

An undeclared war of devastating proportions is being fought in Vietnam today. This war has been characterized by President John F. Kennedy as the supreme test of "democracy" in Southeast Asia: "South Vietnam represents a proving ground of democracy in Asia... (It) represents the alternative to Communist dictatorship. If this democratic experiment fails, if some one million refugees have fled the totalitarianism of the North only to find neither freedom nor security in the South, then weakness, not strength, will characterize the meaning of democracy in midst of still more Asians." Whether President Ngo Dinh Diem's regime is the "bulwark of democracy" or not, one thing is certain, it is a crumbling bulwark. Suffering from lack of popular support, as Senate Democratic leader Mike Mansfield has admitted, the government has done little to raise living standards, industrialize, provide jobs for the 60% unemployed, provide any kind of security to its population of 12 million or create any kind of alternative to the terrible destruction which is commonplace throughout the country today.

Breakthrough to the New Frontier

U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara stated upon his return from Vietnam early this year that the U.S. must "sink or swim" with Diem. This is certainly an unprecedented breakthrough for the New Frontier. Never before has the U.S. so completely staked its foreign policy

ity laws", is chairman of the Justice and Social Welfare Committee.

The government is run in accordance with the new golden rule--"what is good for the Diem family is good for the state". Diem is Catholic, therefore Catholicism is the state religion, although only 1.2 million out of a total population of 12.1 million are Catholic. Naturally, Diem's brother is bishop. The Diem family is wealthy, therefore there can be no taxation on luxury goods, capital earnings or personal income of the upper classes. Even subversion of the war effort is excusable if a relative is involved, as was the case when Ngo Dinh Can, governor of Central Vietnam, was caught in 1961 running rice on the black market to North Vietnam. He smuggled rice North although there was a widespread famine in South Vietnam at the time. Even U.S. aid has never reached the people. In 1958 the U.S. government was giving South Vietnam credit to import commodities for development. The Diem regime saw that \$34.3 million was imported in clothing, more than the total imports of industrial equipment and machinery which amounted to \$30.3 million. In a country which must develop agricultural output in order to improve its foreign exchange earnings, a total of \$5 million in fertilizers and insecticides was imported against \$7.8 million worth of private automobiles or \$6.9 million in gasoline and oil.

VIETNAM

on a dictatorship which is so well known for its mass suppressions and total unwillingness to cope with the problems of its country. Next to Diem, the Batista and Trujillo regimes look like Roosevelt's "New Deal". Even Eisenhower was hesitant about a "sink or swim" with Diem policy and even went so far as to withdraw military and economic aid until a limited program of land reform was instituted. But the Kennedy Administration helps Diem with his repressions and bolsters his regime with military support.

The Family Concession

Ngo Dinh Diem seems to view the government of his country as a family concession. His brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, is the principal political adviser in the Administration and head of the 70,000 undercover members of the Can-Lao organization; Nhu's wife is first lady of the regime and leader of the organization of Vietnamese women; brother Ngo Dinh Luyen is the Ambassador to London, Bonn and Brussels; Mrs. Nhu's father, Tran Van Chuong, is Ambassador to Washington, Canada, Argentina and Brazil; Mrs. Nhu's mother represents Vietnam in the U.N. Still another brother is the Roman Catholic bishop of Vinh Long. The sisters-in-law play a vital role in the government. Madame Nguyen Thi Minh, author of the infamous "moral-

"Bulwark" Without Democracy

The Diem "bulwark of democracy" boils down to nothing more than totalitarianism. Even the Kennedy Administration has worried about the mass political suppressions, the detention camps and the lack of freedom of the press. As of 1962 45,000 students had been placed in "re-education centers", glorified concentration camps, for being suspected of disagreement with the government. Some have been placed there for violation of Madame Nguyen Thi Minh's Alice-in-Wonderland morality laws--that is, singing sad songs, wearing dresses not at the prescribed length, playing rock and roll music (or even listening to it), doing the twist, or wearing padded brassieres. Not oddly enough, 30% of those "rehabilitated" by the concentration camp process, NATION Magazine reports, have joined the Viet-Cong. There are concentration camps for political prisoners and all people who have openly opposed the regime. These are small in relation to the "re-education centers, since most political dissidents have been killed or have fled the country. (There have been several uprisings against Diem over the past few years. The first was by religious sects which were suppressed by 1955, then came attempts by nationalist groupings that were moderate as well as an attempted military coup in 1961.)

The United States has helped the Diem regime conceive of a new method of keeping the people under the control of the government--the so-called "strategic hamlet". This, according to McNamara's experts, is essential to wiping out the Viet-Cong. The government has been moving whole villages to mud stockades where they will be "protected" from guerilla attacks. The real reason is to prevent villagers from aiding the Viet-Cong. Those who go voluntarily are given land and six month's rice, those who do not wish to go are forced. Supposedly the villagers can farm the land around the stockade. Paradoxically, these stockades have been prime targets of the Viet-Cong. The villagers have difficulty farming the land because of these attacks and three U.S. helicopters have been shot down trying to rush food to the hundreds of people dying of starvation within them. Concentration camps such as these do not win popular support.

Even disregarding its policies, the Diem regime is a bitter farce. Its unpopularity and ineffectiveness are so all-pervasive that there is probably no spot in the country, aside from Diem's palace, that they can guarantee to be without guerrillas. U.S. airmen were shaken up recently when they found Viet-Cong leaflets on the seat of all their helicopters. This was a not-so-subtle hint from the guerrillas that they could easily sabotage the U.S. aircraft. U.S. officers told reporters that they were unsure whether the guerrillas slipped in past the South Vietnamese secur-

ity guard around the base, or whether the guerrillas were actually members of the security guard. Even this was not so embarrassing as the episode last year when the Viet-Cong slipped into an airbase and exchanged Diem propaganda leaflets for their own. Shortly thereafter, U.S. pilots on their regular propaganda-distributing run discovered that they were dropping leaflets with Ho Chi Ming's picture on the front, accompanied by an appeal to desert Diem's army.

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In the southern tip of South Vietnam, four entire provinces are controlled by the Viet-Cong. A clue to the source of their strength can be found in the New York TIMES (April 21, 1963) description: "Often the only dispensary--dispensing the most potent of Vietnamese political goods, medicine--is run by the Communists. Usually the only village school is a Communist school." The Viet-Cong has guns, medicine and crude schools; Diem has better guns, but offers no medical care or education. Naturally, the Viet-Cong holds the area. Even in some of the large villages the New York TIMES notes that "many of the lower officials serve only with a sort of unofficial approval of the Communists."

Diem, who bears the burden of U.S. hopes for Southeast Asia, could never be accused of refusing to hold elections. However, these elections are blatantly rigged

without any real opposition, 37% of the Saigon voters refused to cast a ballot in his favor although they voted for other minor officials.

The incredibly corrupt and totalitarian nature of the U.S. supported Diem regime is enough to keep any guerrilla movement going. Any attempts to oust Diem by anything short of armed rebellion have been made impossible by the government, any democratic alternative has been squashed. The U.S. has chosen to "sink or swim" and Diem is making "swimming" impossible.

All the Way

According to the Geneva Agreement of 1954 which



partitioned Vietnam, no forces of a foreign power could exceed 700 troops. Today the U.S. still claims that she has remained within the confines of this agreement and total U.S. troops in Vietnam number 684. No one is quite sure how many United States troops are in the area, but LIFE, TIME, the New York TIMES and the Saturday Evening Post number them anywhere from 5,000 to 15,000. One factor in this obscurity is that the U.S. Army forbids soldiers to wear uniforms in Saigon so that they cannot be counted. This deliberate concealment exists because the real relationship of the U.S. in Vietnam extends far, far beyond giving economic and technical aid and providing military advisors. By now everyone has realized that the U.S. is leading the fight against the Viet-Cong guerrillas, is supplying ground forces in that fight, and is the only reason why the hopeless Diem regime could have withstood the Viet-Cong, the military coup of 1961 and the opposition of its own people. Unfortunately President Kennedy has had no second thoughts about making a mockery of the Geneva accords.

The extent of U.S. military involvement is beautifully illustrated by the Saturday Evening Post article of March 23, 1963. Here Jerry Rose tells the story of 11,000 U.S. soldiers and their "struggle against Communism".

Continued next page

the Viet-Cong attacked Buon Mi Ga, a small village, soldiers deserted, fled or were captured and the U.S. "military advisors" fought alone. This seems to be the case all over the country. The U.S. not only plans the war, but American soldiers fight it.

The U.S. does more than waste American lives. In a brief story last February, the New York Times talked about the use of chemical warfare against Viet-Cong guerrillas as an attempt to starve them off the land and bring them out into the open. Therefore, U.S. planes sprayed anti-foolants on all vegetation in areas of intense Viet-



Looking for Viet Cong

Cong infiltration. This made the leaves fall off trees and killed crops. Since 90% of the rice crop had been destroyed by the Viet-Cong, the villagers were left hungry when the U.S. Army chemicals killed the tapioca roots, their only remaining food source. The U.S. has also polluted drinking water in areas where it thought the Viet-Cong had bases. The effect of all this has only intensified Viet-Cong raids on villages for food.

The U.S. has become extremely frustrated in its efforts to build popular support for President Diem. Realizing that Diem refuses to change, they have sought to at least change his image. The U.S. helicopter teams make daily runs dropping government propaganda. Through U.S. ingenuity, Diem has set up an "Economic and Social Council" to "advise" the government. Since this is the "bastion of democracy", Diem appoints the council himself. This, U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Frederic Nolting Jr. says "gives the people more of a feeling of participation in government". The U.S. has also advised Diem to promise various reforms--like rice doles to the urban population and land in exchange for volunteering to go into concentration camps. Some trade!

For the Few

The U.S. has given much "economic" aid to South Vietnam hoping that somehow this would help President Diem win friends. The U.S. has tried to foster economic growth through subsidizing native industry, giving Vietnam credits for importation of goods and through direct project aid. The subsidization of native industry supposedly has been to make the country more self-sufficient and industrialize the nation so that the unemployment situation could be alleviated. The Second Five Year Plan for Economic Development is extremely ambitious and provides for the development of mining and metallurgical industries, chemical and allied industries and textile industries. It also visualizes some kind of food industries, caneries and sugar refineries. This plan was presented in the Vietnam Review of June 6, 1962. The implementation of this plan for industrialization will be through state, U.S. and private business hands. The interesting thing that one must note, however, is that none of these industries can benefit the people directly. That is, most of the goods that will be produced are for exportation and most of them do not deal with agricultural tools or lead to a higher development of the country's major product--rice and pork and grains. This would not be so injurious to the country if it were meant to be exported for machine tools, tractors, fertilizers, etc. But the imports into the country have been in consumer goods which only a small minority of the population can use--cars, silks, televisions, etc. Obviously the clique of Diem's supporters are more interested in making money than in developing their country.

The international credit which the U.S. has established for Vietnam has been sorely abused. The system works in the following way: Vietnamese importers deposit money into a fund; the U.S. puts an equivalent amount in a counterpart fund. The importers receive foreign exchange advanced by the U.S. and the money in the counterpart fund is theoretically used by the Vietnamese Government for public, non-military expenditures. However, the history of the use of counterpart fund operations reveal two interesting facts: first, three-fourths of all the goods imported by Vietnam under the commercial aid program have been luxury rather than development goods; and, secondly, when the counterpart funds brought by these imports were spent by the Vietnamese Government, about three-fourths were allocated to the maintenance of the Army.

The direct project aid which the U.S. gives to Vietnam could theoretically be used to help the people in a meaningful way. However, even in this area, it has been used for the benefit of the few. From 1955 to 1960, the U.S. allocated 45% of all project aid for the development of highways (one of which cost \$25 million and leads only from Saigon to a sea resort) against 9% for agriculture when the only real hope for a self-sustaining economy is to increase food consumption and agricultural exports. The U.S. has sponsored many status symbols which are virtually useless, even going so far as to give Diem a nuclear reactor. In a country where there are shortages of pencils and scotch tape in the government offices, where half of Saigon does not have electricity, plumbing, toilet facilities and adequate schools, this aid has meant nothing. Professors Jaffe and Taylor of Michigan State University, who spent several years in Saigon on a research project, called the U.S. approach to "economic aid" in Vietnam a "multitude of piecemeal projects in diverse areas in the hope that they will add up to something". It is no wonder that a recent survey of villagers showed that they were totally unaware of U.S. aid. that is, with the exception of the 55,000 villagers relocated into "strategic hamlets" who hate the U.S. and see the U.S. not as their great

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the cream of the French Army. This effort never understood that the primary strength of any underground movement is not smuggled arms or clever tactics, but overwhelming popular discontent with the status quo. Literally hundreds of thousands of lives and billions of francs were wasted by a succession of French Governments, only to leave Indo-China in the end anyway. This is the point that Washington has missed.

Our latest military innovation for South Vietnam--the "strategic hamlet" conception--was borrowed from the British, who used it as one weapon in a successful struggle to quell a similar guerrilla movement in Malaya. Here again the Administration has missed the main point. After grouping the rural population in these camps and importing tens of thousands of troops, the British found that they had to undercut the political appeal of the Communists by instituting social reforms and promising independence. Our failure to do likewise in Vietnam has only involved us in a vicious circle. The further we support Diem's regime, the more unpopular we become and the more we feel forced to back Diem.

It is already very late in the day to build the beginnings of a decent society in South Vietnam. Perhaps it is too late. But the very least that America can do is to minimize as much as possible the effects of this devastating war. We should immediately withdraw our military troops and hardware, substituting instead direct-to-the-people aid programs. After years of helping to build the discontent that the Viet-Cong lives upon, it is probably too late to prevent their victory. This, however, does not justify continued support to the bankrupt Diem regime, or continued support of the same policies that have produced this tragedy in Vietnam. In Asia, Africa and Latin America, U.S. foreign policy will continue to be frustrated until it flows with--and not against--the tide of the Colonial Revolution. The major weapon against Communism is neither the machine gun nor the helicopter, but massive economic and technical aid coupled with social reform in order to build a decent standard of living.

Gail Paradise is National Secretary of the SPU



Ngô Đình Diem and Clan: At Left, Brother Archbishop Ngô Đình Thục, At Right, Brother Ngô Đình Nhu, With Madame Nhu

simple one--try it and we'll shoot you. As we go to press, President Kennedy, worried over Communist gains in Laos, is sending the U. S. 7th Fleet to the Gulf of Siam, and is contemplating landing Marines in Thailand.

Ironically, this brings Western policy in Southeast Asia around full circle to the policy that lost France Indo-China in the bitterest and most expensive manner possible. France attempted to suppress Communist guerrilla movements with massive infusions of military force, including

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