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AN
OUTLINE HISTORY
OF
VIET NAM

PREPARED BY
THE COMMITTEE TO END THE WAR IN VIET NAM

CONTRIBUTION: 25 cents

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The Committee to End the War in Viet Nam
Madison, Wisconsin
March 30, 1965

OUTLINE HISTORY OF VIET NAM

STRUGGLES FOR INDEPENDENCE

Prepared by The Committee to End the War in Viet Nam

I. Early History

Viet Nam has been an independent nation since the early tenth century. Its history goes back to three centuries B.C. It was organized as a state by a famous king, Thuc Detroit, who established a dynasty in 207 B.C. After a hundred years as a flourishing state it was conquered by the Chinese Han dynasty in 111 B.C. The Vietnamese were never reconciled to Chinese rule. In the first, third, sixth, and eighth centuries, there were major revolts with minor rebellions in between. In 939 Ngo Quyen revolted and established the independent state of Viet Nam. After fifty years of confusion, a permanent dynasty was established. Only three dynasties ruled during the long period extending from 1010 to 1788, despite several invasions from the neighboring countries of Cambodia, Thailand and China. In the thirteenth century, Kubelai Khan launched a series of Mongol-Chinese invasions extending over a thirty year period. China again tried to invade Viet Nam in the fifteenth century and was repulsed as it had been in the thirteenth century by the fiercely independent Vietnamese. Though the country was divided for all practical purposes between two powerful feudal families after the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Vietnamese, including the two feuding families, continued to have the unity of the country as their main goal. As a symbol of the unity of Viet Nam, the heads of the old royal family were still given homage as the titular sovereigns of a united Viet Nam during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

(Sources: John Cady, Southeast Asia (Ohio University, 1964), pp. 103-106, 264-267, 281-284; Le Thanh Khoi, Le Viet-Nam (Paris, 1955), pp. 98-296).

II. Origins of French Rule

After a period of disintegration, a reform dynasty came to power in 1802. The initial period of administrative and political reforms was barely begun before the French began to interfere in the internal affairs of Viet Nam. This was not the first time that the Europeans had interfered in Vietnamese affairs. Politically oriented Portuguese and French missionaries caused such turmoil that severe restrictions were placed on their activities in the nineteenth century. The actual seizure of Viet Nam was part of the era of imperialism in the last half of the nineteenth century. In particular the French Navy and the geographic societies emphasized the "White Man's Burden" and the "civilizing mission" of France. The seizure of Viet Nam (along with Cambodia and Laos) developed out of a crisis concerning the missionaries. As pointed out, the first emperor of the new Nguyen dynasty had reformed the civil service examination system, promulgated a new legal code, and begun modernizing the administration. He respected the Catholic faith of the French visitors and permitted the unimpeded functioning of the missionaries. Unfortunately, under the spur of a vigorous revival program, the missionaries began to abuse the privileges allowed them. Harrassment of missionaries began. They solicited the aid of French naval vessels. After a short series of incidents, created by the French, Louis Napoleon of France agreed to send in troops and have naval demonstrations. Protectorate states were established in parts of Viet Nam until by 1884 all of Viet Nam was under French domination.

(Sources: Le Thanh Khoi, pp. 333-343, 365-380; Cady, pp. 407-434).

111. French Colonial Rule

The general character of French rule in Viet Nam was one of mercantilism. That is, Viet Nam was to serve as a market for French goods, supply raw materials, and economically benefit France. The French created large rubber plantations in the jungle and through a system of forced labour, the Vietnamese were put to work on them. These peasants were often bound by three year contracts and worked in barracks-like conditions far from their native villages. The feudal system of land distribution was strengthened rather than weakened under the French.

"The Chochin Chinese landlord often collected more in usury than he did in rent. Chochin China was the center of French economic activity in Indochina. The abundant benefits of usury combined with the French practice of granting concessions in undeveloped land to French companies and rich Vietnamese, led to the development of many large estates owned by absentee landlords. These estates were worked by tenant farmers and landless agricultural workers. The tadien, or sharecropper, worked between 60-80% of the Cohin Chinese farmland. He generally had to give far more than half his annual harvest to his landlord, partly as rent, partly as usurious interest."

(Source: Ellen Hammer, The Struggle for IndoChina, Stanford University Press, 1954).

The French imposed a series of monopolies which proved a great burden to the peasants. The administration imposed a quota on each village forcing the population to purchase specified quantities of alcohol and opium. If they did not meet the quotas they were punished, but if they exceeded their quotas, they were recompensed. Rural Viet Nam is today the main bastion of National Liberation Front strength in all the south, for one of the first acts of the Nationalist movement was to abolish all these feudal rents and government imposts. The Diem regime's attempt to reimpose feudal rents was a major cause of the new revolt.

"At the time of the French conquest the economy of Viet Nam had reached a considerable degree of sophistication. The hold on the peasant was strong and often oppressive; nevertheless, the rural economy showed a judicious balance between food crops and the industrial crops which formed the basis of the village craft industries; mineral-working was developed, probably to a greater degree than under the French ... The French impact destroyed this balance, encouraged the development of a dangerously vulnerable export economy, created new disparities of wealth and misery, and strengthened rather than eliminated the feudal elements in Vietnamese society...And its destructiveness and the warping influence it had on Vietnamese life, arose in the interests of the metropolitan country (France)--or rather in the interest of small and powerful groups in the metropolis.

"Their investment tended, therefore, to be in those sectors producing easily exportable wealth--mineral (mainly coal), rubber and rice--and production was directed towards a world market which could offer better prices than the increasingly impoverished Vietnamese. No integrated national

economy was created, but rather a series of small enclaves of modern, market-oriented production, set in the midst of a stagnating subsistence economy. The character of this colonial economy is best indicated by the pattern of trade in the late 1920's: rice, coal and rubber represented three quarters of the exports while three fifths of the imports consisted of cars, perfumes, textiles and domestic items of interest only to the European colonialist or to the small Vietnamese landlord elite."

(Source: Keith Buchanan, "South East Asia - Predeveloped or Underdeveloped?" Eastern Horizon, November, 1964.)

In the political sphere, French rule was equally oppressive.

"French civil servants monopolized most government posts in Cochin China; French capital and management, with an assist from resident Chinese, controlled and directed the colony's economic development program. Tentative wartime (World War I) promises of a larger degree of Indochinese participation in the government were later ignored...The French kept educational opportunities at an advanced level to a minimum, partly for political reasons. Meanwhile, the absence of legitimate means of expression of political discontent contributed to the emergence of Communist leadership of the nationalist cause, in the person of Nguyen Ai-Quoc and others."

(Source: Cady, p. 546).

Left-wing political groups dominated the Vietnamese nationalist movement almost from the beginning for two reasons. First only the left-wing groups offered any concrete solutions to the economic problems of the peasantry caused by a continuation, under French rule, of the old feudal land system, and to the worker who suffered from low wages. Second, the conservative nationalist groups were devoid of any concern for political or social reform.

(Source: Cady, pp. 558-561).

The second reason lay in the support given nationalist aspirations in Viet Nam by French political parties. Only the French Socialists and Communists supported, aided, or sympathized with Vietnamese nationalism and anti-colonialist feelings in Viet Nam, or were sympathetic to Vietnamese students who came to France to study.

(Source: Cady, pp. 557-582).

It was only continued French repression and lack of sympathy from the non-Communist countries that slowly drove all the nationalist groups further to the left. That the Communists became the largest left-wing group in the nationalist movement was due to the great leadership abilities of its organizer, Nguyen Ai-Quoc (Who later changed his name to Ho Chi Minh). He became a communist only after many years as a liberal socialist.

"His intellectual orientation included the reading of Hugo, Zola, France, Tolstoi, Dickens and Shakespeare. In 1920 Ho was the first Vietnamese member of the French Socialist Party, but he was later attracted to the Third International, when it adopted a strongly anti-colonialist position."

(Source: Cady, p. 560).

It should be clearly understood that the independence movement which fought against French and later Japanese rule was a working coalition of various groups and parties, of which the Communist Party was the largest, but not the only member. (The National Liberation Front of South Viet Nam, now fighting against American intervention, is a similarly organized coalition.)

The French had as their record in Viet Nam sixty years of political repression, economic exploitation, and promises of reforms which were never kept.

"By the time the Japanese arrived, the French were operating 81 prisons, not counting labor reform camps. But after 55 years, only two percent of the children were officially reported to be getting elementary education, as many as one half of one percent had leaped forward into secondary school, and there was a university in Hanoi. In the puppet kingdom of Laos, one native doctor had already been trained. Harold Isaacs reported in 1943 that "the colonial government spent 30,000 piastres for libraries, 71,000 piastres for hospitals, 74,000 piastres for schools, and 4,473,000 piastres for the purchase of opium distributed through the official opium monopoly."

(Source: Edgar Snow, The Other Side of the River: Red China Today, p. 683; and Harold Isaacs, No Peace in Viet Nam, p. 144)

IV. World War and Guerilla War: 1941-1954

The French did not fight for their property. Governor-General Decaux, an Axis sympathizer, in 1940, obeyed the Vichy government's order to place the colony at Japan's disposal. The Japanese brought in their troops and kept the French as stewards. The colonial bureaucracy supplied the Japanese with rice and conscripted native labor for them. Using Indochina as a strategic base, the Japanese then mobilized the force with which, in December, 1941, they invaded all of southern Asia.

(Sources: Snow, p. 683; D.G.E. Hall, A History of Southeast Asia, pp. 769-784).

After 1941 the newly formed Viet Minh nationalist coalition made an alliance with a Kuomintang-sponsored Vietnamese nationalist group to attack the Japanese and their French servants.

"As previously indicated, Ho Chi Minh's group in South China obtained from the American Office of Strategic Services in late 1944 assistance to reenter northern Tongking in an effort to establish an effective anti-Japanese front. The Free French and China's Kuomintang authorities, at the outset, also cooperated with the effort. With the assistance afforded, the Viet Minh League was able to gain control of seven northern provinces of Tengking by August, 1945. They won largely by default, since legal French authority disappeared during the Spring of 1945 after being ousted

by the Japanese, and the Japanese themselves subsequently began withdrawing from remote areas. Ho convened a Viet Minh congress immediately following the Japanese surrender, and was himself elected President of the executive Peoples National Liberation Committee. His leadership was recognized by virtually all nationalist Vietnamese, including the Cochinchina Trotskyite radicals. The Emperor Bao Dai abdicated in favor of the Viet Minh. On August 25, entrusting to the successor regime the care of the bones of his ancestors, Bao Dai thus surrendered the symbols of imperial authority.

"Difficulties developed for Ho when the nationalist Chinese military forces, acting under allied authorization, entered Tongking to take the surrender of the Japanese in northern Indochina above Hue. British forces took the surrender in the south of Indochina. The occupying Chinese ignored Ho's Pretensions as head of a defacto government and put forward their rival Dong Minh Hoi organization to handle the necessary liason with the people. Thus was the stage set for a three cornered contest between the French, who were assisted by the British to return to Saigon, the Chinese Nationalists, who were undertaking to establish a puppet regime in the north, and the Viet Minh League, which represented, in spite of its Communist connections, the majority nationalist sentiment both anti-Chinese and anti-French. Unfortunately for the preservation of American rapport with the Vietnamese nationalists at this critical juncture, the death of President Roosevelt left the determination of State Department policy in the hands of senior career Foreign Service officers with an exclusively Europe-oriented outlook. Ho's requests for American support of Vietnamese nationalist aspirations went unheeded in Washington. He eventually turned for aid to the rising power of the Communist Chinese in spite of his genuine fear of Communist domination. American policy later became hopelessly entangled with the impossible efforts of France to recover colonial control."

(Source: Cady, pp. 581-582.)

The next two years saw a series of agreements made and broken by the French. France would not do to Viet Nam what the United States had done to the Philippines or Britain to India, namely give it independence. The French used the two years to retake parts of Viet Nam.

"On September 10, 1947, France made a "last appeal" to the rebels in Indochina. She offered what she called a large degree of native control over native affairs, subject to Indochina remaining in the French Union, with French control over military installations and the direction of foreign policy. An amnesty was proclaimed and prisoners exchanged. The appeal significantly made no reference to the question of recognizing Ho Chi Minh's government, or even negotiations with it. Naturally, therefore, the Vietnamese government rejected it.

(Organized in the Tonkin region of Viet Nam as the Republic of Viet Nam and earlier recognized by the French in March, 1946.) At the same time it appealed to the United Nations with an offer of peace on the basis of the unification of the three Vietnamese-speaking regions of Tongking, Annam, and Cochinchina (the name given to artificially created provinces by the French,) into an independent state within the Indochinese Federation and the French Union. France, however, successfully blocked the appeal.

(Source: Hall, p. 803.)

With this last act the French attempt to reconquer Viet Nam and take away Vietnamese independence went into full swing. The French set up a scion of the old ruling house as the puppet head of the territories they had conquered. The story of the next few years is the series of organized attempts to defeat the Nationalist armies. The United States had, during the late forties reversed its position with regard to Vietnamese independence. It was now against any movements that had Communist influence or groups in them. So as part of the cold war strategy the United States began to finance the costs of the French invasion force. Initially money was from the Marshall Plan to Indochina.

(Source: U.S. News & World Report, August 13, 1948, p. 32.)

The French, however, were attacking a well organized army which was backed by the concerted effort of almost all the Vietnamese people. From 1947 to 1953, France increased her forces until 250,000 men were in Viet Nam. She continued to be drastically unsuccessful.

"There seemed to be no hope whatever of a French victory. In France, indeed, public opinion had turned against the bloody and expensive struggle, and in the highest quarters the possibility of 'an honorable way out' by negotiations was mooted. On the other hand by 1953 the United States was paying 80% of the cost of the French military effort, and there was growing American impatience at the defensive nature of the French strategy. Such was the background to the 'Navarre Plan' which the French cabinet adopted on 24 July, 1953. Its author, General Henri Navarre, had been appointed commander-in-chief in Indochina in the previous May and commissioned to find the 'way out' so urgently desired by France and the United States.

"The plan was for a build-up of military superiority, based upon massive deliveries of American aid, and aimed at containing the Viet Minh by defensive strategy until the defensive would be taken--in 1955--with enough success to force the Viet Minh to negotiate. The military operations, which wrecked the scheme, arose out of France's engagement late in October 1953 to defend Laos against all attacks. General Giap took up the challenge and concentrated all the strength he could muster upon surrounding and destroying the powerful 'aero-terrestrial' base established by Navarre at Dien Bien Phu, close to the border of the Laotian province of Phong Saly. This he

finally accomplished on 7 May 1954 after a dramatic struggle of some months watched intently by the whole world. He out-generalled Navarre, causing him to disperse troops that could have rescued the beleaguered force, and using a huge army of coolies to bring up supplies in defiance of the intensive attacks of the French aviation.

"There were divided counsels in France from cabinet-level downwards, and increasing pressure for an armistice. It was this fact and the decision on 25 January 1954 of the foreign ministers of the U.S., Russia, Britain and France to invite Communist China to a conference on the Far East in the following April that led Giap to stake everything upon a spectacular victory.

"The danger now became intense with massive American forces arriving off the coast of Indo-China, and Mr. Dulles hinting at the possible use of atomic bombs. Happily Britain's firm stand against allied intervention and in favour of a negotiated settlement carried the day."

(Source: Hall, pp. 829-830.)

V. The Geneva Agreement: 1954

The French had been defeated. To decide the fate of the new independent countries an evenly-balanced conference of nations was held in Geneva in 1954. The United States participated in the work of the conference although it did not sign the resulting Geneva Accord. But both President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles declared that the United States would uphold the agreement and not forcibly upset any part of it. The Geneva Agreement of 1954 with reference to Viet Nam provided the following:

"...Viet Nam would be partitioned into two approximately equal areas by a demarcation line near the 17th parallel. Elections would be held simultaneously in both parts of Viet Nam by July 20, 1956, with the aim of establishing a unified government. They would be organized after consultation between the two governments of Viet Nam and carried out under the supervision of an International Supervisory Commission consisting of representatives of India, Canada, and Poland. "No foreign bases would be established in any of the Associated States." In addition, reprisals against the anti-colonial Viet Minh forces was expressly forbidden and the military neutrality and political sovereignty of the area was to be guaranteed."

(Source: Further Documents Relating to the Discussion of Indo-China at the Geneva Conference, June 16-July 21, 1954, H. M. Stationery Office, 1954, pp. 11-40.)

VI. The United States in Viet Nam: 1954-1956

After declaring that the United States would uphold the Geneva Accord and not forcibly upset any part of it, the American government then proceeded to undermine the international agreement. Three months after, declaration of support for Ngo Dinh Diem, a man who had not been elected by the people of Viet Nam, was personally announced by President Eisenhower. With the support of the United States, Diem refused to hold free elections, in violation of the Geneva Accord. Both the Department of State and the U.S. President threw their full weight behind Diem's actions from the beginning. President Eisenhower in his memoirs: Mandate for Change, later declared that if there had been a free election, Ho Chi Minh, the present leader of North Viet Nam, would have been overwhelmingly elected the president by the people of South Viet Nam.

(Sources: Department of State, Bulletin, June 11, 1956; O. Clubb, Jr., The U.S. and the Sino-Soviet Bloc in Southeast Asia; Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mandate for Change, 1953-1956, 1963, p. 372.)

In the first and only nationwide free elections in Vietnamese history, held January 6, 1946 before full-scale fighting broke out, Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh coalition won 230 seats out of 300 for the National assembly of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

VII. The New War: 1957-1961

The Diem regime lasted nine years. Corrupt, oppressive and dictatorial, the Diem government began by persecuting members of the Viet Minh still in South Viet Nam, again in violation of the Geneva Accord. The United States, supporting the Diem regime, siphoned large quantities of military and economic aid into the country. In violation of the Geneva Accord, the United States poured two billion dollars worth of military and economic aid into Viet Nam during the period 1954-1962. By 1963, the American government was spending over one and one-half million dollars a day to prop up the tottering Diem regime.

(Sources: Wall Street Journal, 3/6/62; Far Eastern Economic Review, 2/6/64.)

Little if any of the vast quantities of American aid to Vietnam benefited the people of that country. Life magazine declared in 1962 that "although the United States has poured \$2 billion in aid into Viet Nam, few social and economic benefits have ever trickled down to the peasants. The living standards of the vast majority of the South Vietnamese people continued to sink further and further."

(Sources: Life, 3/16/62; Time, 2/9/62; Milwaukee Journal, 11/11/62.)

Faced with an oppressive and unpopular regime supported by the United States and prevented from expressing themselves through elective methods, the people of South Viet Nam began to resist. A broad coalition resistance movement consisting of Buddhists, nationalists, communists and non-communists was formed in late December, 1960--this was the South Vietnamese Liberation Front. The program of the National Liberation Front (which has been misnamed "Viet Cong" by the U.S. and South Vietnamese governments) consists of implementation of the 1954 Geneva Accord. The National Liberation Front is allied with any group that accepts the basic principles of "peace, independence, democracy and neutrality."

(Source: Economists, 7/25/64.)

In response to the National Liberation Front and the vast support which it received among the people of South Viet Nam, the United States and the South Vietnamese governments began a series of reprisals. Torture of villagers suspected of being members of the National Liberation Front was commonplace. The Diem government, with the support of the United States, pursued a policy of indiscriminate murder of civilians. Napalm (jellied gasoline) was and is now used on villages suspected of containing guerrillas.

(Sources: Time, 7/20/62; New York Times, 2/28/62.)

The United States continued and stepped up its policy of pouring U.S. Military personnel into South Viet Nam (again in violation of the Geneva Accord) under the guise of "advisors." By last August there were 16,000 American military "advisors" in South Viet Nam. By last November 16, General Creighton Abrams Jr., army Vice-Chief of Staff declared that the U.S. officers in Viet Nam included the equivalent of "about 4.8 divisions-worth of majors and captains, about 3.5 divisions-worth of lieutenants, and about 3 divisions-worth of master sergeants." In other words, roughly a quarter of the officers of the army's 16 divisions are tied up in Viet Nam--all in violation of the Geneva Accord.

(Sources: Far Eastern Economic Review, 8/20/64; New Statesman, 1/1/65.)

VIII. The War Continues: 1963-1965

Despite the overthrow of the Diem regime in the fall of 1963 and the successive coups, the situation in South Viet Nam has continued to disintegrate. The National Liberation Front has continued to win the support of the population. Over a year ago, the National Liberation Front controlled over half the population and countryside of South Viet Nam and was growing rapidly. In the course of the last year and a half, the National Liberation Front has been scoring success after success. Conservative sources today declare that over 80% of the people of South Viet Nam support the National Liberation Front.

The guerrillas have managed to mobilize the vast bulk of the South Vietnamese population, urban as well as rural. No longer operating as small hit and run squadrons, the National Liberation Front forces have become strong enough to attack in conventional battallion strength. As Major-General Edward G. Lansdale, former American adviser to President Diem declared, "The harsh fact, and one which has given pause to every thoughtful American, is that despite the use of overwhelming amounts of men, money and material, despite the quantity of American advice and despite the impressive statistics of casualties inflicted on the Viet Cong, the...insurgents have grown steadily stronger, in numbers and in size of units, and still retain the initiative to act at their will in the very areas of Viet Nam where Vietnamese and American efforts have been most concentrated." (Foreign Affairs, "Viet Nam: Do We Understand Revolution?" October, 1964, p. 76.) While the State Department has announced plans to recruit 100,000 new South Vietnamese troops in the coming weeks, South Vietnamese authorities have been faced with an average of 2,000 draftee desertions each month. Thirty per cent of all South Vietnamese army draftees are now deserting within six weeks. Morale among government troops is at an all time low.

(Sources: New York Times, January 19, 1965; Wall Street Journal, February 11, 1964; Economist, 8/8/64; L'Express, 2/7/65.)

IX. The White Paper

Up to very recently, American military experts claimed that the guerrilla forces were 80-85% supplied by captured American weapons. A year ago last February, Secretary of Defense McNamara on a trip to South Viet Nam was asked by the President of that country for 8,000 new American weapons to replace those captured by the guerrillas. The U.S. Airman, Official journal of the United States Air Force printed an article over a year and a half ago describing the "Primitive weapons of the Viet Cong." The Air Force journal described the ingenious home-made weapons of the guerrillas. The American government thus admitted that the guerrillas were fighting with either primitive or American weapons. Suddenly, the State Department changed its position. On February 27, 1965 the State Department issued its "White Paper" which attempted to prove that "South Viet Nam is fighting for its life against a brutal campaign of terror and armed attack inspired, directed, supplied and controlled by the Communist regime in Hanoi." In a matter of a few days, the guerrilla movement had been transformed by the State Department officials from a native movement with locally obtained arms to a foreign controlled movement with Communist weapons. How did the State Department justify its position?

(Source: New York Times, February 28, 1965.)

The Defense Department has announced that 15,000 weapons were captured from the guerrillas during the three years 1962-1964. The State Department White Paper reported on weapons captured during an eighteen month period, June, 1962 to January, 1964. On the basis of Defense Department figures, the total number of weapons captured during the State Department's eighteen month period must have approximated 7,500. Out of this total, the White Paper reveals that a grand total of 179 "Communist-made" weapons were captured. This figure would represent 2 1/2% of total weapons captured. Only two of these weapons (machine guns) were definitely made in North Viet Nam. The State Department has implicitly admitted that 97 1/2% of all weapons of the National Liberation Front have either been home made or captured U.S. -made weapons. The State Department's figures hardly document the charge that the guerrilla movement in South Viet Nam represents a case of Communist-supplied "insurgency."

Despite its repeated charges of infiltration from the North, the State Department was able to produce a total of eight citizens of North Vietnam who had been captured in the South. Of the nineteen "case studies" of accused infiltrators, sixteen were identified as native South Vietnamese returning to the South, one was unidentified as to origin and two were definitely listed as originally North Vietnamese. Later in its White Paper the State Department lists six more "infiltrators" from the North. Yet, on the basis of this evidence the authors of the White Paper declare that "as many as 75% of the now more than 4,400 Viet Cong who are known to have entered the South in the first eight months of 1964 were natives of North Viet Nam."

Further, the strength of the guerrillas is in the Mekong Delta in the Southern part of South Viet Nam. Roads from the North are controlled by government troops. It is impossible to direct such military operations as in the Mekong Delta from 1,000 miles with basic communications shattered. Finally, if outside aid was so necessary for the National Liberation Front, it would be hard to understand why the guerrillas have so zealously been engaged in destruction of roads as they have been.

(Source: Economist, 8/8/64.)

The British liberal journal, the Economist, understated the situation when it declared that "the thread that leads from insurgency in South Viet Nam back through Hanoi to Peking is admitted to be tenuous--much more tenuous than was the comparable thread in the Korean War." (December 5, 1964). The financial journal, the Far Eastern Economic Review, was more blunt when it asserted that "the U.S. obsession with retaliation against the North savours of self-deception: the Viet Cong could very probably keep going indefinitely with no material aid from outside at all..." (December 3, 1964.)

The logic of the State Department's analysis leads it to claim that serious sources of internal discontent have played little or no role in the development of the guerrilla movement. In pointing to the North as the source of the conflict, the State Department ignores the early history of the Diem regime, its attempt to reimpose an oppressive and feudal system of land tenure on the countryside, its repression of all non-Diemist political organizations (Communist and non-Communist alike), its persecution of religious groups (which led finally to the Buddhist uprisings of 1960 and Diem's fall), the corruption and nepotism of the Saigon regime since 1954. The artificial and revolving Saigon governments which have followed Diem have done nothing to correct these conditions.

By defining the Vietnamese problem in purely military terms, both the United States and the South Vietnamese governments failed to come to grips with the real economic, social and political problems of South Viet Nam. It is this failure which has caused the military debacle in the South, not the much touted aid from the North. Escalation of the conflict involves a dangerous intensification of the narrowly military approach to the country's problems which has already proved self-defeating. The complete disintegration of the control of the South Vietnamese government, the growing popular support of the National Liberation Front and the continual demoralization of the government troops led the United States Government to adopt a policy of expanding the war as a means of propping up the tottering regime of South Viet Nam and raising the spirits of the South Vietnamese armed forces. This policy has been advocated by leading U.S. Government officials for over a year. Last April, the U.S. armed South Viet Nam with fifty Douglas Sky-raider bombers capable of delivering bomb attacks in North Viet Nam.

(Sources: Wall Street Journal, 2/8/65; Wall Street Journal, 4/13/64.)

Recently, the United States has begun a policy of using "nausea" gas on civilian populated areas suspected of harboring guerrilla forces. All this has added to the growing anti-American feeling among the South Vietnamese people. (Wall Street Journal, March 23, 1965). As the British journal, the Manchester Guardian declared, "Now bombers have been brought in for field operations. Whether or not they kill many guerrillas, they will certainly kill villagers, and South Vietnamese villagers have already had far more than they ought to be asked to bear of this sort of defense of their liberty. Growing numbers of Vietnamese in the towns--and in the army--are coming to think so, too." (March 11, 1965). The American government can hardly be expected to gain support from the Vietnamese people when their country and their bodies are being used as subjects for U.S. weapons experimentation. More devastating gases, new rapid-fire grenade launchers, more destructive incendiary bombs, new fragmentation bombs and more complete destruction of agricultural crops are among the various new devices envisioned by the U.S. government in the war in Viet Nam (Wall Street Journal, March 26, 1965).

The United States government is fighting a losing war against the population of South Viet Nam. As the Manchester Guardian declared, "time is not on the side of the Americans in Viet Nam, and the more they shake the hourglass the faster the sands run through." (March 11, 1965).

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