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On Capitol Hill

By Congressman
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In World Wars I and II when Congress officially declared war in the manner prescribed by the Constitution, the status of our military forces was clear-cut. Since 1945, however, through major military engagements like Korea and the present situation in Vietnam, there has been no sharply focused definition of status.

Our officers and men are forced to operate in what amounts to a state of military limbo. The chain of command is confused and divided between the State Department, CIA, and the Defense Department.

Diplomatic conditions override military necessity and there is confusion as to whether we are "in" or "out" of a war. Just as our military forces were restrained from really winning the Korean War by the "Yalu River Policy" imposed by the State Department, so our forces face another paradox in Vietnam.

Even with Americans dying in fighting which involves fifteen thousand of our men, the State Department will not admit it is a war and let our military men make military decisions. Our troops are only allowed to advise; they cannot command. Our flyers can only fly when the Vietnamese agree and only then in planes which are a minimum of ten years old.

The obsolete World War II planes which have caused so much trouble in Vietnam were sent there because of a diplomatic decision that we would abide by the Geneva Accords of 1954 which we had not even signed and which have been repeatedly violated by the Communists.

Though there is room for honest criticism of the Defense Department's failure to develop a new counter-insurgency type aircraft instead of rehabilitating good Korean War planes which have flown thousands of hours and must wear out, the basic military decisions in Vietnam have been sound.

This is essentially a ground war and our ground equipment is the very best. Our military men and their performance are superb and they believe in their mission.

The greatest problem, it seems, is the political situation in Vietnam. Men who have actually served in combat tell us that the Vietnamese in the field will not cooperate with U.S. advisors and have little faith in their government. The desertion rate is high and the will to win is low.

An end to the war in Vietnam need not require an invasion of the North, nor dangerous acts which could escalate the level of violence and start World War III. The present plan for victory is sufficient if only the State Department would first admit this is a war and let the military fight it.

The answer does not lie in committing more American forces, but in letting the forces already there take operational control of the war. With experienced and well-trained commanders who could issue an order and make it stick, a military victory could raise the morale of the Vietnamese so that a political victory would be automatic.

In spite of any diplomatic exercise in semantics, we are either in this war or we should be out of it. If we are in it, we should let military men win it by winning it!

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