

Henry Kissinger's Vietnam Obsession

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.

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

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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 began on January 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 . . ."

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. 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.

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BUT HOWEVER THE AGREEMENT has been violated, the fundamental fallacy is the notion that more American intervention can bring peace. We tried that.

Then 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 the 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.

No one should underestimate 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.

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