violating the Paris ceasefire agreements which confines us to resupplying depleted stocks. We are also breaking our word by introducing a new combat plane, gloriously and honorably named Tiger II Freedom Fighters.

Asked about this stepped-up bomb procurement for Southeast Asia, Air Force Gen. Jonas Blank explained everything by saying, "The requirement to accelerate production occurred as a result of the March 26, 1974, Secretary of Defense guidance which tasked the Air Force to protect a Southeast Asia contingency capability that we had not previously planned."

In short, it appears we are returning to our old winning formula of guns and military advisers, of which it is now believed we have 20,000 sneaking about those dear, old familiar palms. Thus, instead of using our decisive leverage to make him abide by it, we are apparently egging Thieu on to forget the Paris agreements which were supposed to be our tickets out of that bog.

Some moderates or liberals or whatever you want to call the wishy-washies in Congress seem to be content to vote the money for the destruction of the Paris agreements in return for keeping our people out of the fighting and because you don't want the Reds to take over, do you? Of course, the Reds are going to take over anyway, only it will be longer and more costly. They've got most of Cambodia now and they're going to get the rest of it soon enough.

Ultimately, they'll get General Thieu also because we know that a corrupt, inflation-wracked, debilitated South Vietnam can't win without our armed interven-

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tion. We already have our Secretary of Defense getting us acclimated to the thought again, and there is the memory of Dr. Kissinger saying, "I wanted to bomb the daylights out of Hanoi, but Congress wouldn't let me." It looks like the boys regard the Paris agreements as a truce to buy time to get the peaceniks off their backs.

The justification for what we're doing, is that the North Vietnamese are doing the same thing. Doubtless they are. But if they win, they get the other half of their country. What do we get if we win? Honor? The President's told us we already have that. The satisfaction of keeping the Reds out of Saigon? Well, what's wrong with these Reds? They're far less obnoxious than the ones in Moscow or Peking and being fewer in number and poorer in resources, are much less of a threat.

Even if we don't go back there with the big birds but try to buy the victory this time, all we are going to get for it is a big debt. This isn't 1955 or 1965, and we can't afford it anymore. Our inflation rate is running 10 per cent now, and if we have to pay for three wars in Indochina and another one in the Middle East, it simply isn't going to matter who wins. We will lose.