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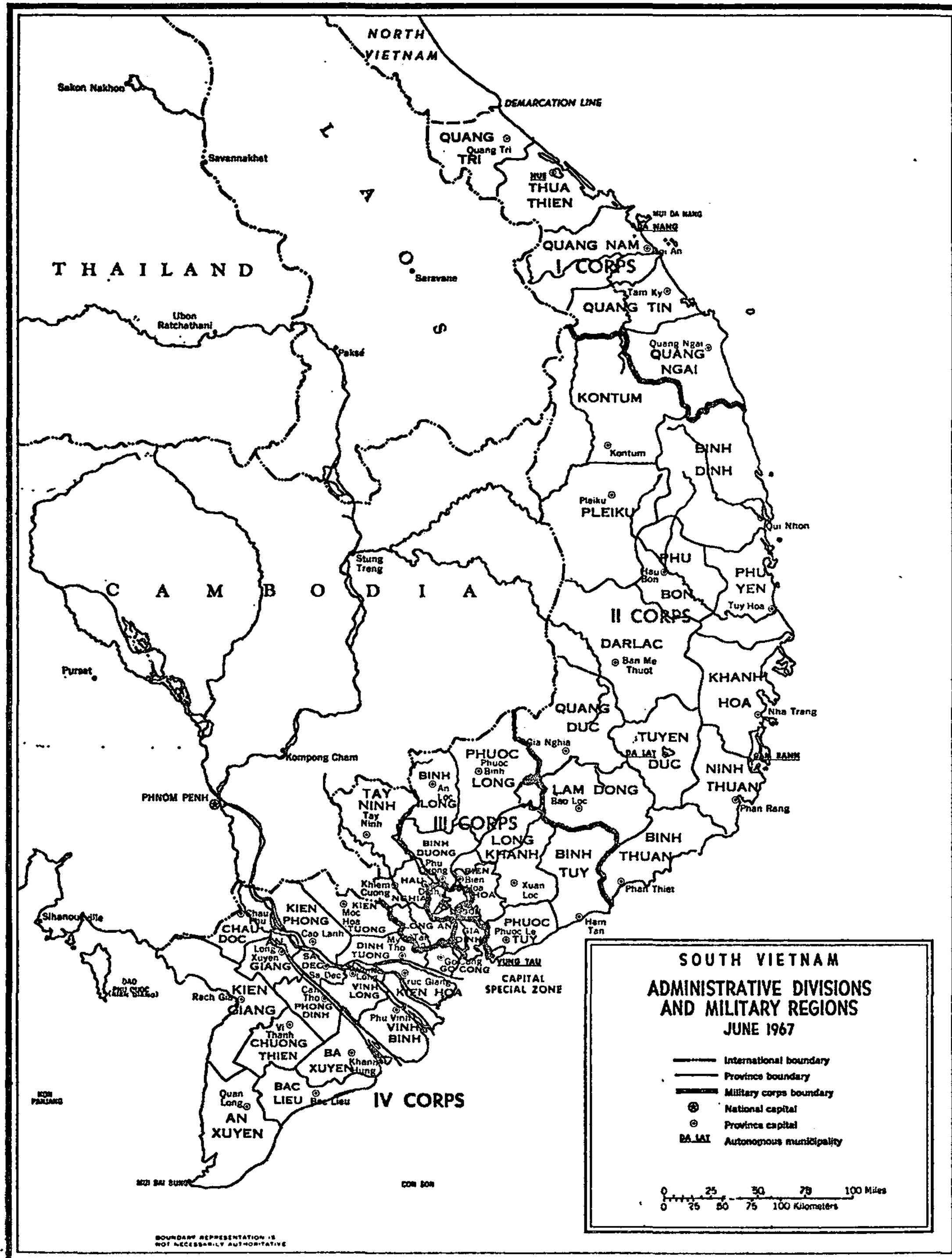
THE REALITIES OF VIETNAM



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THE RIPON SOCIETY is a Republican research and policy organization whose members are young business, academic and professional men and women. It has national headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with chapters in Boston, Los Angeles, New Haven and New York, and National Associate members throughout the fifty states. The Ripon FORUM is published monthly by the Society application to mail at second-class postage rates is pending at Boston, Massachusetts. To those who wish to subscribe to its publications and support its programs the Society offers the following options for annual contribution: FORUM, $10; FORUM (student), $5; Contributor, $25 or more; Sustainer, $100; Founder, $1000. Correspondence addressed to the Editor is welcomed.

THE RIPON SOCIETY
1430 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

LETTERS: Omaha and Jackson Hole

Dear Sir:

As a delegate from Michigan to the 1967 Young Republican National Convention in Omaha, I naturally took deep interest in your splendid analysis of the proceedings in your report entitled "Overkill at Omaha."

I was especially warmed by the report's kind comments about the resolution on Air and Water Pollution. I served on the Platform Committee and, needless to say, had a hard time of it. The Platform Committee would not accept my resolution on Air and Water Pollution, but told me to go ahead and try to get it through the Resolutions Committee. So I took my resolution to the Resolutions Committee, which accepted it **in toto** and reported it to the convention floor, where it passed on a close voice vote.

I also sponsored a resolution on Crime containing specific proposals. I took this to the Resolutions Committee, too, but it was so watered-down as to be unrecognizable by the time it reached the convention floor in the form of a fuzzy generality.

Sincerely,

W. S. BALLENGER,
Research Director
Republican State
Central Committee
Lansing, Michigan

Dear Sir:

The articles in the August issue of the FORUM about the Republican Governors Association meeting held in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, were interesting and informative.

Gene Marans is to be commended for an excellent reporting job. Keep up the good work.

Sincerely yours,

JAMES J. MARSHALL
Public Relations Director
Republican Governors
Association
Washington, D.C.

1430 MASS. AVE: 'Disaster' a Success

The Ripon Society book, *From Disaster to Distinction,* has already sold some 20,000 copies.

This past summer three Ripon Society studies received wide attention in Congress: "Government for Tomorrow: A Proposal for the Unconditional Sharing of Federal Tax Revenue with State and Local Governments" was reprinted by the Government Printing Office for use by the Joint Economic Committee. The Library of Congress Legislative Reference Service prepared a summary of Ripon's Negative Income Tax proposal for the general use of the members of Congress. An article from the May FORUM, "GOP Initiative No. 1: The Case of Congressional Reform," was reprinted in full in the Congressional Record. When he inserted this article into the record, Congressman Cleveland (R-N.H.) described Ripon as "an organization of scholars and professional men and women dedicated to the highest ideals of responsive government through responsible politics."

Immediately following the distribution of the July FORUM, which contained an extensive analysis of the War on Poverty in Mississippi by Ripon member James L. Robertson, the Society received a call from the Office of Economic Opportunity headquarters in Washington, D.C. requesting additional copies of the study.

George Lodge will meet with the Boston Chapter on October 5.

Ripon National Executive Director Thomas E. Petri spent the first week in August meeting with party leaders. While there he discussed the Society's programs with a receptive group of more than one hundred House Republican Summer Interns.

The New Haven Chapter deeply regrets the death of one of its members, Charles Lenahan, 40, publisher of the Hamden *Chronicle.*

THE REALITIES OF VIETNAM

A Ripon Research Paper
The Ripon FORUM
September, 1967

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An Alternative for Republicans

Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will no longer take advice . . .
(Ecclesiastes 4:13)

With one eye fixed on remote posterity and the other on the Gallup polls, President Johnson has had little vision to spare for the real constituency of his Vietnam policy: the generation of men who are expected to fight the war and live with the results.

As members of that generation, we have sought the advice of experienced men; we are conscious of the informed and responsible counsel that is available to the makers of American foreign policy. But even seasoned observers agree that on the subject of Vietnam *rigor mortis* has set in. A bureaucratic coalition within the administration has reached a rigid consensus that repels knowledgeable advice. It has set its own terms of discussion, enshrined its own version of the facts and has for the most part succeeded in imposing its internal verities on public debate as a whole.

FLURRY OF DIPLOMACY

Thus, the American people have been asking whether more bombing, more troops, more diplomacy, more refugee relief, better elections, or more economic aid hold the key to our difficulties in Vietnam. And the administration has graciously suffered "dissent" on these questions. Small wonder, when dissent on tactical issues is easily preempted by bureaucrats who have the power to act: when "hawks" have the public ear, the administration can intensify military activity; when "doves" seem ascendant, it can treat them to a flurry of diplomacy. But the basic structure of administration policy remains untouched by these fluctuations. The larger questions of our involvement in Vietnam remain to be asked.

Why has a conflict which has been repeatedly defined as "political" and "essentially Vietnamese" become a largely military, largely American undertaking? Why, after six years of "limited" war, punctuated by glowing predictions of success, has no upper limit yet been reached on American troops or expenditure? Why, despite American talk about bringing peace and democracy to South Vietnam, has American policy led to the further entrenchment of a regime of generals, who are dependent for their power on the continuation of the war?

PRIDEFUL COMMITMENT

Answers exist to these questions, answers that demand an unflinching reappraisal both of the structure of our Vietnam policy and of the conduct of our foreign affairs as a whole. The Johnson administration is incapable of carrying out this reappraisal. It is motivated, as the President and his advisors assure us, by a sense of commitment. A commitment to a brave little nation? To the cause of freedom and democracy? To the containment of aggressive Communism? No, these broader goals have been obscured behind commitments of a different sort: a prideful commitment to continuing a misconceived policy, an ignoble commitment to covering over mistakes, an imprudent commitment to the unlimited use of American resources and moral energy in a dubious cause.

The time has come for simple commitments to reality and the national interest. Vietnam is the place to begin. The course of this war may well shape American thinking on foreign policy for a generation to come, just as the bitter neutrality controversy of the 'Thirties dominates the thinking of many officials responsible for our present position. It is important, therefore, that the proper lessons be drawn early. And it is appropriate that they be drawn by young men who will have to build from the pieces that the Johnson administration leaves behind.

AGENDA FOR ACTION

The Ripon Society proposes a thorough reorientation of American foreign policy in Vietnam and new departures in our conduct of foreign policy as a whole. It calls for frank discussion of American goals in Vietnam, the costs of fulfilling them, and their place in a larger context of priorities for global foreign policy and domestic spending. It proposes the following agenda for debate and action.

1. There must be an examination of present policies in the light of the facts of Vietnamese political life. It is the conclusion of the Ripon Society that the present structure of policy is built on an expensive fiction about what South Vietnam is and what it can become. The American people should know how much it will cost to make this fiction into a reality.

2. New concepts are needed for Vietnam. Instead of our present military, centralized, "nation-building" approach, the Ripon Society calls for a flexible, political approach to the problem that will reduce American troop commitments in the long run and take cognizance of the strong ethnic and religious rivalries that divide many non-Communist South Vietnamese from the Saigon government.

3. The conflict in Vietnam has increased certain imbalances in American political institutions: the imbalance between our ability to wage war and our administrative capacity to seek peace; the imbalance between Congress and the Executive in the formulation of foreign policy. These imbalances as well as the present administration's failures in foreign policy, provide both an opportunity and a duty for the Republican Party. The Ripon Society calls on the Republican Party to bring the issues of foreign policy to the people in the 1968 elections.

I. The Costs of Implementing a Fiction

Visiting Congressmen and journalists who ask to see the success of pacification programs in South Vietnam are often taken to An Giang province. There they are treated to the spectacle of orderly village life directed by respected local leaders who have a long history

of resistance to Communist control. These villages, stable and secure from attack, have been electrified; aerial land surveys have been carried out; American-sponsored improvements in sanitary, educational, and medical facilities have been made. To extend similar benefits to all the villages in all the provinces of South Vietnam is the American goal, and it is a noble goal.

But there is another remarkable feature about the model villages of An Giang province. They are under the sway of the Hoa Hao sect, which as recently as 1963 was declared by the Saigon government to be part of the Viet Cong. American officials in nearby provinces and in Saigon fully accepted this interpretation, and U.S. equipment and support enabled Premier Diem to carry out a program aimed at the destruction of Hoa Hao power. Had Diem succeeded, there would be no model villages in An Giang province today. There would be refugee camps, large numbers of U.S. troops, and fragmented settlements that would be easy prey for the Viet Cong.

LOCAL AUTONOMY

Happily, the Hoa Hao were able to hold out against their enemies both in Saigon and in the Viet Cong until Ngo Dinh Diem was overthrown. In 1964 they negotiated an agreement with the new central government: Hoa Hao areas, considerably reduced by Diem's attacks, were grouped within the newly drawn boundaries of An Giang province; the autonomy of local leaders was assured; and, in return for allegiance to the Saigon government, the new province was guaranteed immunity from harassment by the Army of South Vietnam. Almost overnight, An Giang became a "pacified" area, and U.S. teams were able to enter to improve the lives of the villagers and to help them in their long-standing effort to defend themselves against Viet Cong infiltration. Thus, the most successful example of "pacification" is an area that has never had the advantage of occupation by American or Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) troops. It is a region in which a local group has been "redefined" from pro-Communist to anti-Communist status and which has been allowed a measure of autonomy in return for allegiance to Saigon.

Other local leaders have not been so lucky as the Hoa Hao. They have been defeated by the combined efforts of the Viet Cong, the Saigon government, and American policy. But since particularism runs deep in Vietnam, local leadership may reemerge, just as the Hoa Hao resurfaced after American officials proclaimed them to have been "for all purposes eliminated as a powerful political and military force."

The tenacity of local loyalties is a product of the ethnic and religious diversity of South Vietnam. South Vietnam is a fragmented country; it is the product of several waves of conquest and a long history of ethnic, religious and geographical rivalries that have left divisive hatreds. Even before the arrival of nearly a million refugees from the North, it was rent by localism in the rural areas and factionalism in the cities. A realistic approach to the country must build from this legacy. It must recognize that there are many non-Communists who, like the Hoa Hao, hate the mandarins and the army of Saigon just as much as they hate the Communists.

THREE REGIONS

As a first simplification, the real South Vietnam may be divided into three regions, each of which has a distinctive political culture: first, the northern Coastal Strip, an area which is characterized by an imperial tradition and deep-seated contempt for the government of Saigon and where the militant Buddhists are the most important non-Communist faction; second, the Central Highlands, populated by mountain tribesmen who are not ethnically Vietnamese and who are willing to ally themselves with any force that will protect them from Vietnamese cultural domination; third, the southern part of the country (old Cochin China), which is divided among important religious groups (Catholic, Buddhist, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao), each of which has strong political interests. The presence of ethnic Cambodians adds an element of racial diversity to the southern part of the country.

Finally, in all these areas are the Viet Cong, whose cadres control fully one-fourth of the rural population. They have developed an intricate network of front organizations that include youth groups, women's clubs, and civic action groups in villages which, taken together, contain three-fourths of the rural population. For many villages the cadre's authority is inseparable from village life, and indeed, the cadres have become a new social class in rural Vietnam.

CENTRALIZED DEMOCRACY

To build a stable coalition from the non-Communist fragments is an ambitious undertaking that might be accomplished by skillful bargaining. But the American aim in Vietnam is more than ambitious. Under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations the United States has been the partisan of a policy of centralized government in South Vietnam. Instead of seeking to foster a political system built upon grass-roots support, American policy has been preoccupied with a dream of centralized democracy radiating out from Saigon, much as communism is thought to radiate from Hanoi. (In actuality, the North allows some local autonomy to ethnic minorities, a fact which the Viet Cong use to good effect in their propaganda campaign among the mountain tribesmen of the Central Highlands.) The American mission in Saigon has accordingly been engaged in a search for a "national leader" capable of carrying out a program of "nation building," a sort of man on a white horse who will be the South Vietnamese counterpart of Ho Chi Minh.

In the beginning this national leader was Premier Diem, and we acquiesced while he persecuted the Hoa Hao and made political prisoners of more than 40,000 of his non-Communist enemies. Later he was Premier Ky, and we supported him in smashing the Budhhists in the northern provinces and in sending lowland Vietnamese with American troops to organize the mountain tribesmen of the Central Highlands. Now our candidate for national leadership is General Thieu, who has been chosen president in an election from which all "neutralists" (including a former Cabinet minister) were excluded.

GOVERNMENT BY ARMY

But whoever the man, there must also be a white horse, and unfortunately only one group in South Vietnam has even a remote possibility of being ridden to power over the factions and fragments of political life. This is the army, most of whose top officers were born in the North or fought for the French. The American dream of making South Vietnam into a centralized, unified state thus inevitably means military government. From the experience of other underdeveloped countries, no reason exists to hope that a military regime will turn itself quickly into a consti-

tutional democracy or that it will be responsive to the interests of the rural population. "Nation-building" as it is now conceived in U. S. policy means nothing if not military rule in South Vietnam, and indeed within the State Department the military regime of South Korea is given as a model for South Vietnam. It would be enough if we could hope for a military ruler who was capable simply of administering the countryside.

But even here there are enormous difficulties. The army does not have sufficient contact with the rural areas to understand peasant problems or to administer them effectively. The army of South Vietnam has had only one top-ranking general of peasant origin, General Thi, and Premier Ky relieved him of his command of the I corps area soon after the Honolulu Conference. The social distance between officers and enlisted men is great. Officers despise their troops with the traditional contempt of the high-born for the manual laborer. Enlisted men are rarely promoted into the officer corps; in the last three years only one field grade officer in the army of South Vietnam has been wounded leading his men into battle. The pruning out of ethnic Southerners and former members of the Viet Minh in favor of Northerners has further divorced the officer corps from the country.

BAD BET

The army of South Vietnam is thus not to be compared with the popularly-based armies of some other underdeveloped countries. It lacks their social base and political skills. What is more, the generals cannot even command the respect of the mandarin class, the traditional rulers of the country, who have always asserted the superiority of civilian to military authority.

On its own merits, the Army of the Republic of South Vietnam is not, then, a good bet for unifying the country on a centralized model. But with the thrust of American policy behind it, it is an even worse bet. Just as U.S. military support relieves the ARVN from going into the swamps, so U.S. political support relieves the Saigon generals from the need to bargain with civilian factions. Indeed, the one ruling general whom the United States Mission publicly criticized, General Khanh (now stripped of power), was also the only one to bring the militant Buddhists into a ruling coalition. But American policy has become fixed around the idea that a nation-building war must be carried out on all political and military fronts at once, against Communist, neutralist, and anti-Communist rivals alike.

EXPENSIVE PROJECT

Can such a war, carried on without regard to the political terrain, aimed at imposing central government in a country with decentralized bases of power, dependent on the administrative capabilities of a narrowly based and politically unskilled military elite, can such a war be successful? Probably it can. Implementing a fiction is not impossible, merely expensive. It is now costing the United States, according to reputable estimates, upward of 24 billion dollars a year and casualties of 7000 a month. The budgetary figure represents three times the total of American overseas investment for the current fiscal year and about seven times the total foreign aid budget. The monthly casuality figure equals the total number of Peace Corps volunteers who went abroad last year. The troop commitments to Vietnam represent an almost total investment of our available troops for flexible response to unanticipated crises in other parts of the world. If unexpected trouble should occur abroad or in American cities, the U.S. strategic reserve would be inadequate to respond. To ask whether this represents a prudent investment of American resources, manpower, and moral energy is now academic. The question is whether we can hope for any substantial reduction of cost if present policies continue.

INSTALLMENT PLAN

The costs of Vietnam have been built up on an installment plan. First a little more bombing, then a few more troops for conventional operations, then a few more for counter-insurgency warfare, then more investments in the "other war." With these four major elements — and with well-advertised elections and peace offensives to legitimize its operations — the Administration has attempted to implement the fiction of unified central government in Vietnam and to protect this government against external aggression. The Administration clearly believes that more installment plan increases hold the best prospect for a long-run reduction in the costs of the war. But what are the likely results of intensification of the four major elements of present policy? What are the prospects for success of the two legitimizing devices?

1. BOMBING OF NORTH VIETNAM

Many impatient strategists who apply a simple-minded interpretation of the lessons of World War II to the Vietnam situation insist that the quickest solution is to intensify the bombing of the enemy, assumed in this case to be North Vietnam.

A. INTERDICTORY

The first kind of bombing, mostly south of the 18.5° parallel, aims at interdicting infiltration. It has not, however, prevented the North Vietnamese from installing missile launching sites and storage depots, nor from surfacing a road within South Vietnam.

And the fact is that even if North Vietnam is bombed to rubble, the war in the South will continue. For although North Vietnam unquestionably aids and guides the Viet Cong, the conflict in the South is not a result of simple aggression. Unlike World War II, and unlike the Korean engagement, the Vietnamese conflict is largely a counter-insurgency war. Right now, the larger part of American troops is employed in securing the South from guerilla activities, while the smaller part is employed in checking infiltration from the North. Many military and civilian leaders whose ideas were formed by the two previous American engagements have been unable to come to terms with this fact. They have continually tried to define the war as a simple question of stopping aggression and have maintained that air power provides the most economical way of doing this. Now, the insurgency in the South *is* supported by a kind of aggression from Hanoi, but it is not one that can be stopped by bombing. The Northerners have trained guerilla cadres who operate in the South and bring isolated villages under the control of a centralized Communist hierarchy. To try to eliminate these cadres with airplanes is an admission of failure.

B. PUNITIVE

Bombing north of the 18.5° parallel is usually punitive, designed to "raise the cost of aggression to Hanoi," without directly reducing infiltration. But Hanoi's "costs" are calculated not by the monetary value of the installations destroyed but by the alternative uses for the labor and capital needed to replace bombed facilities; *i.e.*, by the "opportunity costs." The Hanoi regime presides over a largely peasant economy in one of the most densely

populated agricultural areas of the world. The regime thus has a more comfortable supply of underemployed labor than most underdeveloped countries. If the Russians and Chinese supply heavy equipment and technicians, the opportunity cost to the North Vietnamese of diverting labor to repair damaged facilities is low.

The only way to overtax the North Vietnamese labor supply is by systematic bombing in civilian areas. The administration denies any intention of doing this. But according to reputable non-Communist sources, American planes began punitive bombing against dikes in the Red River Delta of North Vietnam when the waters were at a seasonal high this summer. Further bombing of the dikes will flood the best rice-producing area of North Vietnam just before the October-November harvest, creating conditions rivalling those of 1946, when a famine caused the death of one million North Vietnamese.

CHINESE INTERVENTION

Proponents of punitive bombing may also want to humiliate Communist China by destroying the Chinese railway line that cuts through North Vietnam. They claim that the Chinese railway brings supplies to Hanoi, and this is part of the truth. But no Administration spokesman has ever mentioned that the railway also has strategic importance within China: it is a major means for transporting raw materials between Yunnan Province and the rest of China. A measure of its value to the Chinese is that even before the extension of U. S. bombing, 40,000 Chinese paramilitary technicians were assigned to repairing the part of the link that passed through North Vietnam. The intensified bombing of the railway thus represents a calculated risk of bringing China into the war. Will internal difficulties prevent the Chinese from intervening or will they postpone their quarrels in the face of external humiliation?

Some within the administration may not care whether we do provoke a Chinese response. They believe that a war with China is inevitable and that it is better fought now than in the 1970's, when the Chinese will be able to deliver nuclear weapons. When this view is stated in explicit terms, it is easily countered by those knowledgeable in the pattern of Chinese hostility. But it is more often held implicitly. Many leading policy-makers who publicly discount the possibility of Chinese intervention are also those who believe in the inevitability of a war with China.

Bombing also involves a calculated risk of escalation by the Russians, who are committed to preventing the collapse of the government of North Vietnam and to protecting the integrity of shipping to Hanoi. The costs to the Russians in prestige should not be underestimated at a time when they are taunted by the Chinese for collaboration with the West. Finally, the North Vietnamese themselves can escalate the war in response to bombing. North Vietnamese and Communist Pathet Lao troops already hold sway over large parts of Laos. Ho Chi Minh could reactivate the war there at will in the hope that an expansion of the ground war into Laos might take some of the pressure off Vietnamese soil. Nor is this the only possible response by the North Vietnamese.

2. CONVENTIONAL GROUND FORCES

Despite U. S. bombing, the North Vietnamese now have the initiative for escalating the conventional ground war. They hold in reserve eighty per cent of their regular army (some 400,000) men and during recent months have been concentrating forces near the demilitarized zone. Constant U. S. bombing by B-52's has not been able to prevent them from building a surfaced road through the A-Shau valley within South Vietnam, nor has it stopped them from storing in the caves near A-Shau supplies sufficient to support several divisions. They have also received six-inch rockets from the Russians that have been installed and are being used inside South Vietnam. During the past six months Communist troops already in South Vietnam have occupied for short periods four of the five provincial capitals in the I Corps region without any protest from the local population. If the Northerners are convinced that the United States means to destroy their country from the air, they might very well try to make this occupation permanent by sending new troops to hold Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces. Guerilla activities within both of these provinces have already been shifted from Viet Cong to North Vietnamese Army command. Such action might easily tip the balance in Washington in favor of a plan previously set aside for invading North Vietnam up to the narrow neck of the country.

It should be noted that no increase in bombing is likely to avert an invasion from the North. The more new targets that are bombed, the less deterrent effect the threat of future bombing will have on Hanoi to hold back its ground forces. In effect, the more hostages we destroy, the fewer we have to bargain with. The American public was not made aware of these facts earlier this year when General Westmoreland bargained for 45,000 more troops. They were not informed that any increase of conventional American forces up to 300,000 men can probably be matched by North Vietnam. And any increase above that number is likely to be the result of a full-scale, conventional, Korean-style conflict that has hitherto been avoided.

3. COUNTER-INSURGENCY

Regardless of what happens in the conventional war against main force units of the Viet Cong and the army of North Vietnam, the counter-insurgency war will continue, and the prospect is for stalemate unless allied forces are vastly increased. The Pentagon's declared ratio for success is ten counter-insurgency troops to one guerilla.

The reason for a high ratio is that counter-insurgency warfare is essentially a local policing operation. The Viet Cong operate by calculated acts of assassination and terror that can be carried out by small bands of lightly armed men. To protect against such harassment requires a day and night policing function and an intimate knowledge of the political terrain. Guerillas can harass villages on a rotating basis, but counter-insurgency forces must stay put. The ten-to-one ratio, moreover, is based on the experience of the British in Malaya and other long-term professional counter-insurgency operations. To get a counter-insurgency operation in motion takes more than the standard ratio. Only when once established can the ratio decrease as the perimeter of effective control spreads out. For American troops in Vietnam who are rotated annually, the ratio may be much higher than the standard esti-

mates. Counter-insurgency cannot be carried out effectively on a short-term basis, and the yearly rotation of American troops makes almost impossible the establishment of necessary relations with translators, spies, and local contacts. What is more, the northern coastal strip of the country does not permit economies of scale. The strip is broken into isolated valleys so narrow that a counter-insurgency operation has no room to spread out. In any case, even the standard ratio would imply a total allied force of more than two million men, as the Viet Cong now have upwards of two hundred thousand native Southerners in the field.

As for the South Vietnamese army, the ARVN will not be much more effective in counter-insurgency than it has been to date. Half of its total of 700,000 is composed of police, local, and regional forces who have been poorly paid and badly treated. They are not an efficient policing force, and in many areas they have a tacit agreement to coexist with the Viet Cong. The regular army, just over 300,000 men, has been an overly centralized force, with too much authority concentrated in too many generals, ever since it was reorganized under American advisers in the mid-1950's. A return to a decentralized force, giving more authority to lower-ranking officers commanding smaller units, more appropriate to counter-insurgency operations, would eliminate the work of half of the ARVN's present generals. Corrupt recruiting procedures and the lack of Vietnamese interest in joining the army so long as American troops are still available means that the ARVN cannot provide forces for a larger counter-insurgency operation.

The fact remains that with more than a million allied troops now in the country, counter-insurgency cannot be carried against all areas contested by the Viet Cong. The area south of the Mekong River has not yet been entered by American troops. The ARVN troops stationed there engage in little fighting, as a result of a tacit agreement to coexist with the Viet Cong. If under American pressure, this area should be opened to active counter-insurgency operations, the level of U. S. involvement would rise. Thus, if present policies continue, the aim of pacifying all sections of the country by counter-insurgency methods would result in a serious and long-term drain on American manpower. And if the Viet Cong recruit an additional one hundred thousand men in the next year, the American manpower requirement for counter-insurgency will skyrocket, regardless of what happens south of the Mekong River.

4. THE "OTHER WAR"

Because the counter-insurgency and conventional efforts have reached the point where only a massive infusion of troops can change the balance, many spokesmen including Generals Thieu and Westmoreland have spoken of a long war of attrition, lasting perhaps ten to fifteen years. But there is no need to be so pessimistic. Within the structure of present policy a solution could be found within three to five years that would make possible a modified form of central government. It is, we feel, an unconscionable solution, but the only way in which centralized control can be imposed upon South Vietnam.

Suppose for a moment that the rice supply of a Communist-held area were destroyed and the population made dependent on imported food distributed in refugee camps administered by the Saigon government. Such a refugee camp solution would give the central government a sure hold on areas that have been impervious to its influence. It might be seen as part of the "other war," the war for the hearts and minds of the people of South Vietnam. It wins the minds of Viet Cong sympathizers by disorienting them; it forces simple villages off their lands, erodes their independence, and destroys the social order in which Viet Cong cadres thrive.

A refugee camp solution to the problem of insurgency is, perhaps inadvertantly, well underway. As a result of the war, South Vietnam must now import rice for the first time in its history. "Search and destroy" operations on the ground and bombing from the air have drastically reduced local rice supplies.

Meanwhile, under the U. S.-sponsored Chieu Hoy program Communists everywhere are encouraged to defect on an individual basis, villages are given the chance to flee communist domination, but there is no way in which a Viet Cong cadre can agree to defect and bring his village with him. Thus, regardless of how many defections are recorded, the rice must be destroyed and the villagers removed to "deprive" those hard-core elements that remain of both food and troops. The effect is that sections of Vietnam are being devastated and refugees generated at a high rate.

Between late 1964 and mid-1967, 1.8 million South Vietnamese peasants were made homeless by the war. The present rate is probably greater than one millon a year. If refugee generation continues at its present rates — and any intensification of the ground war would make the rates higher — one-third of the rural population of South Vietnam, some 4.5 million people, will be in refugee camps or relocation settlements within three years. Since no estimates put Viet Cong control, total or partial, at higher than 4.5 million people, the gathering of that many peasants into refugee camps could go far to eradicate from the countryside the settlements that supply the Viet Cong with their food and troops. Peasants would then be domiciled in manageable units; a central government in Saigon would distribute American aid to one-third of its population; and the dream of nation-building in South Vietnam would become a reality, even if the reality were, as one anti-Communist editor (now deprived of his right to publish) has put it, "a nation of thieves and beggars."

It should be emphasized that though the refugee camp solution is a likely one if present policies are extended south of the Mekong, there are obstacles to the success of even this inhuman course of action. So far, the Saigon government has been incapable of securing the allegiance of even its homeless population. There are not less than 1.8 million refugees of South Vietnamese origin, yet not more than 500,000 of the rural population are under total control of the Saigon government. Indeed, after six years of war, Saigón can claim total or partial control of only 3.6 million of the total rural population of 13.4 million. This number is less than the total of groups who should be rock-bottom allies of the government, namely, the Southern refugees dependent upon it and traditional anti-Communist groups like the Hoa Hao, Catholics, farming refugees from the North, and ethnic Cambodians (See Tables I and II.) The Saigon government, then, has barely held its ground, despite massive American support. And because of American support it has felt free to alienate actively "neutral" groups like the militant Buddhists and mountain highlanders.

Even so, since it would be easier to convert the ARVN into a refugee police force than into an effective counter-insurgency force, the refugee camp solution is the cheapest way to "win" the war. For refugee relief, though prolonged, is much less costly than conventional and counter-insurgency warfare, and in strictly military terms, it may also be much more effective. Bombing and conventional warfare cannot solve the problem of insurgency; counter-insurgency warfare requires close knowledge of the political terrain and upwards of two million men. Refugee generation, on the other hand, requires no more troops and no costly escalation, it can be accomplished without knowing the language and without making difficult distinctions between friend and enemy. It is accordingly the path of least resistance for American policy; it represents the lower limit of cost to the United States under present policies. The cost to South Vietnam in human terms is of course intolerable, but it is fully consistent with the declared aim of the Saigon government to eliminate Communist influence from the countryside.

5. PEACE OFFENSIVES

To placate domestic critics the Johnson administration has periodically made public appeals to Hanoi to negotiate. Energy expended on these peace offensives is likely to be wasted. Hanoi remains committed to the Mao-Giap theory of guerilla warfare: captured documents provide ample evidence that the North Vietnamese leaders believe Viet Cong cadres can keep the United States from winning the countryside and then can induce it to abandon the cities as well. Only an alteration in the balance of factions in North Vietnam, including the demise of the "bitter ender" First Party Secretary, Le Duan, would mark a change in this attitude. During the coming election year, Hanoi will no doubt try to influence American public opinion with diplomatic overtures. But the American effort at negotiations is much better directed at cadres within South Vietnam who are independent of aid from the North. For though Hanoi and the Viet Cong hierarchy remain ideologically opposed to any sincere negotiation with the United States or the Saigon government, the best American sources agree that a large proportion of Viet Cong cadres are not indoctrinated in Communist ideology. What is more, local cadres, who see the scale of American commitment, are much more likely than their leaders to become convinced of the permanency of the American presence in South Vietnam, to admit the hopelessness of taking the cities, and to be willing to make deals with the Americans. Only negotiations which seek local rather than national solutions to the problem of insurgency have even a moderate chance of success during the coming year. Only piecemeal negotiations which bid away their cadres will convince Communist leaders to come to the bagaining table for a total solution. Yet these are precisely the kinds of negotiations that are actively discouraged by both the Saigon regime and the Johnson administration, both of which prefer to polarize the alternatives between all (a capitulation by Hanoi) or nothing.

6. ELECTIONS

There is, of course, a widely publicized political element amidst the overwhelmingly military devices by which the United States is trying to build a nation in South Vietnam: the September elections. They occupy in American policy much the same symbolic function that the fort at Dien Bien Phu held for the French: they are yet another turning point in the war; they are a promise of lasting order; they are a glimpse of the new vision that the United States is bringing to the people of South Vietnam. And they would not have been held had it not been for the insistence of the American Mission in Saigon for a sign of national regeneration.

It should be recalled that it was not the military consequence of the defeat of Dien Bien Phu that caused French withdrawal, but rather the public reaction within France to the collapse of a symbol that had been trumpeted by the military as a new approach to the Indochinese war. The Johnson administration has broadcast similar hopes about the September elections, which were its fortress against the realities of Vietnam. These elections were structured not to draw non-Communist factions into a new ruling coalition, but to lend an air of legitimacy to the nation-building war. South Vietnamese political leaders who could challenge the military junta or who favor negotiating with local Viet Cong groups were and have been systematically excluded from running. To speake of local negotiations was to admit that the problem of insurgency exists, and this Saigon (and until late August the Johnson Administration) has been unwill ng to do. Political processes which are open only to those who reject reality are not likely to work wonders. And now in the aftermath of the Saigon elections, as it becomes increasingly apparent that central democracy is spurious, it is time to reassess the costs of American support.

UPPER AND LOWER LIMITS

The assessment should be made not by talking of "escalation" and "withdrawal," but by comparing the likely upper and lower limits of present policies with those of alternative approaches.

Within the structure of present policy, the best one can hope for is a refugee-camp solution to the problem of insurgency in South Vietnam. It can be reached, without mentioning the word "refugee," by emphasizing current programs to relocate villagers in secure areas, to promote individual defections, and to deprive the Viet Cong of their rice supply. It would probably require a continuation of expenditures at their present levels for three years, followed by a period in which American troops would be withdrawn and an expensive program of refugee relief and rural reconstruction would be expanded in accordance with the humanitarian aims of the "other war." Such a solution represents the lower limit of cost under present policies. But to win the temporary allegiance of a people by starving them into one's camp is short-sighted and self-defeating.

As for the upper limit to the American commitment, there is none. A different mix of elements — more emphasis on bombing or conventional warfare — could lead to an invasion of North Vietnam, an extension of the war into Laos and China, a confrontation with the Russians.

So long as it is conducted in accordance with the aims of the Johnson Administration, the war will, in sum, get worse before it gets better. It is of course possible that both President Johnson and Ho Chi Minh may flinch and open negotiations. But they are both stubborn men and their terms for bargaining are very far apart.

SKEWED PRIORITIES

What should the upper and lower limits to the American commitment be? The Ripon Society believes that the proper upper limit of the American commitment has already been exceeded. A prudent policy would demand that the level of present involvement be taken as a ceiling and that steps be taken to reduce the drain on American resources. To do otherwise is to further distort our sense of priorities away from other, strategically more important parts of the world and away from necessary expenditures of money and idealism at home.

But President Johnson's policy, however unrealistic and costly, has also created obligations that put a lower limit on the American involvement. The United States has a moral commitment to the one million refugees from the North who have been resettled in South Vietnam with our aid. It has an obligation to the 1.8 million refugees generated in the South during the past two years of heavy fighting. It cannot lightly abandon these people and the others of South Vietnam who are not Communists to the vengeance of the Viet Cong and their Northern supporters. Nor can we accept a solution that would pose a military threat to Thailand, which, unlike South Vietnam, is a signatory member of SEATO.

REDUCED COMMITMENTS

The Ripon Society believes that an honorable approach to Vietnam can be found that will work within these new upper and lower limits. *i.e.,* an approach that will reduce American troop commitments in the long run and minimize the destruction of Vietnamese society. It is an approach that does not demand precipitant withdrawal or imprudent escalation; its effectiveness does not depend on the panacea of immediate negotiation. It does demand something perhaps more difficult at this late date: a patient, realistic, flexible, and humane vision of what can reasonably be achieved in South Vietnam.

II. The Need for a Confederal Strategy

At selected moments in the unfolding of its Vietnam policies, the Johnson Administration has challenged its critics to provide alternatives. After Hanoi failed to respond to the bombing pause, for instance, the Administration asked whether there was any choice but to resume bombing. When intelligence reports showed increases in Viet Cong troop strength, the Administration paused to ask whether it could do anything but increase American troop commitments. And so it has been. By posing stacked questions sequentially, the administration has proven to its own satisfaction that its critics are naive and incapable of posing feasible proposals for a change in policy.

Now the real basis for a responsible alternative in Vietnam is not to be found by manipulating elements within the present structure of policy. The alternative to policy based on a fiction is policy based on reality. In reassessing the American undertaking in Vietnam, two central realities must be confronted.

POLITICAL FRAGMENTS

The first reality is the fragmentation of the traditionally anti-Communist forces in South Vietnamese political life. In addition to the regional, religious, and ethnic rivalries traced in the Appendix to this paper, there is a wide gulf between the French-educated urban middle classes and the rural population. The former have a typically French faith in centralized government, to which the United States Mission has somehow been converted under the conviction that it represents "nation-building." Non-Communist peasants, on the other hand, have fought to resist centralized control, whether from Hanoi or Saigon. If both urban and rural sources of support are to be drawn into a stable non-Communist government, it will have to be on the basis of decentralized rule. Regardless of the protests of the French-educated centralists, local leaders will have to have a greater degree of autonomy than they have yet been granted. If they are not, if local leadership, however ignorant and unsavory it may appear to city folk, is further undermined and destroyed, the result will not be a democratic government from Saigon. The result will be no government from Saigon, save for refugee camps and American troops to carry out the policing functions normally performed by local leadership. American troops would then be the objects not merely of Communist hostility but of opposition from all traditional groups seeking to protect their social order from alien interference.

THE VC CADRE

The second reality is the political and social innovation that is the basis of Viet Cong strength throughout South Vietnam: the local cadre. Viet Cong cadres are the only effective link between many Vietnamese villages and centralized commands, and they are the strongest such link in Vietnamese history. The cadre member is trained to live with the people of his village, to seek out those with grievances against Saigon-appointed officials and local notables, and to provoke incidents which mobilize the peasantry against the government. He is instructed in the techniques of organizing front groups, engaging in the selective use of terror to intimidate his opponents, accumulating intelligence from children and village spies, and coexisting with potentially hostile groups until he is ready to overthrow them. Very often "coexistence villages" that are well-infiltrated by cadres admit U.S. medical teams, vote in elections, and listen to Saigon-trained propagandists by day, while the Viet Cong maintains control by night. Cadres are an important new part of the village social structure in three-fourths of the rural population of South Vietnam, although only one-fourth of the rural population is under their total control. Careful analyses of their training and internal messages indicates that they have taken on a new social role that is more important to most of them than adherence to Communist ideology. Hence, recent American usage of the term "cadre" does not recognize the Communists' claim to mechanical control. In our usage, "cadre" is not a collective noun denoting a well-disciplined group of men; it denotes an individual, professional agitator.

If the cadres are to be dealt with realistically, both the Saigon government and the American mission will have to abandon the goal of extirpating them from village life. And the United States will have to recognize the futility of a Chieu Hoy program designed to encourage individual defections from cadres without guaranteeing a continuation of their social role. Viet Cong cadres are presently tying down nearly all the ARVN troops and more than half the American troops in the country. To destroy them means either the destruction of a large part of rural South Vietnam or an enormous drain on American manpower. A means must be found to allow them to hold their social function, while neutralizing their military threat.

A *confederal strategy* would deal with these two realities in a way that both Americans and Vietnamese could understand.

FIRST PHASE

In its first phase, a confederal strategy would aim at developing an effective and stable non-Communist coalition between the cities and the twenty-seven per cent of the rural population that is subject to government control. In cases of conflict among factions, American support would go to those which have effective control of rural areas, since their loyalty and local policing efforts are alone able to free American troops for their proper function of checking infiltration from the North.

The concept of a coalition based on a confederal approach requires the concession to local leaders of formal guarantees of autonomy in the following ways:

* Control over local local police and militia.
* Election of provincial and district officials who are now centrally appointed. (Provincial and district chiefs, most of them military men, now approve candidates for hamlet and village elections and make the major civilian decisions affecting their areas.)
* Government officials of local origin. (This is crucial in Vietnam where administrative rules are traditionally loose, allowing for wide discretion.)
* Local rule in formulation of land tenure regulations and reforms.
* Redrawing of provincial boundaries to correspond to the realities of political control.
* Cultural guarantees to ethnic minorities (*e.g.*, preservation of customary law, use of ethnic languages for primary school instruction).
* Right to collect local taxes, supplemented where necessary by direct access to U.S. aid. (A recent amendment to Title IX of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1967 permits the United States to find local channels for the distribution of aid.)

In other countries similar measures for decentralization might be accomplished by informal understandings, without written guarantees. But the time for that has passed in Vietnam. Too many promises have been made and broken for regional groups to trust any authority in Saigon. Nor can the United States serve as guarantor of informal bargains, for our Mission, too, has found it convenient to forget pledges made to minority groups in South Vietnam. National elections may give the regional minorities temporary leverage because of their ability to deliver bloc votes, but in a national legislature overwhelmingly dominated by urban Vietnamese the ethnic minorities have no continuing means of enforcing their interests. They will be restive whenever they are not actively courted by the ruling faction in Saigon.

In the September presidential elections, for example, the Thieu-Ky ticket actively sought the support of the Hoa Hao in An Giang province, of the Cambodian minority in Ba Xuyen province, and of the Highland tribesmen. If Thieu is able to deliver on his promises of financial aid and autonomy, these ethnic minorities will no doubt continue to hold anti-government feelings in abeyance. But their loyalty is not to the constitution of South Vietnam, which provides no guarantee of their rights, but to the military faction. Should it break its word or be replaced by a rival coalition (*e.g.*, one composed of Coastal Buddhists, Southern army officers, and Mekong Delta Vietnamese), the ethnic minorities would again feel isolated. Thus, before any form of parliamentary coalition poltics can be stable, prior confederal steps must be taken to give all important non-Communist groups a stake in the idea of national government.

A first, obvious step is to make formal and public the arrangements already in force with the Hoa Hao in An Giang province and to ratify similar arrangements for the enclaves of Cham peoples in Binh Thuan province.

Second, the government of South Vietnam should fulfill promises already made to the mountain tribesmen to draft guarantees of cultural autonomy when the National Legislature meets this fall.

Third, confederal decentralization and redrawing of boundaries should be carried out to give other strong local groups authority over their own regional affairs: the Buddhists in the northern coastal provinces; the Cao Dai and the settlements of Catholics and Northern refugees in the lowlands; and, the ethnic Cambodians in Kieng Giang, Ba Xuyen, and Vinh Binh provinces. Measures of this sort, which could be adopted almost immediately, would give non-Communist groups a stake in the South Vietnamese government and constitution regardless of which faction happened to hold the reins in Saigon. There is no other way to deal with the problem of fragmentation of the non-Communist groups.

SECOND PHASE

Once the rock-bottom non-Communist groups are consolidated the same confederal framework can be offered to "co-existence" villages, which comprise much of the contested half of rural South Vietnam. Local Viet Cong cadres and ARVN troops who have developed a relationship of tacit collaboration would be encouraged to formalize their relationships in exchange for regional autonomy from Saigon. Provincial boundaries can be redrawn for such areas, just as they were redrawn for An Giang province in October 1965.

These agreements might require the marketing of all surplus rice through Saigon, the payment of nominal taxes, and other signs of allegiance in exchange for separate access to U.S. aid to repair the devastation of war. The second phase would provide an alternative to the ravages of war that does not now exist for these villages. There is at present no way in which a Viet Cong cadre operating in contested villages can submit to popular war-weariness without losing his social function. And villagers have no incentive to denounce cadres so long as the alternative is not local control but administration by a Saigon-appointed military governor.

It is, of course, likely that the Viet Cong cadres would receive orders from above not to participate in confederal bargains, in which case a clear conflict of interest would be established within the Viet Cong ranks. Cadres who are not ideological Communists or not dependent on the North for supplies would perceive differing interests from those trapped in the Communist hierarchy. This would put pressure on the Viet Cong where it is economically most vulnerable, for those cadres who are independent of Northern supplies currently provide surplus rice for the Viet Cong efforts in weaker areas. Bidding away independent villages would begin the process of crippling the Communist movement by alienating cadres whose local social role is more important to them than the ultimate Viet Cong aim of winning the cities.

THIRD PHASE

In its third phase, a confederal strategy would be offered to villages under the full control of the Viet Cong, which now hold approximately one-fourth of the total rural population. Such hard-core villages would face increasing isolation as the earlier phases of the confederal approach progressed. At this point the Viet Cong hierarchy would face three alternatives: 1) remaining in the South while their villages are losing food and manpower; 2) fleeing to the North; or, 3) retaining much of their local power in Communist enclaves and participating in the confederal framework. Once their prospects for taking over the entire country are cut off by a consolidation of non-Communist groups, it is likely that the Viet Cong high command would negotiate for the third alternative.

POSSIBLE OUTCOME

A confederal strategy provides a vision of a feasible outcome that South Vietnamese and Americans both lack. Urban Vietnamese can now envisage only a French-style solution, with the urban classes playing the role of colonial administrators and the army securing the countryside. The American Mission, on the other hand, seems infatuated with the model of South Korea, where a military junta has taken steps toward democratization. Both of these models fail to cope with the fragmentation of South Vietnamese political life and the new social role of village cadres. A decentralized solution, by contrast, would permit both local leaders and rural cadres to keep a stable base of power now denied to them under the slogan of nation-building.

The minimal result of a confederal approach would be a consolidation of non-Communist groups, whose territory the United States could then defend with conventional forces. The maximal application of the confederal framework to the rest of the countryside would make possible a political system that accommodates sharp political differences (as does Italy) and deep cultural diversity (as does Switzerland).

REASONABLE COSTS

A confederal strategy is designed to reduce the American commitment in installments much as the present policy seems destined to escalate it by installments. Barring massive invasion by North Vietnam, a confederal strategy would operate well within the present troop commitment.

It would save manpower almost immediately by winning the cooperation of the local population in the northern provinces of the Coastal Strip and Central Highlands. It would prevent vast numbers of American troops from being sent for new counter-insurgency operations south of the Mekong River. Saigon can no more surely lose its influence in this area than by permitting the entry of U.S. forces, which Communist propaganda convincingly identifies with the French, to enter.

Finally, by lowering the level of violence in selected "coexistence villages," it would put steady political pressure on the Communists, who would be faced with possible defections by their non-ideological cadres. The present policy of Saigon to root out all cadres gives them no choice but to continue obeying orders from the Communist hierachy. A confederal strategy would promote factionalism in the Viet Cong and unity among non-Communists; the present policy does the reverse.

It should be emphasized that the confederal concept is *a strategy, not a rigid blueprint.* It is designed to keep the costs of the war below the upper limit recommended in the previous section. It permits a rethinking of Vietnam policy that provides not merely an alternative vision to that of the Administration but alternative emphases at every step of the way. This can be best illustrated by showing how the major elements of present policy will fit into a new pattern under a confederal strategy, how such an orientation cuts across some of the well-known "hawk-dove" distinctions.

1. BOMBING NORTH VIETNAM

Even if bombing some day leads Hanoi to nominal capitulation and negotiation, the Viet Cong can still conduct intensive guerilla activities, and they will do so unless they have an alternative that permits popular southern Viet Cong leaders to retain political power. A confederal strategy encourages the formulation of such alternatives. It can be adopted regardless of one's attitude to the effectiveness of bombing in inhibiting infiltration.

But we would claim as an advantage for confederalism the fact that it will allow for a de-emphasis on bombing. The effect of bombing in fulfilling its two major purposes has been very much overrated by the administration.

Punitive bombing north of the 18.5° parallel simply does not save American lives. It risks conditions under which more lives, American and civilian Vietnamese, will be lost. And it is irrelevant to the insurgency in the South, which is the major drain on American fighting forces. *For these reasons, a confederal strategy would heavily de-emphasize bombing the North. Interdictory bombing south of the 18.5° parallel would continue as long as it was necessary to cut infiltration and troop buildups.*

2. CONVENTIONAL GROUND FORCES

Invasion and insurgency are the two major military problems the United States faces. A confederal approach would employ conventional ground forces to defend areas where the Saigon government had won the loyalty of the people. It would also use them along the demilitarized zone and at crucial mountain passes to prevent an invasion of the northern I corps area.

While military leaders have been debating over bombing, barriers, and infiltration, they have failed to remind the American public that the North Vietnamese seem to be preparing an invasion of the I corps area, where American troops are already stretched dangerously thin. A confederal strategy would release troops from policing and counter-insurgency operations to counter a conventional thrust by the North Vietnamese. South Vietnam is not worth the millions of troops needed to counter both invasion *and* insurgency. Hence a confederal strategy provides a political framework in which present troops could be deployed against the invasion of areas in which the local population ceases anti-government activity.

A BARRIER

The approval of a limited barrier by Secretary of Defense MacNamara is a half-way measure that has more meaning for the bureaucratic struggle over punitive bombing in Washington than for the realities of the Vietnamese situation.

The original purpose of the barrier concept was to threaten the North Vietnamese with interdiction of their supply lines to the South. In the years of its building the barrier would cost more lives than bombing

would but afterwards it would be a permanent structure that would reshape politics in Southeast Asia. Supporters of the concept argued that if the Administration made known its firm intention to build a barrier clear across Laos, the only way to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail, the North Vietnamese might have been led to negotiate before the barrier was even completed.

The Administration, however, has committed itself only to a very limited barrier, which does not include Laos. The major hindrance to going into Laos is not the Geneva agreements, for the North Vietnamese army has been operating in Laos for years. Nor is it the "giving away" of Northern Laos to the Communists, since most of it is in Communist hands already. The hard-core objection is that the North Vietnamese might support a conventional military operation in Laos and they would probably receive Soviet aid.

The major function of the *limited* barrier is to demonstrate publicly that there is an alternative to bombing, even if that alternative is no more effective at attacking the main problems of insurgency and invasion. Both punitive bombing and a limited barrier would receive low priority in a confederal strategy.

3. COUNTER-INSURGENCY

The United States can win the counter-insurgency war, but the standard ten-to-one ratio of conventional to guerilla forces is not worth the price. Under a confederal strategy counter-insurgency operations would not be extended to new areas of the country. Plans for an offensive south of the Mekong River and based in the town of Can Tho would be permanently abandoned. In areas where counter-insurgency operations are now underway, the promise of selective withdrawal of American forces would be used to increase the attractiveness of piecemeal negotiations under a confederal framework. With counter-insurgency as with bombing and conventional warfare, military action is used in a confederal strategy to advance feasible political goals.

4. THE "OTHER WAR"

Under present policy the "other war" is too often the camp follower of military initiatives. After bombing, search and destroy operations, and refugee generation have taken their toll, American teams offer food, medical aid, and refugee relief. The confederal strategy would use the economic, psychological, and social programs of the "other war" independently to fulfill political objectives.

A. CHIEU HOY

The Chieu Hoy program, which encourages individual defections of Viet Cong cadres, would operate in a wider context. Defections would still be welcomed, but primary emphasis would be placed on negotiation that permits cadres to retain their social role. Under present policies, defections among high-level units are virtually impossible. The favorable statistics on Chieu Hoy defections trumpeted by the Administration make no careful distinction between political defectors and simple refugees.

B. LAND REFORM

Having ignored for some time the pledges for land reform made in Honolulu in February of 1966, the Johnson Administration is considering putting new pressures on Saigon. Now that it has declared the election a success, the American Mission may demand a centralized land reform program which is designed to win peasant loyalty for the central government.

But a centralized program of land reform is unrealistic. In many areas where land records have been destroyed, the attempt to resolve tenure disputes from Saigon can only be capricious and corrupt. Local administration of reforms is needed, not more centralization.

A confederal approach would subordinate land reform to the political goal of developing local leadership. Saigon might limit the size of family plots; it might provide surveying teams and keep a central record of land transactions. But the administration of reforms and the settling of disputes — a powerful source of patronage — would be left to local leaders. The power to implement land reforms would provide an added incentive for local leadership in coexistence villages to participate in a confederal framework.

C. ECONOMIC AID

To make a confederal strategy credible the United States will have to demonstrate its willingness to aid areas that are not under direct American military control. In principle, President Johnson has committed himself to such a course, and indeed An Giang province provides an isolated example of the purity of American intentions. The most dramatic symbol of American aims, however, was the proposed project for a Mekong Dam to aid people of Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam who are not under American military occupation. After publicizing the project and engaging in preliminary studies, the Johnson Administration dropped it without explanation. There is perhaps no single act that would better symbolize the American commitment to the long-term interests of Southeast Asians than the revival of this project. Because it would take years to complete, it would make Communists and non-Communists alike believe that the United States has a permanent concern for the welfare of Southeast Asia and that, unlike the French, Americans will not leave when they grow tired of the war.

A confederal strategy will also implement the Foreign Assistance Act of 1967, which stipulates that "emphasis shall be placed on assuring maximum participation in the task of economic development on the part of people of the developing countries through the encouragement of democratic private and local governmental institutions." (Title IX, Sec. 281.) This would depart from present policies which emphasize channeling aid through the Saigon regime, which regularly tries to deny American funds to its non-Communist opponents.

5. PEACE OFFENSIVE

A confederal strategy will steadily improve the negotiating position of the South Vietnamese government by consolidating its support and enabling it to bid away Communist cadres. It will create a basis for national negotiations that cannot presently exist so long as the Communists perceive that the government of Saigon is inherently unstable. Should Hanoi and the Viet Cong hierarchy become reconciled to the impossibility of a conventional military victory, they will still have the choice of reverting to guerilla warfare or of trying to bargain for partial control of their enclaves in the countyside in general negotiations. A confederal approach will then make possible a stable solution. It should be emphasized that as long as all efforts for limiting American costs are directed at securing general negotiations, military escalation will go unchecked. A confederal approach, by coordinating military and political initiatives, will assure a lessening of the conflict

until such time as peace talks become feasible.

6. ELECTIONS A confederal strategy would attack the endemic cause of instability in an overly centralized system by conceding a measure of power to local leaders. Instead of placing preponderant emphasis on village and national elections, it would promise elections on the district and provincial level. Under present policies almost all provincial and district chiefs are military officers and all middle-level officials are appointed and promoted from Saigon; under a confederal strategy many of these administrators will be elected.

Vietnam's local leaders need something to fight for. An increase in their own authority is a more plausible incentive than the imposition of corrupt officials from Saigon. A confederal strategy would accordingly urge that provincial and district elections be offered to all areas that are able to maintain internal security.

POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS Elements of the French-educated middle class of Saigon and perhaps all the refugees from the North may greet a confederal strategy without enthusiasm, and even with outright hostility. Thirteen years of American support have accustomed many Saigon residents to the illusion that they themselves have ruled the provincial towns and the countryside. French intellectual habits have made them see Saigon as the Paris of South Vietnam, as an administrative capital of a thoroughly centralized regime. Northern refugees, for their part, are likely to oppose bitterly any scheme emphasizing regional bases of power and implicity denying their right to return.

But Vietnamese political and military leaders, however adamantly they may oppose a change in their comfortable assumptions, have also shown a remarkable ability to adapt to political realities when they are not protected from them by American troops and economic aid. The confederal strategy will remind recalcitrant Vietnamese leaders that the illusion of centralized rule was possible in the past only because of massive American support and that such support will henceforth go to a vision of government that is more consistent with democratic ideals and more appropriate to Vietnamese political realities. The United States can begin distributing its aid in a decentralized fashion even during the period of readjustment to the new idea.

A second possible objection is that thanks to thirteen years of suppression of local leadership, there may be no popular regional and ethnic leaders with which to bargain on a confederal basis. The Appendix to this paper should satisfy doubts on this matter. It demonstrates the tenacity of particularistic loyalties in South Vietnam. American officials and Vietnamese politicians who deny these loyalties should spend more time outside Saigon.

Finally, must not areas be pacified militarily before they can participate in a confederal framework? An Giang province suggests not, as do the repeated demands by northern Buddhists and mountain tribesmen for a measure of self-rule. In a counter-insurgency war the loyalty of the population is invaluable for reporting and resisting Viet Cong infiltrators. Wherever such loyalty can be won by the mere extension of local democracy, massive military pacification is neither necessary nor right.

CLOSED OPTIONS One cannot, of course, reduce the costs of the Vietnamese undertaking without eliminating certain options now open to American policy-makers; and it is only fair to list two options that a confederal strategy forecloses. The first is the possibility of ridding the countryside of all Communist influence. This has been the expressed aim of a few Saigon army officers, but no reputable American official has ever publicy favored sending the millions of counter-insurgency troops required.

The second option is that of destroying North Vietnam and thereby provoking the Chinese into a war in which their nuclear capacity would be destroyed. This would presumedly be done by creating a situation in Vietnam analogous to that in Korea. If the Chinese were convinced that the United States had extended its original war aims to include heavy punishment and possible invasion of the North, they might intervene and provide an excuse for pre-emptive war.

A confederal strategy assumes that the United States can contain the Chinese without destroying neighboring states, much as it contained the Russians in Europe. Those who disagree with this assumption will of course find the cost of this strategy too high. They will find it intolerable that the United States adhere to its declared war aims, which include a preservation of the South but not the destruction of the North.

FOUR AIMS A confederal strategy is designed to:

I. *Reduce American costs without sacrificing America's moral obligations to its Southeast Asian allies.* In contrast to present policies which increase the level of United States military involvement in installments, a confederal strategy aims at a decrease from the present troop levels. It accepts as a lower limit any troops necessary to defend from conventional attack those areas in which the local population is loyal to the government and constitution of South Vietnam and able to maintain internal stability.

II. *To confront the significant a) political, b) military, and c) diplomatic realities of the Vietnamese situation.* These are: a) the fragmentation of non-Communist political groups and the social role of the cadre; b) the primacy of insurgency and the possibility of large-scale invasion; and, c) the unlikelihood of any diplomatic resolution of the conflict until there is a stable government in Saigon with a framework that will permit the Viet Cong to retain power in the countryside.

III. *Provide a direction for change and a vision of a feasible outcome.*

IV. *Coordinate military and political initiatives so that they are mutually reinforcing.*

A confederal strategy offers a coherent overview of the Vietnamese conflict that specifies *operational* political goals for every province and district of South Vietnam. The present goal of centralized government is unprecedented in Vietnamese history and is accordingly incapable of inspiring any real comprehension or loyalty in the countryside. A confederal strategy reasserts the primacy of the political element in limited warfare and does so on a level where political guidelines can save American lives.

For these reasons the Ripon Society endorses a confederal strategy. If great obstacles to its implemen-

tation exist, they are not to be found on the terrain of South Vietnam. They are to be found in Washington.

III. The Republican Responsibility

It is not necessary to blame the entire structure of present policy on any one man or party, or any small group of officials. For although President Johnson and his advisers seem stubbornly committed to an imprudent and costly course of action, and although they will continue to use every available form of political leverage to avoid being confronted with their mistakes, the fault is not entirely theirs. Their misconceived policies could not have developed unchecked were it not for deeper malfunctions in our political institutions.

BUREAUCRATIC MOMENTUM

There has been, to begin with, an administrative imbalance between our ability to take military risks and our ability to take political risks. The Department of Defense, reformed under unified civilian control, has been able to offer flexible responses to world problems. It has adopted a method of planning and budgeting that enables it to see clearly the costs, interrelations, and long-range military implications of its programs. And it engages in planning for contingencies so that it will be prepared for crises.

No comparable comprehensive effort in cost analysis, coordination, and contingency planning has been undertaken among the cluster of civilian agencies charged with economic and political elements of foreign policy. As a result, the relations between military and non-military instruments of foreign policy have often been determined by blind bureaucratic momentum, which naturally favors the better-prepared agencies. Because the Department of Defense is unified, massive and engaged in stand-by operations, while civilian agencies are fragmented and devoted to day-to-day details, American policy has a built-in tendency to drift toward military measures in times of stress.

South Vietnam provides a tragic example. America's power to wage war in that country is enormous. But we have been unable to wage peace, to formulate a political strategy that would limit the loss of life and build a basis for a negotiated settlement. American forces destroy entire villages on less hard intelligence than the Viet Cong use in assassinating a single village chief. Military contingency plans exist for invasion of North Vietnam, for bombing of Haiphong, for bombing of dikes, for counter-insurgency operations south of the Mekong River and doubtless even for use of nuclear weapons. But do similar plans exist for a confederal initiative or for any realistic settlement? Perhaps in a sub-basement of the State Department. But so long as there is no public indication of them American talk of negotiation lacks credibility. Political preparedness, like military preparedness, has to be publicized to be believed. It is meaningless for officials to talk of America's desire for peace and for a "political solution" so long as the administrative means to implement these hopes are not known to exist.

CONGRESSIONAL WEAKNESS

A second imbalance, between Congress and the Executive branch, has permitted bureaucratic mistakes to go unchecked. The Legislative branch faces long-term problems in adapting its procedures to the growth of executive power. In recent years it has begun laying plans for such adaptation: plans for Congressional reorganization, for improved staffing, for proper access to information and expert advice. But the Vietnamese conflict came before any innovations could be made and although it has forced many responsible legislators to revise their own roles in the making of foreign policy, it has caught Congress as a whole off guard.

Congress has neither the staffing nor the machinery to assert its prerogatives in the making of Vietnam policy. Its right to be consulted has been compromised into a right to ratify. Bureaucrats come before its inquiries in a contrived atmosphere of crisis with answers which are predetermined by carefully controlled information. Congress' right to know has been reduced to the right to be briefed. Legislators have been informed promptly of the *results* of policy in Vietnam, but no body of Congress has had continuing access to the political intelligence and strategic plans from which decisions are really made. Even Congress' right to set broad aims has been undermined by executive decisions which, although apparently "tactical," have altered the character of the war. Congress, in sum, has been unable to check the bureaucracy from without. Since significant checks are also absent from within, the pattern of Vietnam can easily be repeated: American policy can drift toward military solutions where political ones will suffice; American youth can die because its elders lack decisive civilian leadership.

PRESIDENTIAL STYLE

President Johnson did not create the imbalances in our political institutions, but neither has he tried to correct them. If anything, his personal style of administration has accentuated the difficulties. His is a style of secrecy and silence. He has been willing to consider only proposals that filter noislessly through bureaucratic channels. He is famous for rejecting out of hand programs that originate outside his administration and for cancelling plans that are leaked prematurely to the press. He has been criticized for this, and he has also been praised for relying more than any recent president on career civil servants.

But the Johnson style has more important consequences than its occasional outbursts of pique or its encouragement of career service. Its charm for the President lies in its ability to stifle effective criticism. By keeping programs secret until the moment of their release, the President gives opponents no time to prepare alternatives. He subjects legislators to a blitz of proposals that overwhelms their meager staffs. The President's practice of withdrawing nominations and programs that receive advance publicity also keeps dissidents within the administration from taking their case to the public. Since a public row means the sure rejection of a proposal, civil servants seldom dare to express their preferences outside official channels. The president's style thus excludes the public (and Congress) from bureaucratic debate and in so doing leaves the natural momentum of the bureaucracy uncorrected by external pressures. In foreign affairs this means that however many skirmishes may be won by proponents of political initiatives, the main thrust of American policy remains in the hands of the strongest agency, the Pentagon. Even if the President should reorient his Vietnam policy, his administration is unlikely to overcome its dependence on military plans and its habituation to military risks. It presents a classic example of self-entrenching bureau-

SAIGON'S POOR CONTROL OVER THE RURAL POPULATION

The most important conclusions of the following tables are:

1. While the Viet Cong's control over its rural areas is almost always "total," Saigon's is usually only "partial."
2. Viet Cong cadres operate regularly among almost three-fourths of the rural population — the 25% controlled and the 47% contested.
3. The Saigon government has little positive attraction for rural areas, for it controls no more people (3.6 million) than the number who have been alienated by the Viet Cong (3.0 to 4.0 million).
4. Over one-fifth of the rural population north of the Saigon area have become refugees since 1964.
5. While the government probably relies on recent refugees for most of its controlled areas north of Saigon, one-fourth of the rural population in the Southern Lowlands traditionally has opposed the Communists.

The numbers behind these discouraging comparisons are very conservative. The "rural" population under Saigon's control is greatly exaggerated, because it includes district town (and probably also most provincial capitals) which are not really rural and which can be protected by artillery and airpower without control over their inhabitants. The anti-Communist groups are estimated by increasing past numbers with a 2.8% annual population growth, U.S. AID's official figure; but since 1960, the year of Diem's most reliable census, the population has grown even faster. The number of refugees since 1964 is underestimated, because many rural people who have fled to the cities and are now scratching out a living on their own have never been registered with the Saigon government.

TABLE I: Saigon's and the Viet Cong's Control over the Population of South Vietnam

	Number	Percentage of Total Population	Percentage of Rural Population
NON-URBAN POPULATION			
Saigon's Control	3,618,400	21%	27%
"Total" Control	489,300	3%	4%
"Partial" Control	3,129,100	18%	23%
Contested Population	6,336,700	37%	47%
"Government-leaning"	4,360,600	25%	32%
"Viet Cong-leaning"	1,976,100	12%	15%
Viet Cong's Control	3,325,400	19%	25%
"Partial" Control	402,200	2%	3%
"Total" Control	2,923,200	17%	22%
Unclassified	152,300	1%	1%
URBAN POPULATION	3,732,500	22%	
TOTALS:			
Non-urban Population	13,432,800	78%	100%
Total Population	17,165,300	100%	
N.B.: The number of voters registered for the Presidential election	5,853,251	69%	60%*
Total Eligible Population over 18	8,500,000		

The registered total corresponds almost exactly to one-half the sum of the urban population, plus the rural areas under total and partial control and the "Government-leaning" portion of the contested areas.

*Percentage for rural areas registered assumes one-half of the urban population to be eligible and entirely registered.

TABLE II: Rural Groups that Should Support the Saigon Government Compared to Population Actually Controlled

	RURAL POPULATION GROUPS			CONTROL STATISTICS (For comparison with Rural Group Totals for All of South Vietnam)
	Northern Half of South Vietnam (I and II Corps)	Southern Half of South Vietnam (III and IV Corps)	All of South Vietnam	
Most Secure Province (excluding provincial capital)				
AN GIANG PROVINCE (Hoa Hao sect)		440,000	440,000	489,300 (Population under total control of Saigon Government)
Two Fairly Secure Provinces (excluding provincial capital)				
KIEN GIANG PROVINCE (Assumed one-half Cambodian) 22M farmer refugees, descendants of 1954 farmer refugees		339,000	339,000	
NINH THUAN PROVINCE 2M descendants of 1954 farmer refugees	128,000		128,000	
Traditional Anti-Communist Groups				
CAMBODIANS (170M already counted in Kien Giang Province)		374,000 to 624,000	374,000 to 624,000	
DESCENDANTS OF 1954, I Farmer refugees resettled through Land Development Program (24M already counted)	76,000	80,000	156,000	
DESCENDANTS OF 1954, II Farmer refugees *not* resettled through Land Development Program and hence still near Saigon or now refugees in Saigon		765,000	765,000	
SOUTHERN CATHOLICS Descendants of Catholics living south of the 17th parallel in 1954 and outside of the main cities (33% of total)	89,000	140,000	229,000	
DOUBLE COUNTING (Item to be subtracted before totaling)		194,000	194,000	

	RURAL POPULATION GROUPS			CONTROL STATISTICS (For comparison with Rural Group Totals for All of South Vietnam)
	Northern Half of South Vietnam (I and II Corps)	Southern Half of South Vietnam (III and IV Corps)	All of South Vietnam	
Saigon's Natural Support: Total (Three most secure provinces and other traditional anti-Communist groups)	293,000	1,944,000 to 2,194,000	2,237,000 to 2,487,000	3,618,000 (Population under total or partial control of Saigon Government)
REFUGEES SINCE 1964 (In refugee camps, returned to home villages, resettled elsewhere, registered and receiving "limited assistance")	1,080,000	720,000	1,800,000	
MINIMUM ADDITIONAL REFUGEES (Assumes recent refugees include as many as possible traditional anti-Communists)	787,000		787,000	
MAXIMUM ADDITIONAL REFUGEES (Assumes same proportion of traditional anti-Communists among refugees as in general population)	1,018,000	552,000 to 531,000	1,570,000 to 1,549,000	
Saigon's Minimum Potential Control RANGE: Group closest to Saigon Government Control (Traditional Anti-Communists, Three Secure Provinces, 1954 Refugees)	1,080,000 to 1,311,000	1,944,000 to 2,725,000	3,024,000 to 4,036,000	3,618,000 (Population under total or partial control of Saigon Government) (Repeated for another comparison)
TOTAL RURAL POPULATION	5,080,000	8,350,000	13,432,800	13,432,800
PERCENTAGE: Saigon's Natural Support as Share of Rural Population	5.8%	23.3%-26.3%	16.7%-18.5%	
PERCENTAGE: Refugees as Share of Rural Population (Minimum Comparison, for Rural Base does not include both Reported and Unreported Refugees now in Cities)	21.3%	8.6%	13.4%	
RANGE: Percentage of Group closest to Saigon Government Control	21.3%-25.8%	23.3%-32.6%	22.4%-29.8%	27% (Total and partial control of rural population claimed by Saigon Government)

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APPENDIX: THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR A CONFEDERAL STRATEGY

The Three Regions of South Vietnam

The following appendix reviews the different political histories of the three basic regions of South Vietnam: the Coast, the Highlands, and the Southern Lowlands. The historic roots and modern survival of crucial regional differences are traced through five periods: pre-French and French (up to 1945); Viet Minh activities (1945 - 54); the Diem regime (1954 - 63); the Start of the Insurgency (1957 - 63); and, Recent Events and U.S. Policy. Because of their greater importance for one region, Diem and the Viet Cong are discussed most fully in the appropriate sections under the Southern Lowlands, and the Buddhists are treated in the last section on the Coast.

Any stable solution in South Vietnam other than complete Communist control will have to respond much better to local differences than is now possible. Even the Communists in the North, with much smaller minority populations, grant more cultural autonomy than the government in Saigon. It is too late simply to make informal concessions to local leaders within a centralized legal structure, because such concessions have been made and betrayed by past Saigon governments, sometimes with American assistance.

Our purpose is not to discredit the desire for centralized unity held by many urban Vietnamese nor to recriminate against American officials who often had to make decisions within incorrect policy assumptions. It is necessary, however, for anyone who wants to avoid the refugee camp "solution" to appreciate the views of the different rural areas, cut off from Saigon and from each other. It is also necessary to realize that past mistakes in American policy cannot be dismissed by well-informed Vietnamese as simply unfortunate decisions by a previous rotation of Americans, because, unlike the French, the American government has great power to change reality to fit its myths.

The United States has great moral responsibilities for South Vietnam's present difficulties, not only for millions of refugees and for military officers and civilian officials with poor prospects under a Communist regime. The United States has steadily supported, in the name of "freedom" for South Vietnam, a great degree of centralization and has ignored political repression. Americans would never accept these actions at home. South Vietnam's fragmented urban political groups and confused countryside are partly the result of thirteen years of independence without reform under Saigon governments able to rely on American aid instead of taxes. Americans should hesitate before being patronizing about South Vietnam's lack of democracy.

A Vietnamese businessman summed it up to an American reporter last month: "You Americans think we are stupid and backward people, but we are progressive, and we will not be given a chance in this election." He had half a chance, and 65% of the country took it to show that they did not like the generals. But, because of military pressure on the Constituent Assembly last summer the South Vietnamese did not have a chance to vote in a run-off between the generals and their closest civilian rivals. Now our government is touting the generals as the first ticket in a "fair" election, but American officials will not mention at home that the generals did not dare enter a run-off. And neither will they mention that the generals, with the encouragement of American policy, are ignoring the persistent regional differences of South Vietnam.

The Highlands: Pre-French Tradition and French Rule

The Highlands — comprising well over half of the territory and within an hour's drive of most of the rest of South Vietnam — have always been unattractive to lowland Vietnamese. Malaria, infertile soil, tigers, and hostile tribesmen kept out Vietnamese settlements during a thousand years of Vietnamese migration in adjacent areas.

The tribesmen living in the Highlands are of at least two races, speak many languages, live in settlements of only a few thousand, and have no generally recognized political institutions or tradition of common action. But the tribesmen have one thing in common — fear and hatred of the lowlanders, first of the Cham who drove them from the fertile lowlands into the malarial hills and then of the Vietnamese who kept them there and who sometimes tried to impose upon them the Vietnamese way of life.

Another thing most tribesmen have in common is a slash-and-burn technique of rice growing. Most land is left to weeds, small brush, and trees. Every few years an area is cleared, burned over, and cultivated until the soil's temporary fertility is exhausted. The slash-and-burn technique imposes a low population density and small, scattered settlements on the tribes because most of the land is left to grow wild.

The French did not rule the Highlands with consistent policies. Sometimes they used tribesmen as local administrators, sometimes Frenchmen, and sometimes the hated Vietnamese. The French started schools, invented scripts for tribal languages, and established some modern medical facilities. At the same time, the French brought new products to the lowlands which replaced the cash crops of the tribesmen, reducing their ability to support themselves. The French also impressed tribesmen to work on roads and plantations.

Although the French record in the Highlands was certainly a dubious one — and provoked widespread tribal revolts in the 1930's — the tribesmen south of the 17th parallel can compare them favorably to the last Vietnamese dynasty and to the Diem regime, both of which seized tribal lands, established Vietnamese settlements in the Highlands, and tried to impose Vietnamese customs on the tribesmen.

The Highlands: Viet Minh Activities

The Viet Minh success was based on an unprecedented adjustment by lowland Vietnamese to the Highland environment and to tribal customs. The anti-malarial pill, which the Viet Minh secretly purchased in large quantities from French merchants, was generally regarded within the Viet Minh as the greatest physical factor (aside from captured weapons and ammunition) behind their success. Viet Minh cadres who worked among the tribes learned their languages, adopted their dress (even break-

ing their front teeth if local custom demanded), and married tribal women. Able tribesmen were given leadership posts within the Viet Minh, and the most loyal tribe (the Tho) was even represented by a Brigadier General.

Unlike earlier rebels against the French, the Viet Minh were able to use the Highlands for base camps and rest areas and to recruit tribesmen for coolies and soldiers. In the North, the Viet Minh had already advanced into Laos when the French decided to fortify Dien Bien Phu in a vain effort to keep the loyalty of the Tai tribes and to defend Laos (whose French-supported government was the only one in Indochina satisfied with its limited degree of independence) against further invasions.

South of the 17th parallel, the Viet Minh effort came later but with as much success. By 1954, the Viet Minh had infiltrated the Highlands, opened the Ho Chi Minh Trail, defeated the elite French Groupe Mobile 100, and gained a position to cut through to the sea coast if the French refused a cease-fire after Dien Bien Phu. In the post-Geneva regroupment, some 25,000 tribesmen left the area south of the 17th parallel — over twice as many proportionally as the number of lowland regroupees to the North.

The Highlands: Diem and Early U.S. Policy

Diem was the first lowland Vietnamese ever to rule the Highlands directly, and his policies basically reflected lowland contempt of the tribesmen. He regarded tribal lands as the public domain and granted the choicest valleys to ethnic Vietnamese in order to facilitate direct Vietnamese physical control over the Highlands, to settle refugees from the North, and to relieve population pressure along the crowded Coast. Diem abolished the customary tribal courts established by the French and made Vietnamese the language of instruction in the schools.

Many of Diem's important American supporters approved of his approach to the tribesmen. An Associate Executive Director of the Council on Foreign Relations and one of the Council's Far Eastern specialists dismissed other approaches (presumably the autonomous zones of the French and of North Vietnam) as "reservations." Under Diem, the tribes were to be "made more subject to civil administration" and "ultimately assimilated" into "the surrounding civilization." Another early supporter, the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the American Friends of Vietnam, wrote:

> The tribesmen, unused to Vietnamese friendliness, grew more suspicious with every official assurance of concern; the more they were told that the government would at last do something to remove the causes of their plight, the more opposed they seemed to every new administrative measure.*

Not surprisingly, Diem's policies provoked a widespread revolt in the Highlands. In the revolt were the two tribes which the French had given important administrative posts and hence contacts beyond their villages. The leader, Y Bham, a Rhade tribesman, is now the leader of FULRO, the leading tribal organization.

Early American policy in the Highlands was different from, but no better than Diem's. The French disbanded their commando force, the GMCA, and the American Military Mission did not pick up French contacts for commando or intelligence operations. When two members of the Michigan State Advisory Group in Vietnam returned from field trips with reports of tribesmen cadres from North Vietnam organizing groups in the Highlands, the U.S. Mission ignored them. When even Diem himself, in a visit to Washington described below, warned of infiltration in the Highlands and asked for American aid to ounter it he was refused. When the American Mission eventually opposed Diem's project for resettling ethnic Vietnamese in the Highlands, the reason given was the infertility of the soil in the strategic places Diem chose, not the hostility such settlements were arousing among the tribes.

Diem had taken office without a clear idea of the Viet Minh path to victory, but by 1957, when the infiltration began from the North, he was very sensitive to the unprecedented danger posed by enemy control of the Highlands. In addition to intensifying his unfortunate cultural imperialism, Diem wanted to build access roads through the Highlands and to turn his Civil Guard into a paramilitary force to combat the infiltration by North Vietnam. In Saigon, the American Embassy and the U.S. Mission preferred more conspicuous roads, between the cities. U.S. officials in Saigon also opposed giving military training to the Civil Guard because it was grouped in Diem's Interior Department instead of Defense! When Diem made a special State Visit to Washington to ask for bulldozers for the roads and for financial and training support for a paramilitary force, he was again refused.

*The latter and probably also the former later changed their views on Diem. These passages are not cited to reflect discredit on these men, but to illustrate the general approval given by Americans to even Diem's cultural imperialism. (Pages 125 and 105 of **Problems of Freedom,** edited by Wesley R. Fishel, Michigan State University Press, 1961.)

The Highlands: Start of the Insurgency

In 1957, just as Diem's repressive policies were taking effect, tribesmen who had gone north in 1954 and who had been trained as cadres in Hanoi began returning and starting cells in their home villages. Since the Viet Minh had earlier taken over the area from the French and since Diem had a much worse record among the tribes (around Kontum, Communist propaganda even promised to bring back a popular French administrator once the South Vietnamese were driven from the Highlands), the newly trained cadres moved easily through the Highlands.

The Communist propaganda emphasized the autonomous zones (on the Soviet and Communist Chinese models) recently created for the tribes in North Vietnam. In the North, tribesmen were given administrative posts within their areas, the Tho general cited earlier was made chairman of his zone, tribal languages were kept in the schools, tribesmen were given higher education in Hanoi and elsewhere in the Communist bloc, and there was no land-grabbing by ethnic Vietnamese, although population pressure was much greater in the North than along Diem's Coast. Supporting the cadres were radio programs in tribal languages broadcast from Hanoi, while Diem's government had discontinued such broadcasts after the regroupment period, 1954 - 1955.

The Highlands: Recent Events and U.S. Policy

A crucial recent development has been the disillusionment of the tribesmen with the Viet Cong. Harsh taxation and impressment of coolies for increased Viet Cong operations over the past few years have destroyed the advantage the Viet Cong once had in the region. While taxes and recruitment have always been great burdens on Viet Minh and Viet Cong hard-core villages, the Communists have generally used political techniques which prevent effective opposition. Short-sighted exactions in the Highlands may have been undertaken consciously, in the hope that victory over all of South Vietnam would come too swiftly for the tribesmen to resist.

Unfortunately, the post-Diem Saigon governments have not moved strongly enough in the Highlands to make up for Diem's mistakes. The first steps have been taken, and many good promises have been made. In February 1964, Y Bham, the leader of the 1958 revolt, was released from jail; in March a Bureau for Montagnard Affairs was established. In October 1964, the Saigon government held a conference for tribal leaders to present their grievances. The tribesmen now have national representation, access to universities through lower admissions test scores than are required of the better-educated

Vietnamese, places in noncommissioned officers' schools, a greater hand in local administration, and a promise of a fair system of land titles.

Yet the confidence of the tribesmen has not yet been gained. The conference of October 1964 was held only after a revolt in September, and that revolt was caused by the assumption of command over tribal military units by ethnic Vietnamese ARVN officers. There have been two revolts since, in October and December 1965. The latter revolt was well-organized, being staged simultaneously in five of the seven provincial capitals. Armed tribesmen serving under Vietnamese officers have expressed the intent to throw out the South Vietnamese by force when the Viet Cong are defeated.

A Tribal Revolt this Fall?

This fall there may be still yet another revolt in the Highlands. When the Constituent Assembly was writing the present South Vietnamese Constitution, the tribesmen demanded explicit guarantees of autonomy. The Assembly, largely composed of urban Vietnamese, refused to include such guarantees, though they wrote a long and detailed document with over one hundred articles. A tribal revolt was averted this spring only by promises from Saigon and American officials that similar guarantees of autonomy will be passed by statute when the new House and Senate convene this fall. If the newly elected legislators refuse to honor promises made by the military government and U.S. officials (quite possible for civilian politicans who hate the military government and who fear permanent American domination), then another tribal revolt seems likely. It is important to note that the previous revolts have occurred in the fall, when the rainy season hampers the transport of Vietnamese and American troops into the Highlands.

Y Bham, now living in Cambodia, heads the only tribal political group (FULRO) and claims to have organized the three revolts of 1964 - 5. In their negotiations with FULRO representatives, the Saigon government and the U.S. Mission have recognized FULRO leadership of past revolts and taken seriously FULRO threats of revolts in the future. FULRO and the Cambodian government have agreed on a common propaganda line, that all the Montagnards of South Vietnam are of the same racial stock as the Cambodians in South Vietnam and Cambodia. While based on false history (at least two racial groups live in the Highlands), FULRO-Cambodian cooperation corresponds to joint self-interest. FULRO gains a safe headquarters on the Cambodian side of the border and access to the outside world. Cambodia gains contacts in the strategic Highlands of South Vietnam which may help less populous Cambodia to restrain any future expansionist ethnic Vietnamese government in Saigon, whether Communist or not.

The United States has always been in a difficult position in the Highlands. In 1961, the sending of the Special Forces (similar to the previously disbanded French commandos) was an implicit repudiation of Diem's tribal policies and aroused Vietnamese suspicions. In 1964, after Diem's fall, the Special Forces were transferred from the CIA to the U.S. Army. Vietnamese ARVN officers replaced Americans commanding tribal units and American officers became "advisers," as in the Lowlands. In the revolt and negotiations that have followed this shift, Americans have played a crucial role in mediating between the tribes and the ARVN. (The only Vietnamese officer the tribes respected in 1964 was jailed as a "neutralist.") But the unremitting hostility between most Vietnamese and the tribesmen (and Cambodians) and repeated decisions by the U.S. Mission in Saigon in favor of the Vietnamese will eventually undermine the prestige of Americans on the spot. The U.S. cannot expect to keep tribal loyalties by giving out medical care and T-shirts emblazoned with the South Vietnamese flag, because the Saigon government is not yet trusted. The only stable solution is a full recognition of tribal autonomy by urban Vietnamese. The U.S. cannot simultaneously mollify the tribes by implying a long American presence and placate the Vietnamese by promising to leave as soon as Hanoi negotiates. Tribal minorities are a general post-colonial problem, for most anti-colonial revolutions were led by well-educated lowlanders insisting that a highly centralized unity was the only way to eliminate foreign domination. In South Vietnam, the U.S. must show that this is not true.

The Coast: Pre-French Tradition and French Rule

Coastal Vietnam differs from the Southern Lowlands in several important respects: it has a longer pre-French history; more extensive pre-French social cohesion, smaller change under French colonial rule; and, most important, a far longer history of Communist influence. Because he is more traditional, is less Westernized, and probably has Communist relatives, even the most anti-Communist Coastal Vietnamese is more difficult for Americans to understand than a Vietnamese from Saigon or the Mekong Delta.

The Coastal Region of South Vietnam extends down through the present I Corps, the northernmost military region. But south of the next province, Binh Dinh, the land narrows even further and is disrupted by sand dunes. Many villages (Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa) depend upon fishing instead of upon rice-farming. Still farther south, there is a half-settled area (Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan) which was once fully cultivated by the Cham people but which the Vietnamese did not maintain or revive.

Vietnam's traditional civilization began in the Red River Delta in North Vietnam. Because the Coastal Lowland are too narrow to attract quick settlement, the Vietnamese moved down the coast only quite slowly, less than a thousand miles in about a thousand years. Their migration, spurred by internal political disputes and population pressure, was necessarily southward; movement was blocked to the North by the stronger Chinese and to the West by the even less hospitable mountains.

Poor communications made a centralized state impossible, but migration was slow enough that the same structure of village life existed all the way down the Coast when the French arrived in the mid-1800's. These villages were the basis of Vietnamese tradition. Much of the land, averaging 25% and sometimes as much as 70%, was redistributed every few years among the households. Except for trade with neighboring villages specializing in certain handicrafts, the rice-growing villages were self-sufficient communities, independent of outside influence. Anyone from beyond the ring of immediately surrounding villages was regarded as a "foreigner." Except for levying taxes and occasionally recruiting troops, the power of the Emperor stopped at the village gate.

In the traditional village the mandarin class provided the best tie to the outside world. Most mandarins lived in the villages, renting land, lending money, and serving on the village Councils of Notables. Some obtained, through examination or purchase, appointments from the Emperor to provincial and district posts.

Fortunately, the Emperor was not a dictator in the modern sense. Though the Confucian ethic supported his powers over the mandarins in theory, the Emperor was restrained by the mandarins' partial independence of their salaries provided by their rents, interest, and bribes and by the general expectation of all office-purchasers that they would not be removed until they had gained a fair return on their investment. The power of the mandarins over the villagers was restrained by several factors: the large proportion of communal land; the lack of absentee landowners; a consciousness of extended families, all of whose members, rich and poor, worshipped the same ancestors; and a tradition of compromise and adjustment in interpersonal relations.

Even before the arrival of French officials, this village tradition was challenged by Catholic missionaries in the North and along much of the Coast. The Buddhists had not established a centralized hierachy extending down into the villages that could compete with the influence of the mandarin class. The Catholics not only set up such a hierarchy, they also developed a village daily routine — mass every morning and regular prayers in the fields at the ringing of the Angelus — which defied the tradition of compromise and forced villages to convert as whole units. Catholic villages were persecuted regularly by their neighbors, often with the encouragement of the

Emperor, for their competing hierarchy and foreign way of life.

But despite the Catholic problem, when French officials arrived in the late 1800's, they found a relatively stable social and political system, which they chose to preserve along the Coast. Unlike the Southern Lowlands, the Highlands, and the Red River Delta, the Coast had no minerals or lands appropriate for rice or rubber plantations whose exploitation would require and pay for direct French rule. The French therefore gave the Vietnamese Emperor in Hue nominal authority, maintained a small French staff for the Coast, and controlled the Emperor through the Resident, ostensibly just an "adviser." The French even preserved the traditional civil service examination based on the Confucian Classics until 1917, twelve years after the Chinese themselves had abandoned them.

While they had lost some power, Coastal mandarins, unlike those of the North and South, were not closely tied to French officials and businessmen. The French presence along the Coast did not bring great economic changes or disrupt traditional village life. Therefore, Coastal Vietnamese of all social classes, no matter how well they spoke the French language, always regarded the French presence as an insulting, alien intrusion which would eventually be expelled.

The Coast: Viet Minh Activities

From the outset of the anti-French revolt, the Viet Minh controlled most of the Coastal region. The situation was so severe for the French that they did not even attempt population estimates for most of the Coastal provinces — indispensable for taxation and recruitment. These estimates were made even for hostile provinces to the North and South.

Viet Minh influence along the Coast was assisted by the fact that the only political groups active in the region were those the Viet Minh were already defeating in the Red River Delta through better organization, superior tactics and assassination of crucial leaders.

With the exception of the Catholic Bishoprics, and the Emperor Bao Dai, political groups could be started only in exile in China, Hong Kong, and Japan. When Northern and Coastal students conspired in exile for unity, their rivalries were not so much regional as personal or ideological, except to the extent of excluding Southerners, whom the French were more confident of controlling and who therefore were allowed some political activity. When the Communists were able to limit the power of rival exile groups in the North, the power of anti-Communist groups was simultaneously limited along the Coast.

By 1949, according to Lucien Boddard's insurgency map, the Viet Minh controlled all of the Coast north of Dong Hoi, a city just north of the 17th parallel. The French then had a thin strip of four cities down to the 16th parallel: Dong Noi, Quang Tri, Hue, and Danang.

Farther south, the Viet Minh controlled between the 16th and 14th parallels in 1949. During the next four years, according to the May 1953 insurgency map of the French General Henri Navarre, the Viet Minh extended their control down to the 11th parallel, around Phan Thiet. Only two isolated French controlled cities in this area, Nha Trang and Phan Rang, were outside of Viet Minh control in this period. Bernard Fall's insurgency maps for 1954 (the first presumably for January or February, published in March; the second for July) credit the French with regaining control of the countryside between Phan Rang and Phan Thiet, but Fall still conceded the Viet Minh control of the Coast between the 16th and 12th parallels when the war ended. Yet these estimates are clearly biased against the Viet Minh. They include French urban enclaves, but omit at least one prominent rural enclave controlled by the Viet Minh — the famous "Street Without Joy," a strip of villages between Quang Tri and Hue.

Fall revealed the extent of Navarre's bias against acknowledging Viet Minh control in the Red River Delta. The French military map conceded only five small, isolated areas to the Viet Minh in May 1953. On the other hand, the map of the French civilian officials who had to estimate probable tax returns and decide to travel without military escorts was quite different from Navarre's. According to the civilians, France controlled only four isolated areas: the Hanoi-Haiphong area (where many French troops were stationed) and the Catholic Bishoprics of Phat Diem and Bui Chu, where an anti-French Vietnamese clergy, not Frenchmen, enjoyed the support of the populace.

Along the Coast, in 1954 it was not even Frenchmen who were in charge of the non-Viet Minh enclaves. The decisive political figures under Emperor Bao Dai, the French "alternative" to Ho Chi Minh, were Coastal mandarins and adventurers. By the end of the war, these men had finally bargained from the French the financial support for a "Vietnamese" army, predominantly led by French officers. During the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, Bao Dai's followers were even able to obtain a major separate operation along the Coast with troops that might have been better used in the undermanned French fortress to the North.

After the settlement in Geneva just as the French were allowed to occupy Hanoi and Haiphong for 300 days to regroup their forces, the Viet Minh received full legal authority over Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh, a longtime Coastal stronghold between the 16th and 14th parallels. In the two provinces, the Viet Minh established a long-term political base by ordering several hundred of their regular soldiers to marry local girls and leave them behind when they were withdrawn to the North in accord with the Geneva agreements.

In most provinces, the Viet Minh ordered specific members to stay behind, and in many areas, they maintained an intelligence network. The Hanoi government itself produced convincing evidence for such a network when it described in detail to the International Control Commission reprisals by the Diem government in South Vietnam against former members of the Viet Minh between July 1954 and July 1957. According to Bernard Fall's map of Communist Complaints, this intelligence network was especially active in the Quang Tri-Hue-Danang area, which produced over one-third of the descriptions of reprisals.

The Coast: Diem Family's Rule

Diem's family, the Ngo Dinh's, was a leading Catholic manadarin clan centered on Hue. Diem and his older brother Khoi served as provincial governors under French indirect rule in Binh Dinh and Quang Tri Provinces, both along the Coast. When Diem took power in Saigon, his authority along the Coast was exercised by two men whose names did not appear in official government documents: his brothers Thuc and Can. (Diem himself is therefore discussed later, under the Southern Lowlands.)

Thuc played a crucial role in the family and in the regime because he was the eldest surviving brother in the clan (Khoi was buried alive by the Viet Minh) and the leading Vietnamese Catholic prelate. He frequently mediated among the other brothers, especially at the clan's annual meetings in Hue. Thuc also provided a discreet channel between the clan and important foreign Catholics. (He was a former classmate of Francis Cardinal Spellman in the Vatican.) Thuc also provided access to the regime for prominent Vietnamese, many of them non-Catholic, who had complaints or suggestions but who feared Diem and his brother Nhu too much to approach them directly. This mediating role for non-Catholic Vietnamese was crucial for Thuc, because it protected him from criticism against his ideological role in the regime.

The ideology of the regime was "Personalism." an intellectually respectable doctrine originally developed by liberal Catholics in the 1930's. Many non-Catholic Vietnamese, however, regarded it as simply a new political terminology which the Ngo Dinh family could use to communicate with Vietnamese Catholics without encouraging comparisons to the Catholic role under the French. Thuc had started an institute to train people in Personalism during the war against the French, when he was Bishop of Vinh Long. About the time Diem took power, Thuc was elevated to the Archbishopric of Hue. He moved his institute to Dalat and (with Cardinal Spellman's financial assistance) he simultaneously founded

the Catholic University of Dalat. Under Diem, Thuc's institute for Personalism was the training school for members of the Can Lao, a secret political group whose members held administrative posts in the provinces and who reported directly to Diem's brother Nhu on the behavior of non-Can Lao (hence mostly non-Catholic) officials.

Diem's brother Can was a complete contrast to the rest of the clan. He did not speak a foreign language and hence had almost no contact with foreigners. Nor did he have much contact with Vietnamese, rarely appearing in public and usually speaking only to his own followers. He ran a skeleton network of secret agents for Diem to watch Nhu and his supporters in the South, predominantly refugee Catholics from the North. Otherwise, Can confined his activities to the Coast. He was a traditional, consistent warlord in the region, promoting his supporters and punishing his opponents with political prisons and tortures that eventually shocked even old Asia hands; he controlled nominations to the National Assembly and provincial and district appointments. After 1956, when Diem abolished traditional Vietnamese village elections, Can replaced doubtful village and hamlet officials as well. Before the elections of March 1956, Can had almost fifteen thousand people arrested, a far larger number than any estimate of Viet Minh agents left south of the 17th parallel and an average of three people per hamlet.

In Western terms, both Thuc and Can were "corrupt." They exploited their public influence to assist their operations in Saigon real estate, forest concessions in the Highlands, and the shipping business. But their system of rule was inherently more stable than that of Diem and Nhu in the Southern Lowlands. Can was predictable in his repressions, so people who never spoke against him in private did not feel threatened; Thuc provided access and an incentive for respected non-Personalists to remain discreet. Both brothers maintained loyal followings through careful promotions.

The Coast: Start of the Insurgency

The present Viet Cong strength along the Coast is the natural result of the past twenty years. The Viet Minh controlled most of the rural areas against the French and eliminated their nationalist rivals in the region. When almost all of the Viet Minh had gone north in 1954 - 55, Ngo Dinh Can imposed a repressive rule mostly through Catholics which, like that of the earlier French, prevented all political activity along the Coast except for secret activity. As under the French, exile groups formed (in Paris instead of South China), but no new indigenous organizations could be started.

People hostile to Can had few alternatives. They could remain silent and do nothing, although this was impossible under Vietnamese custom for anyone with a friend or relative imprisoned or tortured. If they were rich enough, they could go to Paris. Anyone who stayed and wanted to resist had to join the Viet Cong, the successor to the Viet Minh and the only organization with the clandestine techniques sufficient to survive Can's secret police.

The Viet Cong were therefore able to regain the position held by the Viet Minh along the Coast without nearly as many demonstrations and assassinations as in the Southern Lowlands. In the first period of Viet Cong violence tabulated by Bernard Fall, April 1957 to April 1958, there were only two assassination along the Coast, compared with more than fifty to the south. When Fall made his second analysis, April 1959 to April 1960, he did not even survey most of the Coast. Douglas Pike's list of "struggle movements" publicized by the Viet Cong between December 1960 (founding of NLF) and September 1964 credits (aside from eleven places whose region cannot be identified) only sixteen movements to specific places along the Coast and one hundred seven to places in the Southern Lowlands.

At the same time, in the years after 1956, surviving Viet Minh agents along the Coast were supplemented by the return of Viet Minh members who had gone north for further training in 1954. While the word "insurgency" is used here to describe the Viet Cong, it is not meant to imply a spontaneous rebellion. The tragedy of South Vietnam, especially along the Coast, is that the only form of resistance available on the spot was a Communist movement already repudiated, at least implicitly, by the urban elite that had not already joined the Viet Minh. This tragedy was the responsibility of Ngo Dinh Can along the Coast. The role of North Vietnam was clear: retaining an intelligence network after the partition of 1954, supplementing that network with well-trained local men who had been picked to go north in 1954; and, supplying the Viet Cong with limited arms and ammunition, in addition to those captured and secretly manufactured. Though not "aggression" in a conventional military sense, these acts were unequivocally aggressive.

When Can realized the growing Viet Cong strength in his region, he responded, not by shelling and relocating villages as Diem and Nhu did to the south, but by training cadres to live with the villagers as the Viet Cong do. Can's cadres minimized the level of violence by firing only at individuals only when fired upon, and they kept the struggle on a political basis which did not force the villagers to choose sides. Can's cadres, some of whom were even being trained for the Mekong Delta when Diem fell, were the direct antecedent of the present "Revolutionary Development" cadres now gaining much attention.

The Coast: Recent Events and U.S. Policy

Only an extraordinary group of men could have organized a new political group without succumbing to the secret agents of Can and the Viet Cong. Fortunately for Vietnam, such men appeared, inspiring millions of Vietnamese along the Coast and in Saigon. They were the militant Buddhists, based in the imperial city of Hue. While their successes were wholly unexpected, they were not without their weaknesses, the simple products of their past.

In addition to arousing Vietnamese and foreigners to the hopelessness of the Diem regime and bringing down several post-Diem governments, the militant Buddhists negotiated two coalitions which promised them dominant influence around Hue and some national representation in Saigon. The first coalition was suppressed by force, the second was betrayed by Ky. Both the suppression and the betrayal had U.S. support. The refusal of other non-Communist Vietnamese and of American policy-makers to develop a coalition with these men was a mistake which may have been irrevocable.

The militant Buddhists' leader, Thich ("Reverend") Tri Quang, is completely different from the urban Vietnamese politicians and ARVN officers Americans prefer to deal with. He lacks both a manadarin education and foreign contacts, both of which are now in disrepute along the traditionalist Coast. Originally respected for his knowledge of Buddhist scripture and self-denying ascetism, Thich Tri Quang has been out of Vietnam only once, for a short visit to Japan. His sudden populartity was both a reflection of his intense, inflamatory speaking style and a repudiation of first the Diem regime and then successive Saigon governments as hopeless alternatives to the Viet Cong along the Coast.

The first political effort of the Buddhists was against the Diem regime, beginning publicly in May 1963 with an incident at the Buddha's birthday celebration. According to Ngo Dinh Nhu, Tri Quang had actually started the movement in Hue in 1961 by tricking Ngo Dinh Can into paying subsidies for an inner group to prevent Communist infiltration of the Buddhist organization around Hue. Even if he did plan extensively in advance, Tri Quang was by no means in a position to overthrow Can when at the celebration his police prevented the normal flying of the Buddhist flag without the simultaneous display of the South Vietnamese flag. After several celebrators were killed, the Buddhist leadership tried to prolong the ensuing tension. When Diem met their demands for assistance to the victims' survivors, they insisted that the aid be described as "compensation," thus trying to force an implicit admission of police guilt.

Two great strokes of luck turned the Buddhist leadership from a conspiracy seeking a cause into a factor in world politics. On June 11, when the Buddhist leadership was straining to keep resentment alive, an old monk burned himself to death in Saigon. While the Buddhist tradition respects such suicides, nothing like it had ever been done before in Vietnam. Instead of gaining simply a mild boost, the Buddhists found a transformed population. In Saigon the popular response was extended by memorial services and the display of a heart, said to have survived the monk's immolation and a final cremation. As a Saigon official told a **Time** reporter, "We have been living under a regime of terrorism, but after Quang Duc [the immolated monk] I no longer feel fear."

The second event occurred in August, when Nhu sent the police into the pagoda used as the Buddhists' Saigon headquarters. The United States had already urged Diem to mollify the Buddhists, and in other Buddhist countries Asians were blaming the Catholic President Kennedy for the supposed repressions of Buddhism by the Catholic President Diem. After the pagoda raid, President Kennedy hinted that Nhu's overthrow was necessary and made his famous remark "they [the Vietnamese] have to win it." The coup that followed two months later was the result of complex military intrigues and complicity by United States officials. Though the Buddhist leaders did not play a direct role in the coup itself, they emerged from Diem's fall with immense prestige throughout all of South Vietnam, far beyond the reach of their small organization.

Factionalism after Diem

Unfortunately, in 1964 - 65 the Buddhists lost much of their general popularity and, after an initial effort at unity, the militant Buddhists from Hue split from the Saigon groups, composed of refugees from the North and unorganized Southerners. The Buddhist loss of popularity and internal division occurred during the post-Diem "decompression" period of fierce factional infighting in Saigon. With almost fifty thousand political prisoners freed from the jails, a generation of exiles returning from abroad, and an internally divided army suddenly freed from Diem's security agents, too many people wanted to rule South Vietnam. Since the civilian politicians had no organizations, their powers for good or ill, were confined to teahouse intrigues, to deciding which group of civilians would provide external respectability and internal political skills for the rulers of the day in the army. Shifts within the army caused most of the ten changes of government in nineteen months, but most of the troop movements were swift and bloodless.

Since the Buddhists were the only group able to summon mass support, their factional efforts were the most conspicuous and the bloodiest. Their mass support frightened Vietnamese Catholics and urban politicians. It seems probable from later events that U.S. officials in Saigon and Washington gave up forever on the Hue Buddhists in this period. Since then, when they have acted constructively within the implicit rules of the political system, the United States has given Ky and the Saigon politicians full approval to repress the Hue Buddhists by military force and to change the rules against them. When the Hue Buddhists have been powerful within their region, U.S. officials have publicly criticized them; when the Hue Buddhists have tried to resist being double-crossed, U.S. officials have called for "unity" and for letting "the Vietnamese" decide the matter "by themselves."

At first all Buddhist leaders, not just the ones from Hue, frightened the Catholic groups. The Diem regime, it must be remembered, had not persecuted Buddhists for their religion. Buddhism did not have a hierarchy or a doctrinal unity transferable to political affairs which could have been persecuted even if Diem had so wished. Diem went so far as to dedicate all of South Vietnam to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in 1959, but neither religious persecution nor forcible conversion were attempted.

In politics, the Diem regime had simply favored Catholics and other Can Lao members and then imprisoned and tortured its opponents. These opponents differed in many respects, but by the process of elimination they were almost all Buddhists. In 1964, many Buddhists leaders tried to whip up an anti-Catholic sentiment as a means of strengthening their own position with the vast non-Catholic majority.

At the same time, all Buddhist leaders were agreed that only an ideology based on Buddhism could save Vietnam from Communism, that an empty anti-Communism led by Catholics could not win in the villages. Immediately after Diem's fall, the Buddhist leaders planned a national Buddhist organization parallel to the South Vietnamese government and reaching down into the villages, as exists in Thailand and Cambodia. Thich Tri Quang became the symbolic leader of the new organization, corresponding to the head of state. Thich Tam Chau, a milder refugee from the North who had led Buddhists against the Viet Minh in the autonomous Catholic Bishopric of Phat Diem, was made premier and placed over a cabinet of ministers. At the same time, many Buddhist monks were made chaplains to ARVN units.

Naturally, Vietnamese Catholic leaders were opposed to the Buddhists riding to power on a wave of anti-Catholic feeling and then assuming exactly the same political role the Catholics had enjoyed first under the French and then under Diem. Since the native Southern Catholics were a disproportionately large portion of the urban middle class and since most of the Northern Catholic refugees remained in the Saigon area, Catholic leaders were also able to produce favorable demonstrations in Saigon.

At the same time, most Can Lao members were able to regain posts in the bureaucracy. Although they were removed from their provincial and district posts in late 1963, not enough others had the training and experience to compete with them, and after several months of confusion, most former Diem officials were simply assigned to different posts. Since the training of Buddhist monks concentrates entirely on scripture and omits both mandarin and foreign education, the Buddhist leaders could do no more than obtain a temporary preference for non-Can Lao officials. Though temporarily embarrassed and weakened, a Diemist recovery was inevitable after the fall of Diem himself.

Just as frightened of the Buddhists as the Catholics were the traditional urban politicians who had no organization, no mass following in the cities, and no tie to the countryside (except sometimes the dubious one of absentee landownership). Since they could not quickly make up for lost time, their only hope for power was for the military to eliminate the Buddhists as a national factor. Then civilian rule would mean rule by old men who had been jailed by Diem instead of by monks and students who had demonstrated against him.

Neutralization under Tri Quang?

A tragic element to the Buddhist defeat was their emphasis on being the only group who could gain a sufficient mass following in the villages to deal with the Viet Cong. Especially along the Coast, where people had never had an open alternative to the Communists and the mandarins, the appeal of a negotiated settlement, a coalition government, and neutralization of South Vietnam was very powerful. Although Thich Tam Chau was more cautious about the Viet Cong (as befitted a leader of Northern refugees, whatever the merits of the case), Thich Tri Quang cultivated an air of mystery, encouraging Vietnamese to feel that given sufficient power he could bring a stable settlement. Although this behavior is universal among politicians, the more Thich Tri Quang pursued this line with non-Catholic Vietnamese, the more Americans mistrusted him.

In Saigon, Vietnamese fearful of Tri Quang's domestic appeal quickly found that the best way to oppose him at the U.S. Mission was to exploit his claim to be able to bargain with the Viet Cong. Refugee leaders from the North used their Communist relatives and old friends as proof of a painful break, of an abiding feud with the Communists. The Northern ties of the Hue Buddhists, however, provided innuendos of Communist influence. (Of course the Americans given these innuendos never were told that Tri Quang's mother and elder brother died in a Communist prison camp in the North after partition.) Even Tri Quang's mass support from city people and from villagers who were trucked in for demonstrations was used as evidence of Viet Cong in-

fluence! It was permissible for the Viet Cong not to stop villagers from benefiitting from U.S. medical teams, but when the Viet Cong did not stop villagers who wanted to demonstrate for Vietnam's first non-Communist charismatic leader, then Americans in Saigon and Washington became suspicious.

Not surprisingly, the Buddhists' most ambitious plans for separate organizations failed. Tam Chau, the Northerner who was supposed to head the hierarchy, lost interest. After he received no cabinet appointments and Tri Quang got three, Tam Chau tried to regain his power by allying with Northern Catholic leaders instead of working within the Buddhist coalition. Along the Coast, the Hue Buddhists tried to strengthen their organizaion with "People's Councils for National Salvation," but when their student leaders led demonstrations in the cities (which the Viet Cong had never been able to do), more experienced Viet Cong cadres took the crowds away from them and discredited the movement (a hostile action which was often regarded as roof of cooperation).

The I Corps Coalition: Tri Quang and General Thi

By early 1966, the Hue Buddhists had turned their attention to another coalition, with ARVN officers and civilian officials in the I Corps, the military region comprising the five Coastal provinces around Hue. The ARVN commander was Lieutenant General Nguyen Chanh Thi. He was a native of Hue and the only important ARVN general born of a peasant family. He led the first coup attempt against Diem, in November 1960, with elite paratrooper units who were disgusted with Diem's inability to contend with the Viet Cong's first massive wave of terror. After Diem's fall, General Thi took command of the I Corps, his home area.

The I Corps coalition also included one of South Vietnam's two civilian province chiefs, an able, former exile civilian as Mayor of Danang, officials and professors at the University of Hue, and many civilian politicians who made up for the Buddhists' lack of administrative training. None of these men was a Communist. Some were suspicious of Americans conducting separate military operations and taking power more directly than the French had done in their area, and they became positively hostile when American policy gave Ky full support in trying to break up their coalition. The Honolulu Conference of February 1966 probably finished the Hue Buddhists under the Johnson Administration. Although its timing may have been planned to turn public attention away from the critical testimony of General Gavin and Ambassador Kennan, the Administration had prepared a series of demands on Ky. One demand, agreed to then and now practically forgotten, was "social revolution, including land reform," for which the Administration promised its "full support" (the U.S. had refused to help Diem pay for even his mild land reform). Also agreed upon was "a democratic constitution," "its ratification by secret ballot," and "elections rooted in that constitution." In his first announcement of the elections, Ky said that he would not himself be a candidate. President Johnson emerged from the Conference saying, "We talked of very specific things," and after the Conference Vice President Humphrey and the Secretaries of Agriculture and Health, Education and Welfare visited Vietnam.

Ky and U.S. Oppose Coalition

Ky's first "specific thing" after the Conference was to maneuver against General Thi in I Corps. In early March, the National Leadership Council unanimously deposed Thi, calling his a "war lord." The U.S. Mission in Saigon agreed immediately, calling the deposition of a popular general from his native area a "step toward political stability" and "a defeat for warlordism." It was perfectly clear that the U.S. would not continue to assist Thi, whose command corresponded to that of the U.S. Marines (also confined to I Corps), no matter how popular he was with his troops and the surrounding population.

Two days later the Hue Buddhists issued a demand for the return of Thi and the maintenance of all Corps commanders until the elections. When demonstrations began, General Thi appeared in person to ask them to stop, and they stopped. Fierce negotiations began in Saigon, with Ky, the Northerner Thich Tam Chau, and the Hue representative in Saigon meeting on March 12, 13, and 17. By the end of the month, Father Quynh, leader of the Northern Catholics from Phat Diem and an impeccable anti-Communist, was also criticizing Ky.

In the first half of April, a compromise was developed and General Thieu signed a decree promising elections within five months, informally understood to be on August 15. The Buddhists asked for a definite agreement that the Constituent Assembly would replace the military government as soon as the new Constitution was ratified, and to everyone's surprise, a commission of politicians appointed by the generals to oppose the Buddhists agreed with them. On April 17, Tri Quang flew back to Hue and stopped demonstrations against Ky. This compromise definitely was influenced by the U.S. On April 5, Ambassador Lodge had personally ordered American aircraft to help fly to Danang ARVN troops loyal to Ky in a show of force; the troops were kept on the airbase and then later flown back to Saigon. On April 8, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, William P. Bundy, publicly criticized the Buddhists for refusing to compromise, ignoring the fact that the dispute began by disrupting a Buddhist compromise, the I Corps coalition.

Ky Doublecrosses Tri Quang

Once he had Tri Quang satisfied, Ky betrayed him. On May 7 over a paper cup of Jim Beam bourbon he suddenly revealed to a group of American reporters that he would continue in office and that the Constituent Assembly would be disbanded when the Constitution was ratified. This news was censored in the Vietnamese press, and Ky surprised his enemies by sending ARVN troops and a third replacement for General Thi back to Dananag, just as the current I Corps commander was about to start a solidarity party of Catholics and Buddhists to demonstrate to American officials and reporters their agreement. In Washington, Secretary Rusk and then a State Department spokesman disassociated themselves from Ky's alcoholic revelation and his second dispatch of troops to Danang, but an American helicoptor was supplied to take the new I Corps commander from Danang to the hostile city of Hue. This man, Ky's final replacement for General Thi, was a notorius favorite of Diem (now head of an extremist Catholic ticket in the Senate). His appointment was a clear indication that the coalition which the Buddhists had developed with General Thi and which had survived his first two replacements was shattered. The Diemist appointment was also a calculated insult to the Hue Buddhists. As the American helicoptor flew the new commander away after his speech, a young ARVN officer tried to shoot him down. The American gunner in the helicoptor fired a burst of machine gun bullets into the crowd, killing the officer and wounding others.

U.S. Ignores Double Cross

In the next ten days, Tri Quang tried to gain a reversal of American policy. He stopped a demonstration after the helicoptor incident and withheld the news that an American (rather than an ARVN) soldier had fired into the crowd. Three meetings with U.S. consular officials and a cable to President Johnson produced a "leave it to the Vietnamese themselves" style remark by Secretary Rusk and a non-committal reply from the President.

Ky made many conciliatory statements, but he did not explain how he expected to be trusted. On May 26, the point of no return was reached in Hue: the helicopter gunner was identified as an American at the funeral procession for the dead ARVN officer, and Tri Quang's students led a crowd to burn the USIA library in Hue. ARVN troops were sent into Hue; the Buddhist leaders were cornered and then captured after a three-week seige.

American experts on the Viet Cong are rightly quick to point out that the Viet Cong does not attract the South Vietnamese elite and that even Tri Quang in his most anti-Saigon and anti-American moments did not threaten to seek Viet Cong support. When defeated, he still did not flee to the Viet Cong; instead he risked house arrest under a hostile government in circumstances similar to those that killed Diem and Nhu. If American experts emphasize this point, then they should also emphasize the desirability of reversing American policy and giving Tri Quang and General Thi (now in Washington,

trying to learn English) a chance to reform their coalition.

Ky agreed to hold elections, and he has. The Hue Buddhists were excluded from the Constituent Assembly and from the Senate for the sin of "neutralism." Tri Quang's group would have had a very good chance in the Senate contest, because the multiplicity of candidates disproportionately favored a well-educated block vote. This advantage was reaped by Catholic groups, who may control over fifty percent of the Senate with less than ten percent of the population and whose most popular Senate ticket received less than fifteen percent of the Presidential vote.

The Southern Lowlands: Pre-French Tradition and French Rule

The Southern Lowlands were completely changed by the French. In the 1860's, a small Vietnamese population lived in villages less than one hundred years old and cultivated about 500,000 acres of land, mostly between Saigon and My Tho. As the Vietnamese Emperor had ordered all his mandarins to leave the southern area first ceded to the French, the French had to rely upon themselves and the only inhabitants who knew any Western languages, the Vietnamese Catholics. Saigon became the base of French activities in Indochina and the Southern Catholics (unlike Northern and Coastal Catholics, mostly living in their own villages) became the basis for an urban middle class, working under French officials, businessmen, and customers.

Great canals were dug to drain the vast areas flooded annually by the Mekong and bi-monthly by salt water from unusually high tides. By 1880 the cultivated area had more than doubled to almost 1.3 million acres; by 1937 it had quadrupled again, reaching 5.5 million. In those 57 years the population almost tripled, from 1.7 million to 4.5 million.

The great expansion in rice fields produced two new Vietnamese social classes: the absentee landlord, with vast holdings supervised by managers, and what a colonial report of 1931 emphasized as a "very important rural proletariat" of tenants and migrant workers. Physically, there was plenty of land for all in the South, now almost four times as much per villager. But the expense of opening new areas, even when they had already been drained, and the competition for large plots completely disqualified most of the rural population from potential ownership. Along the Coast 65% of the households owned at least a small plot, and everyone could rent communal land.

But in the South only 28% owned any land at all, and the landless had no communal land to speak of (only 3% of the total rice area, as contrasted with 25% along the Coast). Coastal landholdings were generally worked by their owner or his sons and only 10% of the plots were worked entirely by tenants. In the South 35% of the plots were owned by absentees, and, assuming their plots were the largest, these men owned 85% of the rice land.

The new villages in the South were connected to Can Tho and Saigon by cheap, fast water transport. Most of their inhabitants immigrated; everyone depended on a good price for exporting rice all over Asia. Some fields (80% in Bac Lieu Province, from which the present An Xuyen Province was separated) were worked entirely by migrant workers who would follow transplantings and harvests up and down the Mekong. Some did not even live in villages—they simply lived on the bank of a canal without a government or community. In some areas, no effective government ruled at all; the landlord ruled without challenge from either established communities or from the French administration.

The result, of course, was a society in the South whose relations were monetary and impersonal and hence materialistic and individualistic by traditional Vietnamese standards, but the peasants were not Europeanized. The traditional responsibility of the landlord and creditor to be easy on the tenant and debtor after a bad harvest could not hold if the landlord lived in Saigon or Can Tho, depended solely on his rents and interest to live a gay urban life and conducted his business through a middleman. Even today, after a generation of warfare in the South, Vietnamese families are strong enough that orphans are taken in by relatives of the fourth and fifth degrees, rather than be left homeless. Pearl Buck's foundation for orphans and abandoned children of American soldiers recently found that even compared with Japan and Korea Vietnam has few deserted children.

Cao Dai and Hoa Hao

Instead of forming political parties and trade unions along Western lines, Southerners found escape, unity, and resistance to the French in two new Buddhist sects. The first, Cao Daism, founded by a group of Vietnamese in 1926, was not exclusively Buddhist, but a combination of the world's religions plus hero worship. (Winston Churchill and Victor Hugo, for example, are Cao Dai saints.) Its organization was consciously patterned on that of the Catholic Church, and it spread so rapidly among peasants as well as government officials that the French banned its advocacy from the Coast and in the North. The Cao Dai "Pope" had close ties with reformist political parties and with the Japanese. In fact, when the latter took over Indochina, the French deported the Cao Dai Pope to Madagascar. After World War II, the Cao Dai claimed a total of twelve sub-sects, totaling between one and four million members, a large proportion of the population in the South.

Hoa Haoism, the second sect, was started not by a committee, but by a charismatic leader, the twenty-year-old son of a minor notable. After developing a very attractive Protestant version of Buddhism (better to have a pure heart than a rich altar — and debts to pay for the altar), the Hoa Hao prophet predicted a Japanese attack on Indochina as soon as France fell to Germany. With more than one hundred thousand followers in less than a year of preaching, Huynh Phu So was soon a potent force. When the French exiled him to another part of the South, So converted the surrounding population. When the French committed him to a Saigon hospital, So converted his psychiatrist. A second exile became a place of pilgrimage; only Japanese intervention prevented a third exile, this one to be outside Vietnam.

The area between the Mekong and the Bassac (the southernmost branch of the Mekong) rivers was more fully developed by the French than the land farther to the southwest, the Transbassac. There drainage canals were still being dug when the Depression and World War II disrupted the French pattern of colonial development. The Transbassac contained the largest landholdings, with landlords whose word was law throughout their domains. Fiercely militant Cambodian villages, survivors of the original Cambodian occupants of the Mekong Delta driven south by the invading Vietnamese, were (and are) also found in the Transbassac.

To the north of the Saigon-Tay Minh line the lands were inhospitable all the way to the sandy and abandoned areas on the Coast mentioned above. The major river in this barren area, the Dong Nai, was overgrown with mangroves and the high ground beyond the river was cursed by malaria, a complete barrier to Vietnamese settlement. In the 1900's the French began developing the malarial high ground; its red and grey soils were good for rubber, whose rising price made cultivation very profitable. The rubber plantations soon became more valuable than the French rice holdings (most large riceland owners were Vietnamese) and the rubber plantations have become even more important to Americans today, because the undevcoped surrounding swamps and forest provide cover for guerillas and because rubber trees are vulnerable (they must grow seven years before producing) and easily taxed.

As far as most peasants were concerned, the South was essentially a French creation. The Vietnamese and Cambodians had dug some canals, and, if the French had never taken over, large indigenous landowners and a rural proletariat might have arisen anyway. But everywhere Frenchmen held critical positions: officials granting land concessions and businessmen importing foreign manufacturers in exchange for rice. While Coastal Vietnamese could hate the French from a position of self-confidence because of a memory of pre-French stability, Vietnamese in the South could hate the French only from a position of subjugation. For the United States today

this legacy has meant that while the suspicious Coastal Vietnamese feel that "We don't need you — except to supplement our army," the suspicious Southerners say, "We don't want you running things on any terms, French or American." Therefore, no matter how terrible the Viet Cong may seem, it is very difficult for Americans to appear to offer a constructive alternative.

The Southern Lowlands: Viet Minh Activities

Unlike the North and the Coast, the South had several active indigenous organizations in addition to the Viet Minh working against the French. The French had permitted some urban political parties and had not suppressed the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, so none of these groups were vulnerable to the Communists' mastery of exile politics. During World War II the Viet Minh controlled only a few villages and a forested enclave in the North; it started operations in the South too hastily at the end of the War to take over all anti-French activity.

Even before the War Southern Marxists were divided. A strong Trotskyite organization, led by the lower-class Ta Thu Thau, had badly defeated the predominately middle-class, orthodox Communists in the elections of 1938. In 1940 the orthodox Communists had tried to lead a peasant rebellion, but a security leak alerted the French, the rebellion was crushed, and the Communist organization was destroyed.

The Cao Dai and Hoa Hao had improved their positions during the War as the result of a less hostile administration. A new group, improperly called a "sect," had also formed: the Binh Xuyen, a coalition of robber bands around Saigon. Southwest of the Mekong Delta and in Vinh Binh Province the Cambodian minority, armed by the French, fought all Vietnamese. In Kien Hoa Province the Catholics organized a militia to defend themselves against the Viet Minh. At first the various factions in the South fought as much among themseves as they did against the French and the Viet Minh. Only the consistent hostility of the Viet Minh and the eventual French recognition that these factions could be bargained with more easily than they could be "pacified" permitted a loose anti-Communist coalition. Among the factions two great surprises came during the war against the Viet Minh. The Hoa Hao, regarded as a loose, one-man organization, recovered after the assassination by the Viet Minh of their charismatic founder. And the larger Cao Dai failed to establish a secure rural power base; not even a small one could be set up around their Pope's residence in Tay Ninh.

The large number of indigenous factions make it even harder to estimate the extent of Viet Minh activities and control in the South than along the Coast. Village land records, for example, were destroyed throughout most of Vinh Binh Province. The French of course blamed the Viet Minh. The Viet Cong, claiming always to be their successors (but also careful since then to have a Cambodian representative on the National Liberation Front's Central Committee), have also given full credit to the Viet Minh. But it is impossible to verify today who destroyed which records, the Viet Minh rebels or the anti-Vietnamese Cambodians armed by the French. It is clear, however, that unlike in the North and on the Coast the Viet Minh were not the only organization fighting the French and terrorizing landlords.

The Communists Fail in the South

The Communist party, moreover, revealed more factionalism in the South than in the North and along the Coast. The first Communist leader, Tran Van Giau, shortly after World War II tried to establish a tractable popular front in the South which would correspond to the Viet Minh. When, in 1946, it was clear that he had failed, he was repudiated in the South and assigned overseas. Then Nguyen Binh, an ex-member of the VNQDD (the Communists' mortal rival in the North), was appointed leader of the Viet Minh in the South. By 1949, according to Lucien Bodard, Nguyen Binh controlled almost all of the South except for the vital roads connecting Saigon and Quan Long: most of the Transbassac; the seaward tips of the Mekong Delta provinces; and, both sides of the "Duck's Bill" — from beyond Tay Ninh in the North to beyond Sa Dec, across the Mekong, to the south. In 1950 Nguyen Binh directed a conventional military campaign, similar to many of Giap's in the North, in an attempt to seize the large cities from the French, but apparently without having consolidated his control over many rural areas.

When this effort failed, Nguyen Binh was killed, not by simple execution, for he was too popular in the South. He was sent, without any rest, with a small party of troops loyal to Le Duan into the worst Cambodian jungle, supposedly to find a new infiltration route. When surprised by a unit of the Cambodian army, Binh's nominal subordinates killed him before fleeing into the jungle.

In 1951 after Nguyen Binh came Le Duan, the present First Secretary of the North Vietnamese Communist Party, and Le Duc Tho, present head of the party's Orgburo, as rival leaders in the South. While the origins and meaning of their rivalry are not clear, it certainly dates back to a dispute over the conduct of the war in the South, which had to be resolved by Ho Chi Minh himself.

In 1954 three short-term regroupment areas were established for the Viet Minh in the South: the tip of the Camau penninsula, an area somewhat larger than the present An Xuyen Province; the Plain of Reeds, somewhat larger than the present Kien Tuong Province; and, the Xuyen Moc-Ham Tan area, which then straddled the border between Cochin China and Annam and now overlaps Binh Tuy and Phouc Tuy Provinces. At that time the Viet Minh probably had two other base campe. First was the present "Zone C," around Tay Minh and easily connected to the Plain of Reeds regroupment area. Second was the present "Zone D," until recently corresponding to the Phuoc Thanh Province and now the area where four provinces meet northeast of Saigon and are easily connected to the Xuyen Moc-Ham regroupment area.

In the Southern Lowlands the Communist Party did not hold the monopoly on effective, tested political organization it enjoyed elsewhere in Vietnam. It could not claim, simply as director of the Viet Minh, as much respect as it could command farther north. When Vietnam was divided at the 17th parallel in 1954 to give the anti-Communists a second chance, the best opportunities for an indigenous anti-Communist coalition were in the Southern Lowlands.

The Southern Lowlands: Diem

Since Diem had delegated most of his power along the Coast to his brothers Can and Thuc, the Southern Lowlands tested his own abilities. His personality, like his political support, had two complementary elements: the traditional Vietnamese mandarin of Hue and the devout, medieval Catholic of the North and the Coast. He worked long into the night in the tradition of the self-sacrificing mandarin or prelate, but he had neither administrative skills nor charismatic powers. Though he was impressive in small meetings with Western diplomats and journalists, he came to rely on his brother Nhu to decide which Vietnamese leaders and official papers were to be sent to his office and to rely on the semi-secret Can Lao to control the population.

When Diem became premier in 1954, he was manifestly the representative of the American policy of a second chance south of the 17th parallel for the anti-Communist nationalists of Vietnam. The initial French policy after Dien Bien Phu was to preserve as many plantations and as much cultural influence as possible by sending an old friend of Ho Chi Minh's (Jean Sainteny) to Hanoi and by not trying to develop an anti-Communist coalition for the elections scheduled for 1956. The French still had close ties to the major opponents of the Viet Minh in the South: Emperor Bao Dai, the recently created army, the Binh Xuyen, the Cao Dai, and the Hoa Hao.

Diem's first cabinet was unimpressive; it was composed almost entirely of blood relatives and in-laws. But the end of 1954 saw a much broader cabinet, in which a majority (8 of 14) was held by the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao. Both of these groups had long feared the Communists and had interests which no longer corresponded to those of the French. Diem secured his position by gaining control over the army — with substantial American help. The crucial subordinates of General Hinh, the army's commander,

were lured away on a visit to the much-admired President Magsaysay of the Phillippines and General Hinh was told bluntly that no military aid would be given until the army was under complete civilian control (*i.e.*, Diem's). Though he later claimed he could have started a coup against Diem with a telephone call, General Hinh yielded and soon left for France, where he was given a military appointment.

Diem then began to fragment the sects represented within his cabinet, paying several Cao Dai and Hoa Hao leaders over $10 million from American military aid for "back pay." At the same time, in early 1954, Western represenatives sympathetic to the sects (and hence their only hope of getting the U.S. to moderate Diem's hostility toward them) were withdrawn from South Vietnam. When they realized Diem's intention to destroy their groups, most Cao Dai and Hoa Hao leaders joined the Binh Xuyen leader on March 5, 1955 in demanding a greater role in the cabinet. Of course this was denied them.

Although the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao held political control over the Tay Ninh area northwest of Saigon and over many areas south of the Mekong River, they had no conventional force to match the 250,000-man army under Diem, and their local exactions could not compete with the $250 milion annual American aid given Diem. Even their claims to conventional military forces never reached 50,000. The generally accepted total of 15,000 to 20,000 for the Cao Dai forces grossly exceeded the 4,916 regular troops actually subsidized by the French at the end of 1953. While the details of Diem's negotiations with the setcs are still obscure, the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao leaders who had fought the French and the Viet Minh only when necessary could hardly have expected to defeat Diem's army in conventional warfare. Their resistance must have been a desperate last resort, and they were defeated within a few months. The only surviving units were four Hoa Hao battalions which fled up the Mekong beyond Long Xuyen and preserved themselves only by adopting guerrilla tactics and hiding amidst the loyal Hoa Hao population.

With the defeat of the Binh Xuyen and the sects, Diem had a chance to offer a non-Communist, non-sectarian alternative to rural areas of the Southern Lowlands, but he failed to make good on this opportunity. Large areas of land around Saigon (Binh Xuyen) and south of the Mekong River (Cao Dai and Hoa Hao), abandoned during the war against the French, were taken for the settlement of refugees from the North (most of whom were tightly-knit Catholic villagers) without the permission of local inhabitants. Improved security in rural areas, especially those formerly terrorized by the aggressive and intolerant Hoa Hao bands, led to some economic improvement. But the new rural security also permitted Saigon landlords who had not received rents for years to return to the countryside on the heels of the army and to make exactions in the form of "back rents," much as Diem had paid bribes in the form of "back pay." Even refugee Catholic villagers, a basis of Diem's support and able to publicize their complaints, were preyed upon by national and provincial officials until they were stopped by a national scandal and the dismissal by Diem of a cooperative cabinet minister.

Diem Misrules the Hoa Hao

Hoa Hao areas associated with the surviving four battalions were repeatedly attacked by ARVN units, and the one peaceful Hoa Hao area for which information is available was badly treated. As late as 1960, a Michigan State University group found that Diem's government had taken over all Hoa Hao buildings without payment and had appointed all non-Hoa Hao officials in My Thuan, a former Hoa Hao headquarters in a part of Vinh Long Province where 85 - 90% of the population belonged to the Hoa Hao sect. The Americans then saw the suppression of a Hoa Hao ceremony on the Buddha's birthday, initially approved to honor Hoa Hao soldiers killed fighting the French and the Viet Minh. There were only 250 Catholics in the area, but they included crucial local officials, like the district chief, the district "information" officer, and the canton chief. Catholics were allowed to build a church instead of working on the local forced-labor construction projects (agroville) against the Viet Cong. Under prodding from a priest from Vinh Long, the seat of the area's Bishopric, the district "information" officer was reluctantly starting an organization to propagate Catholicism among the hostile local populace. Threatening letters to and assassinations of local officials were an increasing problem. Diem's officials blamed the Hoa Hao, and the latter blamed the Viet Cong, claiming that the local ARVN units were infiltrated and useless. Since Americans made only a few short visits outside of Saigon between 1955 and 1962, it is impossible to say if My Thuan's plight was unusual. It should be emphasized, however, that the Americans reported no embarassment by Diem's officials at seeing their behavior observed and recorded.

Even the Binh Xuyen — the gangland alliance which had controlled the roads into Saigon, the city's rackets, and the French secret police — were not replaced by superior instiutions. Brother Nhu ran most of these activities, not for personal profit, but to finance the Can Lao and his family's political activities independently of U.S. aid. Nhu controlled the opium trade and the lotteries, manipulated the foreign exchange market, and extorted Saigon businessmen. The only Binh Xuyen activities Nhu did not take over where those that were banned by his puritanical wife, the famous Mme. Nhu.

Mistakes by the U.S. Mission had a great influence on South Vietnam's increasing difficulties. United States military "advisers" made no effort to anticipate a resumption of Viet Minh guerrilla activities and converted the new Vietnamese army, originally created by the French for decentralized, small-unit, counter-insurgency operations, into a highly centralized conventional force, consciously imitating the South Korean army and preparing for a conventional invasion from the North. The refusal to finance Diem's plans for a paramilitary force has already been mentioned. In the Mekong Delta, the United States refused to continue the French-developed naval units used to patrol the hundreds of miles of rivers and canals (compared with only one major road south of Saigon). These military mistakes are being reversed today, but without the slightest hint that present improvements are more a return to French methods than American invention. United States Navy activities in the Mekong, for instance, are being publicized as having been inspired by the Montitor and the Merrimac, two American ships of a completely different war a century ago, rather than by methods successful in the same place against the Viet Minh within the past generation.

U.S. Ignores Assassinations

When evidence increased of a systematic insurgency, as in reports of Hanoi-trained cadres in the Highlands and of assassinations and kidnappings concentrated in strategic provinces south of the Mekong where the Viet Minh had not been strong, the U.S. Mission maintained that the country was too prosperous for an insurgency to survive. United States aid was mostly in the form of consumer goods sold to merchants by the Saigon government, which then spent the proceeds instead of relying on local taxes. The merchants sold the consumer goods in the provinces and peasants bought them, without feeling the slightest gratitude to the United States for not being taxed harder. There was no way of knowing whether the peasantry had gained more from larger peacetime harvests and Diem's mild land reform and rent control laws than had to be paid in rents to absentee landlords. Since no prolonged American contact with rural areas existed until 1962, it was surely cavalier to ignore totally signs of trouble and bury them under claims of South Vietnamese rural "prosperity." The present Administration line, that the North began the insurgency because it was afraid of Diem's popularity, similarly lacks supporting evidence and is grossly deceptive.

The most grotesque American mistake was to conclude that there was "no alternative" to Diem and his family. The original reason for favoring Diem was a sound one: Diem was the best man to lead an anti-Communist coalition. Bao Dai had been discredited by years of association with the French and of high living in Vietnamese and European resorts. Diem had stayed clear of both the French and the Viet Minh, had good connections in the United States, and was a hard worker. In 1953, in a "neutralist" campaign that would be banned today in South Vietnam, brother Nhu organized a party that performed well in the elections held by the French. Unfor-

tunately, Diem did not try to lead a coalition. He established an inefficient dictatorship based on his family and the Can Lao, preventing legal opposition but not providing reforms and local competition against the Viet Cong

In 1960, eighteen leading civilian politicians, including Suu and Huong, the best-known recent civilian Presidential candidates, signed a long manifesto against Diem. ARVN officers, disgusted by Diem's preoccupation with dividing the army rather than by fighting the Viet Cong, attempted coups in 1960 and 1962. Diem's jails were full of political prisoners, many of whom were brutally tortured; 46,000 survivors were released in 1963 and 1964.

Yet U.S. policy decided to reinforce Diem and the Can Lao instead of letting their domestic opponents replace them before Diem could fragment his opposition even further. But after visits by Vice President Johnson (May 1961) and General Taylor (October 1961) and a major speech (June 1962) by Senator Mansfield, one of Diem's original American supporters, calling for a reappraisal, the United States started an approach similar to the use of the Can Lao. Instead of trying to pressure Diem or to allow his enemies to combine him, American civilians and military officers were sent to crucial provinces to "advise" Vietnamese civil servants and ARVN officers, trying to persuade them to work against the system being buttressed by American aid in Saigon by taking precisely those local initiatives which would yield local popularity and which Diem's family would not reward if the individual's full loyalty was doubted in secret Can Lao reports. The hypocrisy and foolishness of such provincial activities in support of a hopeless central government may be symbolized by the American AID official in Quang Nam Province who unknowingly rented his house from a notorious (to Vietnamese neighbors) participant in local torture sessions.

The Southern Lowlands: Start of the Insurgency and the Viet Cong Cadre

The survival of at least one Hoa Hao unit and of elements of the Cao Dai and Binh Xuyen forces, coupled with the weak initial strength provided the Viet Cong by the Viet Minh, make it impossible to be sure of the degree of North Vietnamese control of the insurgency in its early stages. The National Liberation Front (NLF) was not started until December 1960, but even so, according to a May 1966 memo issued by the U.S. Mission in Saigon, survivors of the sects "made up the bulk of the early NLF support, although the alliance was at all times an uneasy one." Yet the December 1961 State Department booklet meant to "inform" Americans and foreigners of "A Threat to the Peace: North Viet-Nam's Effort to Conquer South Viet-Nam" referred to the NLF as "Hanoi's creation" (p. 15) and did not even hint at the participation of non-Communists in their own groups, let alone at their ever having provided "the bulk of early NLF support." The return of Communist cadres to the Highlands in 1957 proves that North Vietnam was involved in the insurgency from its beginnings, but the original degree of Hanoi's control will remain in doubt until a wider range of evidence is publicly available.

The violent start of the insurgency was traced by Bernard Fall from contemporary newspaper reports of assassinations, ambushes, raids, and cells of dissidents. The campaign of violence began in the Mekong Delta, where the Communists were disproportionately weak. The first concentrations of violence (April 1957 to April 1958) were in the areas around Chau Phu and My Tho, presumably establishing a position on the Mekong River where the Cambodian border would provide a convenient sanctuary and preparing to cut off the only roads bringing rice from the Delta and Transbassac to Saigon.

The next pair of Viet Cong targets was immediately to the north and to the south of My Tho, further isolating Saigon from the Delta. In the period between April 1959 and April 1960 Long An Province had about one assassination per month, and there were other deaths in the adjacent parts of Hau Ngia and Kien Tuong Provinces.

South of My Tho, Kien Hoa Province was a crucial target, and captured documents indicated Viet Cong intention to make Kien Hoa its model province for the Delta. Kien Hoa is a cluster of three islands, and their inlets offer many good places for concealed depots, hospitals, and rest camps at the opposite end of the Mekong Delta from Chau Phu. At the same time, like the strip of rubber plantations circling Saigon to the north, Kien Hoa offers an easily taxed cash crop, coconuts. The Catholic militia of the Vinh Long Bishopric had cleared out most of the Viet Minh, but some agents survived and went north in 1954. In early 1958, in areas where the Saigon government had not gained control, some of these agents started returning to their native villages. There was as much violence in Kien Hoa as in Long An in 1959 - 60, about ten assassinations over twelve months. But when an honest military officer was sent by Diem to clean up Kien Hoa, he found far more (1,200) political prisoners in the provincial jail whom the former provincial governor had been trying to extort for their release. This military officer, a former chief of counter-intelligence on the Viet Minh in all of the Southern Lowlands, reopened the road to Saigon. This man's successor also did well until he was transferred in May 1963, but thereafter the situation deteriorated and proved difficult to retrieve after Diem's fall. Today much of Kien Hoa is controlled by the Viet Cong, and parts of it are being bombed.

The Southern Lowlands: Recent Events and U. S. Policy

The Southern Lowlands have been divided since 1964 by the fact that major military operations have been concentrated north of the Mekong River. Few American ground troops, and even fewer North Vietnamese troops or cadres, have been operating south of the Mekong. Most North Vietnamese units have been fighting in the Highlands and along the Coast. Until they drew away American troops from the Saigon area this spring, American operations were concentrated on "search and destroy" missions in Viet Cong base areas in the sparsely populated Plain of Reeds (Kien Tuong Province) and rubber plantation area circling Saigon to the north (Tay Ninh to Phuoc Tuy Province).

Yet the only large secure rural area is south of the Mekong, the Hoa Hao stronghold of An Giang Province. After Diem's fall, the survivors of the four Hoa Hao battalions managed to negotiate with Saigon an agreement whose terms have not been publicized. It is clear, however, that Hoa Hao leaders remain in charge of their province, that the population quickly turns in Viet Cong agitators trying to establish a foothold, and that the province is receiving types of American aid which are possible only when full security is assured, such as electrification and a land survey. Unfortunately, the present An Giang Province (redefined on October 1, 1964, around the time of the agreement) is much smaller than the areas controlled by the Hoa Hao before their conventional defeat and steady harassment by Diem's forces.

In addition to the Hoa Hao, the Cambodian minority is a traditional enemy of the Viet Cong. Kien Giang Province, south of An Giang, has a substantial Cambodian minority and the most successful resettlement of Northern refugees in all of South Vietnam. Not surprisingly, Kien Giang is often mentioned as being more secure than most areas. Two other provinces with large Cambodian minorities are Ba Xuyen and Vinh Binh. Cao Dai and Catholic groups, who once maintained order around Quan Long and in most of the Delta (Vinh Long, Kien Hoa, and Vinh Binh), are no longer mentioned for their local control.

Most of the populous area south of the Mekong River appears to be involved in "live and let live" arrangements. Local holders of power, Viet Cong cadres controlling the villages (there being few local notables because of the predominance of absentee ownership) and ARVN units stationed in the district town (there being few civilian district chiefs), do not challenge each other openly or with violence. The Viet Cong cadres do not

expect to take over the district towns from the ARVN, especially when these towns are protected by artillery and airpower. At the same time, the local ARVN officers, whether in civilian or military posts, do not expect to challenge the Viet Cong seriously in the villages.

The Viet Cong: The Cadre, his Social Role and his Misleading Tactics

Since most violence and struggle movements occurred in the Southern Lowlands, eventually entirely under Viet Cong direction, it is vital to treat separately the basis of Viet Cong activity. This basis is a Communist political and social innovation, the local cadre, and subtle political tactics which make detection of his activity and a response by the legal government very difficult. The Viet Cong cadres are the only effective link between many Vietnamese villages and centralized commands, and they are the strongest such link in Vietnamese history.

The Viet Cong cadre is almost always an ambitious local person who has been trained to live with the people of his village, to seek out those with grievances against Saigon-appointed local officials and against local notables and to provoke incidents which mobilize the peasantry against the government. Land reform, for instance, is not an abstract goal for the cadre and his followers — instead it provides patronage for political power. Landless tenants who join the cause are given plots of absentee landlords and owners of medium-sized plots still living in the village often join the Viet Cong to protect their holdings.

In each village, the Viet Cong cadre starts a series of front organizations which eventually should include every villager. There are Liberation Fronts for farmers, for their wives, for their children, and for old villagers. At first, only a nominal membership fee is requested, but enthusiastic members recruit their neighbors and eventually social pressure forces everyone to join and to participate actively. If a village is hesitant or hostile toward the Viet Cong, the cadre mobilizes greater hostility toward the Saigon government by calling in a Viet Cong military unit from another area and provoking air strikes or artillery fire from nearby ARVN or U.S. forces.

Even in contested villages, the Viet Cong cadre is the most knowledgeable about local affairs. He deputizes children to report on who enters and leaves the village and on what newspapers are read and what radio stations are listened to. As the cadre's control increases, he announces more rules, "requests contributions" (taxes), and recruits troops, and villagers are increasingly careful to obey him.

Thorough investigation of their training and internal messages, together with lengthy interviews with cadres who have come over as individuals through the Chieu Hoy amnesty program, have shown that the Viet Cong cadres assigned below the provincial or district level are not usually ideologically motivated. Just as many Vietnamese learned to speak French as a path to power, without necessarily liking Frenchmen, so many low-level cadres seem to have learned and applied new political methods to take over their native villages without necessarily liking the Communists who trained them. Cadres from middle class backgrounds, who are better educated and perform vital skilled functions, as in propaganda and medicine, may even become inwardly hostile to the Viet Cong command because it mechanically gives preferential promotions to their lower class rivals. The cadre's chief concern is with his new social and political role, as the promoter of non-family social ties and as a new bureaucratic link between the village and the outside world, interpreting commands from the center and communicating village grievances back to it.

Two tactics are crucial to a cadre-based insurgency. The first is the use of terror, which is directed not simply at eliminating enemies but more at manipulating the survivors. Before a man is assassinated or kidnapped, he usually receives a threatening letter listing grievances against him and warning him to change his ways. At the time of an assassination or kidnapping, a list of the offenses for which he is being punished is pinned to his clothing, or posted on a building, or read off to his frightened family and neighbors.

Until the last few years, the Viet Cong had a "Robin Hood" image, gained by killing and publicizing many obviously corrupt officials. As a result, assassinations on false charges of honest and able officials, the insurgency's worst enemies, were sometimes believed and did not provoke the local hostility toward the Viet Cong that an airstrike does against Saigon. Furthermore, not only are Viet Cong methods of violence inherently more selective than those of ARVN and U.S. forces, but the political intelligence of a Viet Cong cadre is much better than that of the typical Vietnamese or American local official on rapid rotation. Because of his better information, the Viet Cong cadre gets more political leverage from his carrots and sticks than our side does. Attacks on the most able men as well as on the most corrupt clearly indicates that Viet Cong cadres are seeking power in their villages and not simply reforms.

The second crucial tactic is that of the "coexistence" village, where the Viet Cong cadre, the village notables, the Saigon-appointed district chief, and local ARVN officer "won't fight" and "live and let live," jockeying for political position without open resort to violence. Once a village's front organizations have started up, a Viet Cong cadre is not supposed to provoke attacks for fear of being shown as unable to defend his people. By day, such villages are supposed to admit joint teams of American medical personnel and Saigon-trained propagandists. These villages all use Saigon government identity cards. In such villages, Viet Cong cadres would encourage participation in Saigon's elections in order to keep all identity cards in good standing, and the cadres would also oppose mutilating ballots which could be traced to their districts.

While this balance of local power is stable, neither the Viet Cong cadres nor the ARVN officers can formalize their tacit arrangement. Viet Cong cadres can get amnesty only as individuals through the Chieu Hoy program, and if a cadre were to bring over his small military force with him, it would be imprisoned for treason or placed under the district ARVN officer, outside of the control of the amnestied cadre and his village. "Coexistence" ARVN officers have enough trouble avoiding taunts that they "won't fight" without trying to suggest to Saigon that power be shared locally. In short, while the cadres and the officers can forestall disruption from their commands by reporting back that all is quiet (but not yet quiet enough to become a Viet Cong base camp or for landlords to return for their rents) and by avoiding violence which would attract attention to their area, they can do nothing constructive to promote their common interests and those of the populations they rule.

Unfortunately, the introduction of foreign troops or advisers disrupts the tacit peace and brings on violent incidents without being able to change the basic division of authority. North Vietnamese units can not capture district towns, and American forces, short of a full counter-insurgency operation, cannot capture the villages. Americans usually cannot provide a direct alternative to the Viet Cong, even if a village's cadre has become unpopular, because mistrust of a return to colonialism is stronger than dislike of the Viet Cong. Under Diem, villagers south of Saigon openly referred to the government as the "My-Diem" regime, the "American-Diem" regime. In one Mekong Delta village where the peasants disliked the Viet Cong, a young ARVN officer began to make good impression last year, and he was warned in time to leave each time the Viet Cong assassination squad visited the village. But when an American was assigned to advise him, the villagers changed their minds, decided that the Viet Cong were right in opposing even good officials from Saigon because they would bring American control, and allowed the next assassination squad to kill the young ARVN officer.

by Duncan Foley

Private Contracts for Public Education

Can we arrest the spreading arteriosclerosis of the big city school bureacracies? Overworked teachers struggle desperately to maintain order in classes of forty uninterested or hostile pupils. The schools in the big cities are becoming places to get out of for almost everyone involved, except the administrators, who fill their lives by alternately proposing and obstructing change. This guarantees a lot of paperwork for them and a lot of frustration for the parents and students who see their main chance in life destroyed.

There is little incentive in a large organization to do better than the minimum. The teacher whose colleagues and superiors are mediocre and complacent with no prospect of a crisis to shake them up quickly finds his way to imitation or despair.

The most effective solvent for complacent mediocricity is competition. The difficulty is in devising a system of competition that can work in the big city schools.

First, why shouldn't there be more than one public system available to each student? In cities as large as New York or Philadelphia there is room for three to five complete systems, each operating its own pattern of neighborhood schools, high schools, and other training facilities. Since each family could choose among the various organizations there would be an immediate and visible sign of success or failure, the number of students each attracted.

But there is the possibility that of three systems all will be equally bad. It is essential that outside organizations be permitted to bid for the provision of education services at every level. If a vigorous market in public education existed (and it would run to many billions of dollars a year), a complacent and mediocre organization would be threatened with extinction of others ready, willing, and able to do better for the same cost. Why shouldn't an organization which is running good schools in Detroit branch out to Chicago or New York?

The way to encourage the development of this kind of market is for big cities to begin contracting out public education to private corporations. The advantages to the public in having private contractors administer public schools are great.

The private contractor is free to use teachers, space, and time in their most efficient combination. The public schools are tied to the standard classroom proportions of one teacher to thirty-five students for forty-five minutes. Surely this formula can't be the best for all students in all subjects. Bright, highly motivated people learn more in some subjects working by themselves with irregular but intense consultation. Perhaps large lectures or television can be effective in teaching science and languages. The cheapest way to prevent teenagers from dropping out may be a month of concentrated attention in very small classes to make up deficiencies. The private contractor is free to experiment, to find the best use of resources, and will know and reveal in his bid the actual cost of preventing one dropout, or teaching one illiterate eleventh-grader to read.

Another gain is the incentive for private, competing producers to do research in education directed toward hard, measurable results. In writing specifications and incentive contracts ($1,000 bonus for every dropout who finally graduates, $500 for every college placement, and so on) school boards could wield immense power in directing the energies of the education industry toward public goals.

The easiest place for school systems to start contracting is in particular programs where results are easily measurable. Remedial reading is one example and vocational job training another. It is easy to see whether someone has learned to read or has gotten a job and to pay the organization that helped him accomplish these things accordingly.

The idea of private organizations running public schools is sure to provoke violent opposition. Critics of proposals along these lines will claim that the important aspects of education are simply *not* measurable and that these aspects, the development of character and citizenship, for example, will inevitably be neglected by a contractor. What can substitute for the comfortable neighborhood school with its strong continuity of teaching staff and close relation to the rest of the child's environment? Won't contract schools rapidly become segregated by race, religion, or intelligence?

A board of education can in its negotiations and specifications enforce standards of integration and openness on the contract schools. It will also find out just how much integration and quality education cost when purchased together.

It is true that character and citizenship are hard to measure. But they are not being taught by the present systems, which are themselves a prime example of selfishness, slovenliness, and cynicism in government. What the slum child learns about government in his public school now is that the government does not care and can't do anything relevant to help anyhow.

The sacredness of the neighborhood school cannot be taken very seriously by anyone who has had any contact with what is actually going on. Locally administered public schools can work in a small town or suburb. This system is failing to achieve acceptable results in the big cities. We must find alternatives if the cities themselves or the ideal of public education are to mean anything fifty years from now.