

Vietnam Again

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The news from Southeast Asia is beginning to have a morbidly familiar ring. In an engagement Monday Vietnamese forces suffered their heaviest casualties since the signing of cease-fire fourteen months ago. In fierce fighting on the same day Cambodian insurgents captured a major city twenty miles from Phnom Penh.

In Washington the Defense Department is asking Congress for urgent new military aid to South Vietnam, and the American Ambassador in Saigon is warning that the "people of the world" will be exposed to "enormous dangers" if the United States fails to provide wholehearted support for President Nguyen Van Thieu. Those who dare to question the continuing United States military effort, says Ambassador Graham Martin, are only succumbing to the insidious influence of Communist North Vietnam.

There is scarcely a pretense any more that the Vietnam truce agreement has brought respite from war. Pentagon witnesses told a Congressional committee this week that, unless a quick \$474 million is sent off to Saigon, President Thieu's military operations would have to be sharply curtailed next month. And for the coming year, the Administration seeks \$2.4 billion for Vietnam aid, plus another \$463 million to support American military forces based in Southeast Asia. In the first year of so-called peace, the United States expense for weapons and ammunition in Vietnam was only 25 per cent below the level for corresponding programs in the heavy war year of 1972.

Neither North nor South Vietnam has shown any interest in implementing the elaborate and patently unwieldy political provisions of the Paris accords. If this comes as no surprise, what is ominous is the unstated assumption that the United States is committed to keeping the war going, on President Thieu's terms. Having successfully barred direct combat involvement in Southeast Asia, the Congress is entitled now to be wary of continued drift into war by proxy.