

# Viet View: Little, Late, Negative

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## SAIGON.

President Johnson's order to boost American combat troop strength in South Viet Nam was interpreted here as a means to conventionalize the guerrilla war.

But the address of President Johnson brought little consolation to the Vietnamese in Saigon and the saunch pro-Victory members of the American community.

In general, they viewed the address as too little, too late, too negative.

"President Johnson said we must show the Communists we cannot be defeated and that they cannot win," explained one source close to the highest ranking Vietnamese government officials. "What kind of negativism is that? Nobody is saying that we, the anti-Communists, can and must and should have a policy for victory."

But one American, who has traveled widely in Viet Nam, held the view that "victory" to him was almost impossible.

"Recently, a high-ranking Communist official predicted that before this war was over, there would be 2 million American troops in Viet Nam," he said.

"But the Communist leader was 50 per cent off. It will take 4 million American troops. We'll have to have an American Marine behind every tree in the country to win this war."

One non-American counter-insurgency expert explained, "Yes, we must have American troops—we should have had them a year ago when we caught the first North Vietnamese prisoners. But now is the time Washington should be bringing a competent political apparatus to administer and govern the country. By the time they get ready to do that it will be too late—the Vietnamese government is already on the verge of collapse."

Within South Viet Nam, Communist cadres are escalating the political war by tightening their grip on more and more villages, district towns, provincial capitals and even within Saigon itself.

"The only thing the Communists do not control in the provincial capitals is the traffic," one Western diplomat explained.

A Vietnamese-speaking American explained. "I've visited a lot of the villages that are supposedly government-controlled. I call them the near-empty hamlets. It makes my American bosses mad, but none of the government villages have the number of people in them they should."

Even within Saigon, the simmering, underground political situation is expected to erupt within months.

Within this context, President Johnson's reference to holding free elections in South Viet Nam virtually terrified the anti-Communist Vietnamese.

"If a free election were held in South Viet Nam now, the Communists would win hands down," one said.