

### PLAYING WITH FIRE IN INDOCHINA

#### COMMANDER FERNANDEZ OF GOVERNMENT FORCES RESIGNS

March 11 (IPS)--Authorized sources in the Cambodian High Command announced today that government forces commander Sosthene Fernandez will be relieved of his duties and replaced by Lt. General Sutsakhan. Fernandez has been made responsible for the long series of defeats suffered by the pro-Lon Nol forces during the past week. UPI reports that the Cambodian National Assembly had been exerting pressures on the Lon Nol government, demanding Fernandez' resignation.

#### SAIGON COMMAND'S POSITION DESCRIBED AS "DESPERATE" BY WASHINGTON POST

March 13 (IPS)--United Press International reports today that the Khmer Rouge have blown up an ammunition dump at Phnom Penh's airport suspending all flights for the day.

Throughout Indochina the military position of the U.S. backed regimes continues to deteriorate. In Vietnam, the Saigon Command announced today the fall of Tri Tam, a key district town 40 miles northeast of Saigon. Tri Tam's loss seriously reduces Saigon's ability to defend Tay Ninh, a major provincial capital only 20 miles from Tri Tam. All highway access from Saigon to Tay Ninh has been cut for three days; according to the Washington Post, a major assault on the provincial capital is expected soon. Saigon's control over the country's Central Highlands also stands further weakened. The New York Times reports today that government troops have abandoned the district town of Buon Ho.

#### HOUSE COMMITTEE REJECTS AID FOR CAMBODIA

March 13 (IPS)--United Press International reports that the House Foreign Affairs Committee this morning rejected its Investigations Subcommittee recommendation for additional military and economic aid for the Cambodian government of Lon Nol. By a vote of 18 to 15, the full Committee rejected a total \$135 million in additional aid. The vote comes on the heels of yesterday's 189 to 49 vote against all military aid to Cambodia and South Vietnam by the House Democratic Caucus.

#### WESTMORELAND WANTS TO RESUME BOMBING OF NORTH VIETNAM, MINING OF HAIPHONG

March 13 (IPS)--According to AP today former head of United States Armed Forces in Vietnam William Westmoreland told President Ford today that the President should be given the power to resume

B-52 bombings of North Vietnam. Westmoreland also urged that Ford be given the power to mine Haiphong harbor.

#### NYT: KHMER ROUGE MORE NATIONALIST THAN COMMUNIST

March 13 (IPS)--In a front-page article, the New York Times today reports that, according to "students of Hanoi's policies," border skirmishes are taking place between Khmer Rouge and North Vietnamese forces in Cambodian efforts to "remain independent of Hanoi."

The Times claims that, as victory nears, the Khmer Rouge are being led by a "nationalist tendency" headed by Khieu Samphan, Defense Minister and Chief of the Army.

Such reports contradict all evidence obtained on this subject by IPS over the past few weeks. All reliable sources, including the U.S. State Department, stress that relations between the Khmer Rouge and the North Vietnamese have markedly improved.

#### SENATE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS VOTES AGAINST AID TO INDOCHINA

March 14 (IPS)--Following on the heels of the House Democratic Caucus vote to cut off all military aid to Cambodia and South Vietnam, the Senate Democratic Caucus yesterday voted 38 to 5 against further military aid to Cambodia and 34 to 6 against further assistance to South Vietnam in the current fiscal year, according to today's New York Times.

The Administration hopes to reopen debate on Monday at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee meeting where a proposal providing \$125 million to Cambodia from existing arms stockpiles, without the need for a special appropriation, will be considered.

This attempt to keep the issue alive in Congress is aimed at wearing down resistance to aid to South Vietnam through eye witness accounts from members of the Congressional delegation which recently returned from Vietnam and Cambodia and statements from Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger to the effect that communists in Southeast Asia are on the offensive and bloodbaths are imminent everywhere.

#### VIETNAM: NVA CAPTURES ALMOST ALL OF BAN ME THUOT: CUTS OFF HIGHLAND ROADS

March 14 (IPS)--Today's New York Times reports that serious fighting occurred in several areas of South Vietnam yesterday, as the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) strengthened its hold over strategic towns and supply routes in the countryside north of Saigon. Having captured most of the key highland city of Ban Me Thuot, the NVA now controls all the key supply routes and towns in the Highlands except for Kontum and Pleiku. South

Vietnam military sources report that Pleiku will soon have to be resupplied by air. In an attempt to preclude complete NVA control over the Highlands, Saigon Army (AVRN) forces are now building up for an effort to recapture Ban Me Thuot.

#### THE MILITARY SITUATION IN VIETNAM

March 16 (IPS)--The two week long offensive by the National Liberation Front (the Vietcong) has underlined the glaring weaknesses of the South Vietnamese military (AVRN). Pinning down major proportions of AVRN troops in the northern coastal area of Hue and Quang Tri, the NLF continues to isolate AVRN units in the Central Highlands. The South Vietnamese government has been virtually unable to reinforce these units and has resupplied them only with a costly helicopter and air lift operation that faces heavy anti-aircraft fire. Yesterday the Ban Don Base Camp north of Ban Me Thuot fell to the NLF. Fighting around Pleiku in the major city of Thanh An, an NLF attack on an armored cavalry command post, and attacks on the military air base have isolated Pleiku except by air. This has forced the evacuation of the military command from Pleiku to the coastal city of Nha Trang. Pleiku and Kontum are the only two remaining major outposts held by government forces in the Central Highlands.

#### NEW YORK TIMES, JOSEPH KRAFT PUSH INDOCHINA AID TO "STOP COMMUNISM"

March 16 (IPS)--In a bid to save South Vietnam from the fate of Cambodia, the New York Times editorialized today in support of President Ford's Indochina aid proposal. Joseph Kraft in his column in today's Washington Post carried on the crusade to save Indochina from communist takeover by calling for a return to the days of John Foster Dulles, when the U.S. would stop the spread of communism at all costs.

The Times editorial denounced Congress for its outright rejection of aid for Indochina and proposed a one-for-one replacement of Saigon's military equipment as called for in the Paris Accords, with Congress merely negotiating the details.

#### WASHINGTON POST: "MOSCOW WON'T NEGOTIATE IN INDOCHINA"

March 16 (IPS)--In the first open statement in the U.S. press on Moscow's policy on the Cambodian situation, Washington Post writer Peter Osnos states that the Soviet Union favors "quick military victory" by the Khmer Rouge communists. In an article in today's Post, Osnos writes, "There is no longer any prospect that Moscow will bail out the United States by endorsing negotiated settlement of the conflict--along the lines of the coalition established in Laos two years ago."