



The endless war Ford's turn to face Vietnam

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WASHINGTON — It is the war that will not end.

And like his recent predecessors President Ford is destined to have his own showdown with Congress over the Vietnam tragedy.

Two years ago former President Nixon declared that peace had come. Henry Kissinger announced that a ceasefire had been negotiated and predicted the war would wither away.

But none of it has happened that way.

With little notice as the world's attention has been focused elsewhere, the Vietnam war, now in its 27th year, has heated up.

Combat death rate in 1974 reached the second highest total of any year since the war began, according to Saigon.

More than 80,000 were killed on the two sides —

30,000 more than the total lost by the U.S. in the entire war.

Today the level of violence is at a new high. It's not as high as the Tet offensive of 1968 or the all-out offensive of 1972, but it's heading that way.

The Ford administration is seriously considering a request to Congress for about \$300 million additional aid for Saigon.

The President has said he wants to meet with congressional leaders "at the earliest possible time" to "discuss this critical issue."

But he may find that Congress is less than willing to cooperate, particularly in a period of economic crisis.

Congress halved the administration's requests for military assistance to South Vietnam last year — cutting a \$1.4 billion request to a final appropriation of \$700 million. It also cut a \$750 million request for economic aid to \$449 million. The new Congress, dominated by Democrats, is expected to be even tougher. But Ford intends to fight for more money

for Vietnam, using the historic argument that South Vietnam, once again, is in danger of going down the drain. One congressional expert on Indochina said, "The military situation is deteriorating and will continue to deteriorate."

"The Saigon government held its own fairly well in the first year after the agreements were signed two years ago, but it's been down hill since then.

"I don't see any way to stop it. The administration has no program except to pour more money in, and there's no proof that more money will do the job."

There is little doubt that the Ford administration hopes for the future of Vietnam of January 1972, when peace agreements were signed, have failed to materialize.

Promised elections haven't taken place, nor have most of the carefully worded sections of the peace agreements been carried out by either side.

The agreements look like an attempt to paper over the reality of war.