The first confrontation over the question of continued American military aid to the Thieu regime for Fiscal Year 1975 occurred last week in the House of Representatives with the peace forces achieving at least a partial victory. A series of parliamentary maneuvers resulted in a cut of $274 million from the Authorization bill submitted to the full House by the hawkish Armed Services Committee. While the size of the cut may be disappointing, its true significance may be better understood within the context of the controversy created during recent months by the United Campaign to Honor the Peace Agreement and the Administration’s desperate attempts to react to it. In this Legislative Update we would like to put the recent House vote in that broader and, we believe, more revealing perspective.
STATE DEPARTMENT REACTION: MEMO ON THE UNITED CAMPAIGN

Perhaps the most revealing indication of the impact of our effort over the past several months is the recent escalation of Administration attempts to counter it. A State Department memo released last month is particularly noteworthy. The memo asserts that "A number of 'peace' organizations and activists have mounted a sophisticated, long-term, coordinated campaign to pressure the Congress into eliminating or drastically cutting American assistance to South Vietnam." While admitting that "such campaigns are a proper part of the American political process," the writer suggests that "Congress and the public should be aware of the nature of this effort."

The paper continues with an analysis of the campaign launched last fall--concentrating on the October 26-28 Germantown, Ohio anti-war conference--and reveals some of the 'sophisticated' tools used in the campaign: the Coalition's Indochina Index, Effective Lobbying Techniques, and the 1974 Indochina Peace Pledge. The memo then goes on to point out the 'propaganda lines' used by the campaign and, in an attached memo, makes a somewhat feeble and misleading attempt to answer them. The memo concludes:

"The peace organizations, using these and other misrepresentations of the Vietnam situation in their sophisticated lobbying and propaganda campaign, have generated considerable attention in some segments of the US press and public opinion."

PENTAGON REACTION: MASSIVE LOBBYING CAMPAIGN

Apprehensive as to how that 'attention' might affect U.S. Indochina policy, Administration forces intensified their effort in the week prior to the House vote. Appearing before the press, Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger presented the Administration's latest rationale for continued U.S. involvement. Admitting that neither South Vietnam nor Southeast Asia were essential to U.S. national interests, Schlesinger argued that the U.S. still has an 'implicit commitment' to South Vietnam. Referring to the expected aid cuts, Schlesinger chided Congress for behaving "in such a niggling manner."

Schlesinger's remarks were part of the Administration's ongoing campaign to cloud the issue by equating the Thieu regime with the South Vietnamese people. The 'niggling manner' referred to by Schles-
inger was a totally unwarranted characterization of legitimate efforts by Congress to curb Pentagon spending and to formulate a workable policy for Indochina. The money in question is no small sum in dollar or in human terms. It is an expenditure which will inevitably result in the continued suffering and bloodshed in Indochina.

Schlesinger's remarks were undoubtedly echoed many times over in Congressional offices during an intense campaign by Pentagon lobbyists. Commenting on the approaching House vote, Congressman Les Aspen of Wisconsin said that he hadn't taken the Leggett amendment so seriously until he was confronted by an army of Pentagon lobbyists "swarming over the House office buildings." One California Congressman informed us that Marine Commandant Shoup personally telephoned him to talk specifically about Vietnam aid.

Unfortunately, these 'sophisticated lobbying techniques' paid off for the Pentagon--out of the 60 or so conservatives absent for the supplemental vote (which we won) a substantial majority showed up this time, and that--plus some defections--swung the balance. Also, there is a general feeling among the Coalition staff that we were relatively unprepared for this vote. Unlike the vote on supplemental aid, there just wasn't enough time to launch a major organizing effort. The margin of defeat, in any case, wasn't large: eleven switches and we would have won.

The Saigon Contribution

Some of the most serious efforts to manipulate Congress and public opinion, however, come from the Thieu regime itself. Not unpredictably, press accounts of new and large Communist offensive operations appeared in the American press the week before the vote and GVN field commanders repeated their now tiresome and wornout complaint of not having enough ammunition to withstand "Communist attack". These well-orchestrated outcries inevitably coincide with Congressional debate prior to important aid votes. According to an article in the May 13th edition of the widely respected Far Eastern Economic Review,

"The current upsurge in the fighting is widely thought in South Vietnam to have been "ordered" by US Ambassador Graham Martin to justify the Administration's demands for increased military assistance...It is even claimed that Martin advised President Thieu to yield up one of Saigon's isolated bases within territory held by the PRG every week to convince the US Congress and the public that the North Vietnamese had launched offensives."

(3)
Reports of "communist offensives", incidentally, disappeared the day after the vote.

Apparently not satisfied with Administration attempts to offset growing disenchantment with the war, the Saigon government also recently sponsored an expense-paid "fact finding" visit to South Vietnam by ten Congressional aides. This was the second such trip in as many months.

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It was against this background that the House vote took place last week. As the State Department memo attests, we have succeeded in bringing US involvement in the continuing Indochina war before large and important segments of the American press and public opinion. As disenchantment with the US role in the war grows, so will Administration attempts to combat it. The Administration, however, is clearly on the defensive.

THE HOUSE VOTE

This defensiveness was clearly reflected in the maneuvering on the House floor. Prior to the debate, the hawkish Armed Services Committee had already made a concession by cutting the Administration's inflated $1.6 billion request to $1.4 billion. An amendment offered by Congressman Leggett would have reduced that figure to $900 million. Immediately after the amendment was introduced, however, Committee chairman Hebert made a surprise move. Apparently sensing that there might be enough votes to pass the $500 million cut, Hebert retreated and offered a compromise figure of $1.126 billion--last year's authorization figure. Leggett countered by attempting to amend Hebert's $1.126 billion down to $1 billion. A recorded vote on the $1 billion Leggett amendment was taken and the peace forces lost. The $1.126 billion authorization was subsequently accepted by a voice vote.

NEXT STEPS: SENATE AUTHORIZATION, HOUSE APPROPRIATION

The House vote was definitely a victory in the sense that we succeeded in substantially reducing the Administration's original request of $1.6 billion. Nonetheless, we have only succeeded so far in reducing it to last year's authorization level. And it is important to note that last year's figure included approximately $100 million for Laos. Therefore, this figure of $1.126 billion constitutes an increase of $100 million in military aid for Saigon.
Our next opportunity to make further reductions will be in the Senate where the Defense Authorization bill has passed through Committee and is scheduled to be on the floor this week. The Senate Armed Services Committee has already reduced the Vietnam military funding from $1.6 billion to $900 million, and further cuts can be expected when the bill reaches the floor.

The House has one more chance to cut military funding for Saigon when the Defense Appropriations bill is considered, probably in July. Congress may appropriate new funds for Vietnam up to but not exceeding the ceiling which is determined in the authorization bill. Efforts will be made, probably in both the House Appropriations Committee and on the House floor, to reduce the Vietnam military appropriation below the authorization level.

The importance of achieving further reductions cannot be overestimated. Anything less than substantial reductions from last year's spending levels would be a signal to Thieu that Congress condones his present policy of intransigence and his attempt to subvert the Paris Agreement.

POLITICAL PRISONERS AND AMERICAN AID: A FOCUS ON THE ISSUE

In recent months a considerable number of people have sent the Coalition copies of letters they had received from Congresspeople in response to their inquiries about American funding of the South Vietnamese police and prison system. These letters invariably state the representative's abhorrence of the use of American funds for such purposes (nobody is in favor of torture) and go on to mention the Hatfield amendment, which was intended to terminate such funding. The issue, they imply, has largely been settled by that legislation.

Termination of direct aid to the Thieu regime's police and prison system does not end American responsibility for political prisoners. The responsibility lies in over-all US aid to a repressive and corrupt regime which does not have and, in fact, does not need the support of its people—its bills are paid by American taxpayers. Regardless of the number of restrictive amendments attached to aid bills, a free and open society can not be created in South Vietnam while the U.S. is underwriting a broader repression.

When writing to your representatives we think that it is important to emphasize the broader role that American aid plays in South Vietnam. They should be asked directly: Do you support the termination of American aid to the Thieu regime until it guarantees democra-
tic liberties and begins to implement the political provisions of the Paris Agreement?

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HOUSE VOTE ON LEGGETT AMENDMENT TO REDUCE MILITARY AID TO SOUTH VIETNAM TO $1 BILLION

(An aye vote is a vote to cut aid.)

AYES—190

[Roll No. 246]

[Partial list of names]

NOES—311

[Partial list of names]