

Warnings We Should Heed

"A former rather high official in the executive branch recently made a statement to the effect that we are on a collision course with China."

—Rep. Sikes (D. Fla.) in the new Defense Budget hearings before the House Appropriations Committee, p. 375.

"China is prepared. Should the U.S. impose war on China, it can be said with certainty that, once in China, the

U.S. will not be able to pull out, however many men it may send over and whatever weapons it may use, nuclear weapons included. Since the 14 million people of South Vietnam can cope with over 200,000 U.S. troops, the 650 million people of China can undoubtedly cope with 10 million of them."

—Chou En-lai interview with a correspondent for the Pakistani paper DAWN in Peking April 10.

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Behind the Fighting in Hué and Danang

A U.S. Embassy official in Saigon said to me, "Nobody can come out here with an open mind and not have it changed by what he sees." Since most VIPs see only U.S. officials, it is not surprising that their minds are changed in the desired direction. Perhaps mine is closed. Though I listened as sympathetically as I could to officials of quite different views, I must confess that I heard nothing to change it. On the contrary, it seemed to me that the same exercise in self-delusion so many newspapermen have observed in the past was still going on. I cite as example a remark which offers a clue to the current crisis in Hué and Danang. At one of the first backgrounders I attended in Saigon I was startled to hear a briefing officer dismiss the Buddhist student demonstrations. "The students," he said, "don't represent anything."

Tranquillizers as Policy

I thought the remark all the more disturbing because it came from an official who has a reputation for intelligence and candor. It may well be that if you could run the whole population of Saigon through a computer it would turn out few had ever heard of the student protests. Conceivably you might also find that they expressed the most widespread feelings in the country—weariness with the war and antagonism to the presence of so many foreign troops. To dismiss the Buddhist students out of hand as unrepresentative seemed to me very foolish. The students tend to be the most concerned and vocal group in every society. They are the men and women who will soon be governing the country. To decide that they represent nobody is a comforting way to dismiss protest, but a sure way to miscalculate political forces. Admittedly there are students of varying opinion in Saigon: pro-war students and anti-war students, anti-election students and pro-election students, Catholic students and Buddhist students. It is only the latter the briefing officer was downgrading.

These tranquillizing rationalizations become the premises of policy. Ever since the Buddhist demonstrations were sparked by the removal of General Thi, there has been a disposition in the U.S. Embassy not only to dismiss the demonstrators as "just a bunch of Buddhist beatniks" but also to hope the military would disperse them by force. This is the historic delusion that revolutionary movements can be scattered with a whiff of gunpowder. There was disappointment that Ky did

Now They Tell Us

"The pilots would like to see an end to false hopes that bombing by itself could ever end the war."

—Those Bombings in North Vietnam, featured article in Air Force and Space Digest, organ of the Air Force Association, for April 1966.

not put down the Saigon demonstrations by force and that he withdrew his troops from Danang in April after we flew them there for a confrontation with anti-government troops. From several sources I heard not only that Ky was being advised to precipitate a showdown in Danang but also that there were promises of U.S. funds to rebuild the city if his planes had to bomb out the rebels. There was a strong current of disapproval when Ky backed down and promised elections instead. Ky's attack on Danang last week and the equivocal wait-and-see attitude of the White House seem to me quite consistent with this underlying attitude.

The Irrelevance of Ky

At one briefing I heard an officer object when a correspondent's question characterized the South Vietnamese government as a military dictatorship. "There is no military dictatorship here in the European sense," the briefing officer said smoothly, "Ky is not a Salazar." He certainly isn't. The junta of generals which Ky ostensibly heads run no such firm regime. The mercurial and clownish Ky is not to be compared with Europe's oldest and most enduring Fascist dictator. But Portugal's is the kind of clerical authoritarian regime the dominant forces in the U.S. establishment would welcome in South Vietnam. Our No. 1 fear is of elections. An American of vague background I suspected was CIA—"you might say I'm in business," he said—told me the U.S. was afraid if elections were held "the liberals and the uneducated people" might win and "ask us to leave." The U.S. establishment fears even right-wing politicians lest they prove responsive to war weariness. Even those Vietnamese opposed to elections want a more broadly based government. It seemed to me an indication of Ky's unimportance that not a single Vietnamese with whom I talked about the political future even mentioned him; it was as though Ky were irrelevant. The consensus is

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that the country does not have a government in any real sense; the differences are about how to create one, whether by elections or by some form of military-civilian coalition, whether to make peace or to make war. What the U.S. establishment fears is that once representative government is launched, it will be hard to control. What our military men desire is a secure base while they carry on the war; they want no disruptive experiments in democracy. It is here that military needs conflict with political aims. To win the people you have to risk letting them express themselves, and that means risking a government which might negotiate peace.

Like Russia in 1917

The South Vietnamese are already beginning to "vote with their feet." This is the meaning of the rising rate of desertions from South Vietnam's army. At JUSPAO HQ, a comforting rationalization has been found—the soldiers are not deserting to the enemy, they are only going home to their villages because they are tired of the war! But no one recalls that this is how the Russian Army began to melt away in 1917. They didn't join the Germans; they just began to go home. In South Vietnam as in Russia, the soldiers want peace and the peasants want the land. The CIA comforts itself because there are few if any well-known figures in the National Liberation Front. One Vietnamese with whom I discussed this pointed out that few revolutions have been led by men who were well known before they succeeded. How many Russians in 1917 had ever heard of an obscure fanatic who used the name of Lenin in his Swiss hideout? The handful of little known Bolsheviks were able to take power because they acquiesced in soldier desertions and peasant land seizures. This war and South Vietnam can fall apart and into the hands of the NLF in much the same way.

No one can talk with Vietnamese for any length of time without realizing that no outsider, however well intentioned, can solve their problems. A defeated Japan submissively accepted a thoroughgoing land reform and much beneficent social change at American hands. But the Vietnamese are neither defeated nor submissive; they are as stubborn and fanatically determined as the Irish or the Jews. They'll fight us and themselves to exhaustion. Religious, nationalist and Communist passions are contending within them all at once. South Vietnam in one generation is passing through secular, national and social struggles Western Europe was able to spread out over three centuries. And our presence has exacerbated all these tensions. Bitter feeling between Buddhist and Catholic may even now be erupting in a religious civil war. The appointment of General Cao, a Catholic, as the

Needles in A Hay-Stack Dept.

"U.S. Navy and Coast Guard units on Operation Market Time patrols yesterday inspected 439 vessels, and boarded and searched another 568 for a total of 1007. Two junks were held and 16 persons detained for further interrogation."

—US MACV press release, April 17.

new commander of the First Army Corps, will provoke the Buddhists. It is an indication of how little has changed and how little we have learned that this faithful supporter of the Diem dictatorship should have been until now in charge of psychological warfare. While the Catholic community in South Vietnam, especially in Saigon, has been liberalized and split by the fresh winds blowing through the church ever since Pope John, U.S. policy has allied itself with the bitter-enders who still favor military dictatorship.

The CIA and Elections

Behind the scenes one feels that in Vietnam, as in Laos and elsewhere, the military and the CIA pursue their own policies whatever the conflicting directives and contradictory rhetoric from Washington. I believe U.S. influences had a hand in the anti-election agitation of recent weeks. An indicator of this, in my opinion, was the sudden appearance in the political arena of the normally non-political Vietnamese Confederation of Labor. This is one of the tamest of the world's labor federations; it managed quiet well under Diem until his last most paranoid period; it rarely calls strikes. Its long time head, Tran Quoc Buu, has close and friendly relations with the U.S. Embassy which praises him to visitors as a force for democracy. When this force for democracy led his troops into the streets to demonstrate against elections, some Embassy officials in off-the-record comments to newsmen hailed this as a constructive development and asserted that Ky had overestimated the Buddhist demand for elections and made a mistake in giving in to it. Tran Quoc Buu was earlier a bulwark of Brother Nhu's dreaded Can Lao secret police organization. The CIA, in Vietnam as in Germany, has tended to take over much of the leftover secret police apparatus. Tran Quoc Buu, who is sensitive about his Can Lao past, may have steered clear of the CIA but I am sure he would not have demonstrated against elections if he thought the U.S. establishment in South Vietnam was for them.

The military situation is almost as frustrating for the U.S. as the political. The optimism the Americans in Saigon exuded last Fall has completely evaporated. Then, visiting newspapermen, European as well as American, were infected by the exuberant confidence of the U.S. establishment and

It Looks As If The CIA Has Been Hiring

"They [the Americans training the Vietnamese pacification teams] are usually large men with gnarled red faces and bulging midriffs. The cynical American in charge might be a foreman of a construction gang: boots up on the table, cigar mashed between teeth, strings of hyphenated obscenities. In their presence Vietnamese assistants smile uneasily and are clearly none too happy to be told, possibly in fun, that they are lazy sons-of-bitches. . . .

"While the efficiency of the teams in the harsh reality of the contested countryside remains to be seen, there's another

Southern Deputy Sheriffs for Pacification

important aspect to this growing force which is not stressed to visitors. It is that by spreading thousands of these indoctrinated men (and later women) throughout the provinces the Government is creating a formidable political weapon. Elections are said to be approaching. What these cadres tell the peasants could sway the opinions of thousands of potential voters. They could be swayed, for example, against Buddhist extremism and neutralism. Furthermore the cadres will be heavily armed."

—Gavin Young from Saigon in London Observer May 8.

impressed by the swift buildup of U.S. men and bases. The word was that the U.S. war was not to be confused with the French, that our effort was so much greater in quantity as to have become different in quality. The Viet Cong in the path of this steamroller were bound soon to be crushed. Experts as well as novices were taken in, perhaps because they all shared the natural tendency of industrialized peoples to overestimate the material factor in war.

This heady euphoria has vanished. In the U.S. leadership on the spot—civilian and military—there is a sober realization that no quick solutions are in sight and that a long, long war lies ahead. This reflects the failure of the bombings in the North to prevent a steady buildup of the rebel forces in the South, and the success of the Viet Cong in evading the many "search and destroy" operations so flamboyantly launched against them. They have shown a frustrating capacity to evade battle when we seek it and to strike when and where we do not expect it. All our machines, in other words, have failed to convert this from a guerrilla war, with all the advantages that gives the rebel side.

Now Talking of a Ten-Year War

The only optimistic story I have seen since my return, quoting unnamed officials who expect a decisive turn for the better in the war early next year, seemed to emanate from the State Department. On the other hand the Army's Chief of Staff Gen. Harold K. Johnson in a little-noticed speech in St. Louis (UPI in *Washington Daily News*, May 14) said the fighting in South Vietnam would last for 10 more years. That is as good as saying forever.

In Saigon there was talk of putting 1,500,000 men into South Vietnam. It was claimed that with this many men we could start at the Camau peninsula in the south and "sweep the country clean" up to the 17th parallel—probably of people as well as Viet Cong. Judging from Korean war experience, putting 1,500,000 men into South Vietnam would require mobilization of 4,500,000. In Saigon one often hears it said that while we can't lose, we also can't win. But I notice that Hanson Baldwin, in arguing the case for mobilization in *The Reporter* (May 19), broaches a more pessimistic

The Treasurer Was A Busy Man

"Saigon, April 14—Death convict Dang Cao Sach was recently charged with misappropriating 500,000 piastres from the relief funds reserved for flood victims in Central Viet Nam in 1964 it was learned today. Sach was reportedly taken to the Saigon Court Prosecutor's office for a hearing Wednesday on the charges mentioned. Sach had been sentenced to death by the Special Court for embezzlement of 7,500,000 piastres during his ten year tenure as head of the Dalat Treasury. He had appealed for clemency to the Chief of State who has not yet granted or denied it to him." —Saigon Daily News April 15.

possibility than stalemate. He wrote, before the current crisis, that if civil war broke out between Saigon and Hué, or if Ky used force to prevent a Buddhist neutralist government from taking power, the South Vietnamese army might disintegrate. "If this situation were coupled with a strong Vietcong offensive," Baldwin concluded, "U.S. armed forces might well find themselves fighting for their lives."

Like Spain in Cuba

In a fundamental sense there is really nothing new to report from Saigon. The war continues to be based on two ideas, both old and discredited. The first and older, which aroused the U.S. to a high pitch of war fever when practiced by the Spaniards against the Cuban rebels in the 1890's, is to concentrate the population of contested provinces in urban enclaves and "refugee camps" so that the peasants would "no longer be permitted to fight as rebels one day and appear as peaceable citizens the day after. . . . The countryside was then to be cleared of all supplies and the starvation weapon turned against the insurgents." This description of the Spanish "reconcentrado" policy by Walter Millis in *The Martial Spirit*, his study of our war with Spain, applies to our tactics in the Vietnamese war. Henry Cabot Lodge spoke of the "heroic battle of the patriots" against this kind of "cruelty and oppression" but that Lodge was our Ambassador's grandfather and the patriots referred to were Cubans.

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A Former Premier's Trip Arouses Anxiety in Vietnam, But Cool Reception in U.S.

"Last week as the height of the political crisis hit full blast in Central and South Vietnam, two bits of troubling news worried Vietnamese political circles at the highest level. The first had to do with Bao Dai: forgotten since 1955, the ex-Emperor brusquely brought himself back to world attention by a political statement to the Tribune de Genève. He declared himself against the pursuit of the war in South Vietnam. The second was the arrival in the U.S. of ex-Premier Tran Van Huu, who is said to have encountered the Secretary General of the UN and various American political personalities. It is known that M. Tran Van Huu professes a French version of neutralism, favorable to the VC. This point of view has always been rejected by the U.S.A. In spite of this, many fear a change of policy on the part of American leadership because of the troubles still disturbing Central Vietnam and certain anti-American slogans. Perhaps it will be found worthwhile, by an official declaration, to dissipate these rumors about M. Tran Van Huu's trip."

—Page one editorial in *Le Viet Nam Nouveau*, Saigon, April 19, a semi-official mouthpiece (abridged).

"Tran Van Huu, a Premier of South Vietnam in the days of Emperor Bao Dai, suggests that the first move toward peace must come from the U.S. Huu, 70, has lived in Paris the last 7 years. Winding up a month's visit to the U.S. he said, 'I am sure that if the Americans stopped the war, the others would, too. The call to a truce can come only from the mightiest.' Huu said he had spoken to Washington officials last week about a possible truce 'but there hasn't been any echo. I have the impression that peace is not for tomorrow,' he added wryly. 'When we will have burned Viet Nam to ashes, there will not be any conflict.'

"Huu said hostilities should be stopped to prepare a climate for negotiations and the U.S. should negotiate with the Viet Cong's National Liberation Front. 'In a case as hard as this,' he explained, 'we must talk to the worst enemies.' But he said that while some in Washington wanted negotiations, they did not want to hear about Ho Chi Minh, and while they wanted to get peace in the South, they did not want to hear about the NLF."

—AP in *New York Post*, May 6.

The Realities Behind the Honolulu Declaration

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The other, newer idea is that of "*la guerre révolutionnaire*" which the defeated French military worked out after Dien-bienphu and tried unsuccessfully to apply in Algeria. A mixture of counter-terror, totalitarian organization of the population and promises of a "social revolution" is the formula for winning the people from the insurgents, "pacifying" the countryside and smothering the rebellion. The idea is to apply Marxist and Maoist ideas in reverse. But Communism in reverse is Fascism, the use of police state methods, thought control and a one-party system to safeguard the status quo. A briefing officer, explaining to me the "social revolution" promised by the Honolulu Declaration, outlined step by step how the Communists take over and organize a village, and then showed step by step how we plan to imitate them. It never seemed to have occurred to him that imitating Communist methods, even in reverse, was a strange way to build democracy. Our pacification procedure begins with a "census of grievances." This in practice seems to be a method for recruiting informers by intimidation. CIA teams are to interrogate one villager after another in private to spot and weed out VC sympathizers.

McCarthyism Plus Social Welfare

The classic way—at least as old as the Spanish inquisition—to certify one's own orthodoxy in interrogations of this kind is to inform on others. The quality of such information is apt to be so unreliable as to set off a chain reaction of unjust condemnations and intensified resentment. The pacification teams operate under a high-sounding Ministry of Revolutionary Development. Under the surface of the revolutionary verbiage, the formula adds up to McCarthyism plus social welfare measures. It is as if teams of armed McCarthyites with CIA training were sent into the small towns and villages of the United States to weed out Reds, pinkoes and peaceniks. A briefing officer explained to me naively that in training the pacification teams we had been using a large proportion of Vietnamese belonging to the ultra-right Dai Viet and Viet-

Replies Which Strain Our Credibility

Mr. Daniel J. FLOOD (D. Pa.): Are you getting any fall in morale of our bomber pilots and fighter pilots from the Air Force or fleet because you have these top-flight people, and hardware, sacrificing their lives, or endangering their lives, to knock out a couple of 1-ton trucks on a road? I am talking about morale.

Secretary McNAMARA: My answer is no.

—Newly released House Appropriations Committee hearing on the 1967 Defense Dept. Budget, p. 273.

namese Kuomintang parties because we "needed an ideology stronger than democracy" with which to combat Communism! He did not seem to realize the full implications of this confession.

For Revolution Until One Breaks Out

No country has been promised social revolution more often. As early as 1950 the French were saying that pacification depended on winning the hearts and minds of the peasants with social reform. Diem promised a social revolution. So did Gen. Khanh. So did Marshal Ky and Lyndon Johnson. No country talks more of revolution than ours, but none is more counter-revolutionary in practice. In Vietnam as in Latin America, we are allied with the forces which oppose social change because they stand to lose by it. We are always shopping around for gimmicks that sound revolutionary without threatening to disturb the status quo. "Somebody had the idea," a briefing officer told me, "of introducing the concept of People's Capitalism into the pacification program. His proposal was to get the villagers to invest their money in municipal and government bonds." The officer added regretfully that "this proved to be too sophisticated and had to be dropped." I half expected to hear that the same genius was going to convert Viet Cong by giving them stock in Texas Gulf Sulphur.

Next Week: A Visit to Cambodia and How The NLF Sees Negotiation

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