

Clinton lifts Vietnamese trade ban

WASHINGTON — Moving to ease an emotional legacy from a divisive war, President Clinton on Thursday lifted the 19-year U.S. trade embargo against Vietnam.

Clinton said he was taking the first step toward getting a full accounting of the Americans missing in Vietnam.

"We would lose leverage if there were no forward movement," Clinton said. In recent months, he said, there had been much progress in accounting for 2,238 American MIAs and POWs in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Vietnam is one of Asia's fastest-growing markets and nearly all other Western countries that had once joined in the embargo have re-established commercial ties with the communist nation.

American businesses have pressed for an end to the embargo.

"I want to be clear. These actions do not constitute a normalization of our relationship. We must have more progress, more cooperation, and more answers," Clinton said.

Clinton made the announcement after meeting with representatives of the families of soldiers still miss-

ing in action. Many veterans groups preferred that he keep the embargo in place to encourage continued Vietnamese cooperation accounting for missing servicemen.

"I am absolutely convinced it offers the best way to resolve the fate of those who remain missing and about those about whom we are not sure," Clinton said.

Clinton's efforts to avoid military service during the Vietnam War made his decision all the more sensitive.

The decision to lift the embargo, Clinton said, was guided by progress in four key areas:

- Recovery of remains of American soldiers in Vietnam. Since last July, remains of 39 American servicemen had been recovered.

- Resolution of "discrepancy cases" in which there was reason to believe people could have survived. Since July, the number of such cases had been reduced from 135 to 73.

- Further assistance from Vietnam and Laos in conducting searches along their common border. The first such investigation took place in December and located new remains and crash sites,

Clinton said.

- Release of any documents from Vietnam that could shed light on the fate of those still missing. Since July, Clinton said, important documents had been released from the Vietnamese archives.

A strong suspicion exists among MIA family members and veterans groups that some of the missing are still alive, but the administration has said there is no credible evidence of that.

As a student a generation ago, Clinton marched against the war and also avoided the draft.

Last summer, Clinton promised to keep the embargo until Vietnam provided a full accounting of the missing Americans.

His decision to soften that stance was made easier by a non-binding 62-38 vote in the Senate last Thursday favoring an end to the embargo. Some veterans and family groups maintain that Vietnam has recovered the remains of hundreds of MIA's but refuses to turn them over to U.S. authorities.

Administration officials say Vietnam may have stored remains at one point but no longer does so.

Missing Americans in Indochina

President Clinton has made the lifting of the trade embargo contingent on Vietnam's cooperation and progress in the fullest possible accounting of America's MIAs.



The American Legion, the largest veterans' group in the United States, said in a letter to President Clinton that if he lifts the embargo, he would betray millions of veterans and their families.

Senate names William Perry defense chief

WASHINGTON — The Senate confirmed William Perry as defense secretary Thursday, turning over command of the Pentagon to a scholar, businessman and expert on high-tech weapons.

The 97-0 vote came slightly more than a week after President Clinton named Perry, until now the No. 2 man at the Pentagon, to replace Les Aspin.

"He does have the vision we need," said Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "He is totally committed to the security of this country."

Committee colleague John Warner, R-Va., predicted Perry would rank "among the finest" of the 19 people to hold the job since its creation after World War II.

Republican members of the Armed Services panel almost placed a hold on Perry's nomination because of their concerns about the administration policy on homosexuals in the military. After a hasty series of telephone calls between Perry and committee members, the Republicans decided against it.

"Some people have said he is not charismatic, that we need a charismatic secretary of defense. I disagree," Levin said. "We need somebody who has the experience to change the culture there."

"We must manage our budget a lot better," Levin said. "We can do that with Dr. Perry."

Armed Services Chairman Sam Nunn, D-Ga., said of Perry's testimony in his confirmation hearing Wednesday, "it was impressive and it was straightforward."

Perry leaves Friday for a conference in Munich on defense issues. And next week he returns to Capitol Hill to present the administration's \$264 billion defense spending plan. The administration had hoped Perry could make those appearances as the fully confirmed secretary.

Republicans charge that the administration's regulations on homosexuals in the military do not faithfully follow a law passed last year by Congress aimed at keeping a gay ban in place.

Under questioning Wednesday, Perry assured senators their concerns were being taken into account.

Perry rises from deputy defense secretary to the Pentagon's top job at a time when the military budget continues to decline from the Reagan-era peak during the mid-1980s.

The 66-year-old Stanford University engineering professor helped forge defense policy for the past year under Aspin and directed defense research under President Carter. He made his reputation in defense circles as the leading promoter of radar-evading stealth technology. He also became a millionaire as the founder of and consultant to defense contractors.

IRA leader's visit angers Britain

LONDON — Relations between Britain and the United States have undeniably soured because of Gerry Adams' headline-grabbing visit to New York, but the British are aiming most of their fire at the Sinn Fein leader rather than Washington.

Moving Thursday to seize back the public-relations spotlight, Britain likened Adams, head of the IRA's main political allies, to Hitler's chief propagandist. It also suggested it would push ahead with reforms in Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew, Britain's top official in the province, said he would introduce within two weeks an outline plan aimed at bringing peace to Northern Ireland.

"Progress in Northern Ireland cannot and will not wait for Sinn Fein," Prime Minister John Major told Parliament.

In New York this week, Adams portrayed himself as Northern Ireland's chief peace-maker. He refused to say whether he would persuade the IRA to lay down its arms.

In a Dec. 15 declaration, the British and Irish governments offered to allow Sinn Fein into peace talks if the Irish Republican Army ended its 23-year campaign against British rule in Northern Ireland.

The British worked hard behind the scenes to prevent Adams' U.S. trip, but they want to keep private their anger with President Clinton

and those U.S. politicians who successfully argued for his special 48-hour visa.

Adams had been denied a visa eight times because Sinn Fein, though a legal party, is linked to the IRA and its violent campaign against British rule.

The U.S. ambassador to Britain, Raymond Seitz, was summoned to Major's official residence Tuesday. He acknowledged Wednesday the visa debate had caused "a big tussle" in the Clinton administration.

U.S. government spokesmen defended the president's decision by saying the visa could serve as a "carrot" for Adams to seek peace.

British officials say it will encourage Adams not to compromise.

A senior official in Britain's Foreign Office said Major wanted to avoid a "public row" with America. But he added that the visa effectively let Adams "play the democrat" while the IRA went on with its violent campaign.

Sir Robin Renwick, Britain's ambassador to the United States, said Thursday on CNN that Adams' "extraordinary propaganda line" reminded him of Hitler's propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels.

"The line is, 'I want peace,'" Renwick said.

The Adams visit has left the protagonists talking, in effect, about two different peace initiatives.

To Mayhew, the British-Irish declaration offered the IRA-Sinn Fein leadership the only concession it needs — a seat at a talks table in exchange for an end to violence.

Mayhew told The Financial Times he wants to see a continuation of the 1991-92 talks process, which included all of Northern Ireland's major parties except Sinn Fein.

He said he would present those parties with his ideas on a new local parliament for Northern Ireland — an idea embraced by the province's pro-British, Protestant majority, less enthusiastically by John Hume's Social Democratic and Labor Party, which represents most Catholics.

Mayhew said he also wants to push for cross-border bodies to oversee areas of common interest between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. Hume's party, which wants Ireland united but opposes the IRA, supports this part of the package.

To Adams peace means detailed concessions and assurances from Britain that he can sell to IRA commanders.

After landing Thursday in Dublin, Ireland, Adams said his U.S. visit had been to promote peace, not "to bring back weapons." He said the trip helped the peace process. "Certainly no harm has been done," he said.

He wouldn't say whether he would try to persuade the IRA to stop killing.

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Speedskaters not distracted by Harding case

LILLEHAMMER, Norway — They aren't even here yet, and already Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan are having an impact at the Winter Olympics.

The first batch of U.S. athletes checking into the Olympic Village Wednesday said the attention focused on the figure-skating rivals and Harding's possible links to the attack on Kerrigan Jan. 6 would allow other stars on the team to prepare without undue pressure.

Eighteen athletes and coaches from the men's and women's speedskating squad landed in Oslo and trekked to Hamar, Norway, where they will compete for Olympic gold. The figure skating competition is in Hamar, too, but the speedskaters doubted the pres-

ence of Harding and Kerrigan would affect them too much.

"Once you're in the village, it's hard to be distracted," said Nathaniel Mills, a member of the men's speedskating team for the second straight Winter Games.

The U.S. speedskaters include two out-and-out superstars — Bonnie Blair, trying to become the winningest U.S. woman in Olympic history, and Dan Jansen, trying to win his first Olympic medal to go with a slew of world records and titles.

Personable, articulate and well-known, these athletes normally would be at the center of the Olympic spotlight. But their teammates and coaches feel the Harding-Kerrigan saga will save Blair and Jansen some of the usual stress.

"I think this thing is the best thing that can happen to Bonnie and Dan," Mills said. "It's already in the media spotlight, everything's Tonya and Nancy, and it will probably stay that way."

Peter Mueller, the speedskating team's coach, agreed.

"We don't talk much about it, but it does take the pressure off Dan," Mueller said.

—Mills
Olympic speedskater