

Lodge Adjusts to Aim of Warding Off Aggression

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News Analysis

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SAIGON, Aug. 31 — An hour after word was released last summer that Henry Cabot Lodge had quit as Ambassador to South Viet-Nam he included this bit of philosophy in his remarks to sleepy newsmen who had cornered him outside the Embassy:

"Much of foreign policy has to be conducted in silence, secretly — punctuated by occasional action."

This approach is expected to characterize his second mission here. He gave little away to newsmen the first time, and he probably will give even less this time, at least until he has assessed how much the situation has changed.

When he left, everybody was hoping that an advisory effort alone would help the South Vietnamese prevail in their fight against the insurgents.

Today the Americans themselves are fighting an economy-size war, with the limited hope that it will stave off the collapse of the South Vietnamese and that it will persuade Hanoi to come to the conference table.

In the year in which Lodge had been away, hopes had risen that a genuine if violent public reaction had proved that military juntas were finished and responsible governments were required. Today that euphoric feeling seems to have vanished, and there is again the acceptance of a self-appointed regime.

Lodge apparently is not overly concerned about this. He will settle for an administration — any administra-

tion—that can remain in office long enough to realize what needs to be done and to gather some inkling of how to do it.

This, apparently, is part of the mission of former Air Force Maj. Gen. Edward F. Lansdale, who arrived here Sunday.

What precisely he is going to do is still not clear, although today he was given the imposing title of Chairman of the U.S. Mission Liaison Group to the Secretary General of the Central Rural Construction Council.

The Council — which is less than one month old and which in fact has not yet been convened—will more or less decide priorities in rural development.

Lodge lets little of his thinking seep through to non-official people, but it is known that he is even less inclined today to search for absolutes in an area where everything has become so conditional.

He shrinks from the term "victory," for example. Things are less clearcut in this kind of a war. A phrase like "warding off aggression" is more acceptable: It not only limits South Viet-Nam's commitment to self-protection at home but, more realistically, it preserves the image of being the aggrieved party.

Lodge is aware that Lansdale with his unorthodox views is not entirely beloved by his former brothers-in-arms for harping on the need to give the peasantry an alternative to warfare, and he will make it clear that he does not regard Lansdale as being in

an adversary's position vis-à-vis the military.

To this extent, Lodge will be more of a harmonizer of divergent opinions than he was two years ago. His instructions then were that when President Ngo Dinh Diem had overstayed his usefulness and that the rug was to be pulled out from under him, and he firmly laid down the law to the U.S. Mission that this was policy.

Two years later his Mission is concerned with keeping an administration functioning rather than toppling one.

Lodge will also be concerned with sorting out the various rivalries involving the military and civilian segments of the U.S. Mission, both of which have grown tremendously since he left.

In one sense Lodge's assessment of the Vietnamese problem has not changed. When he left he felt that if the peasant could be given the boon of a guaranteed good night's sleep, and if the lowly Vietnamese felt confident enough in the government to tell it what he knew, the war would in effect be over.

He still feels that way. Now that he is back, he must satisfy himself how far away from that ideal the situation in Viet-Nam is.