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December 27, 1965

SAIGON--The buildup of American combat troops in Vietnam during 1965 produced a visible buildup in anti-American-ism. /Among the Vietnamese population.

One significant, but little-noticed date between the February 7th bombing of North Vietnam and the March 8th arrival of the first American combat units was the February 20th mutiny against commander-in-chief General Nguyen Khanh by his subordinate generals. The net effect of the departure of Khanh was to fragment the anti-Communist power at the Saigon level, while the Viet Cong Communists had partially but dramatically seized control of the country at the village level.

Through his post as commander-in-chief, which was far more important in a wartime situation than the prime minister's position, Khanh had dominated the anti-Communist scene--and had once been acclaimed by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara as America's strongman for Vietnam. But by late 1964, Khanh threw bitter words at American Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor, who demanded political stability, while Khanh was aspiring to the Presidency.

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Twelve days following the bombing of North Vietnam, a "false coup" lead by cross-eyed Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, who was in both American and Vietnamese circles openly acknowledged to be associated with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, channelized the ~~revolt~~^{mutiny} against Khanh. The next day the generals forced Khanh out of his commander-in-chief position--and out of the country. The 600,000-man Vietnamese ~~army~~^{ARMED FORCES} was turned over to a weak commander-in-chief and finally the post was abolished, leaving the Vietnamese ~~army~~^{Armed Forces} virtually leaderless.

Prime Minister Pham ~~Huy~~^N Quat also ran into a disproportionate amount of trouble, and following three months of tenure, called a for support from the Vietnamese generals, who promptly tossed him out of office, in a graceful maneuver that again brought a Vietnamese military junta back into the job of governing the country while it was attempting to defeat ~~the~~^{AN} enemy.

Without the necessary concentration of political power on the anti-Communist side, the Communist subversives could easily exploit the arrival of the first American units--who unfortunately arrived without a solid political-economic social battle plan. The natural instincts of the Vietnamese, who are traditionally xenophobic, were to identify the American troops with their former French colonial masters. But some political-economic guidelines for American troops have eased the situation considerably.

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It was hardly a secret in Saigon, ~~however~~, that all the Vietnamese--including Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat--learned of the ^{DATE OF THE} arrival of the first Marines in March from foreign press announcements made in Saigon and Washington. The psychological fear of the Vietnamese was that they might win the war, but lose their country, as outbursts from officers, students and intellectuals announced "that the Americans were running the whole show."

No sooner did the American troops land in the northern provinces that ^N the medium of exchange became the "Yankee dollar" rather than the piastre, which did little to smother Vietnamese nationalism. Without restrictions on the amount of available dollars, an American private brought with him the purchasing power once held only by Vietnamese generals. Cokes, beers and washbasins were purchased with nickels, dimes and quarters at the village level; in at least one instance, one Vietnamese village chief, backed up by his popular force platoons, attempted to invade the premises of another Vietnamese village chief, backed up by his popular forces, to seize the villagers bankrolls of American dollars at an unfair rate of exchange. Finally, six months following the arrival of the first American units, the American officials abolished the use of the dollar ~~in~~ currency in Vietnam and instituted military scrip which has now become a ~~different~~ another "floating currency."

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The American troops, with an over-abundance of money, quickly became the sole possessors of one of the scarcest items in Vietnam--women. Before, that ~~the~~ chief prerogative had been seized by the Vietnamese army. Few Vietnamese males appreciated the loss of their women--or the fact that illiterate females could earn ~~thru~~ ten times their base pay. Gradually, in any city ~~or~~ or village bordering American units, drugstores, villas, and furniture stores quickly gave way to a great white way of bars and brothels.

The buildup of American forces also brought proportionate demands for more housing, runways, office construction and logistical facilities. The wages of skilled labor, building materials, transportation, set the pace as the Vietnamese economy leaped almost out of bounds. "The Vietnamese economy is in horrific shape and this could ruin the whole campaign against the Viet Cong," one Western diplomat explained recently.

The Viet Cong sabotage of roads had also produced an inflationary spiral on "Vietnamese only" items, such as rice, charcoal and fish sauce. The American economic mission reacted by massive imports of consumer goods to sop up the excess purchasing power--and financed the emergency import of 250,000 tons of rice. While the price of rice dropped in Saigon, in the provinces the rich merchants continued "to charge what the traffic would bear," in ~~the~~ as one American official explained.

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"The more the workers make from the Americans in salary, the more the rich rice merchants charge for the American rice."

~~These~~^O Vietnamese hurt worst by the inflation were, ironically, not the Communists, but the government's own officials and troops, which were paid mostly on a fixed salary.

One incident, perhaps more than any other, exemplifies the resulting anti-American sentiments among the Vietnamese. During a recent official visit to the U.S. Marine enclave city of Da Nang, fatigue-clad Senator Henry Jackson, of the Armed Services Committee, stopped a Vietnamese shoe-shine boy on the street and asked to have their photographs taken together. The little boy replied sharply, "Fuck you, GI. You No. 10. Go Home!" One high-ranking American official with Jackson blanched and replied, "Well, that's pretty much the feeling around here."

In the city of Danang, an average of at least three or four fist-fights a week break out between single GI's and teenage Vietnamese hooligans ^ggangs, popularly known as "cowboys." One American serviceman was reportedly hit over the head and severely knifed; another was beaten up and lay in a back alley for two days. Though Vietnamese shopkeepers saw the body, they did not report it to police authorities, until finally the American military police loca~~ed~~^{ated} it.

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By the ~~and~~ beginning of 1966, it became apparent that the Buddhist bonzes, as well as the Viet Cong Communists, could easily exploit the Vietnamese nationalism and ~~anti~~ anti-Americanism. One incident which the Buddhists choose to magnify occurred when the American Marines fired two tank rifles rounds into a Buddhist pagoda from which they claim a Viet Cong sniper was firing at them. The word immediately spread among Vietnamese peasants that the Marines had maliciously fired into the Buddhist pagoda and these stories were fueled by other accusations that the Marines had deliberately broken a Buddhist statue and strewn human excreta around the pagoda. Similar accusations are known to be swimming further south in the area of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, the net effect of which is to increase the anti-American tensions and then to channel them. The Buddhists, widely considered to be penetrated by pro-neutralist^S/and pro-Communists, had previously successfully toppled two key fulcrums of power within Vietnam--President Ngo Dinh Diem in November, 1963, and General Khanh from the Presidency in August, 1964. The key question arising at the beginning of 1966 was whether or not the Buddhist political organization would choose to tangle with American tactical units.

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"If the Buddhist priests do turn anti-American, the war will change into a new dimension which we can't even yet imagine," one source explained.

Hence, at the beginning of 1966, the rural portion of Vietnam ^{WAS} ~~was~~ half-conquered by the Viet Cong and the urban portion was ^{IN F} state of semi-insurrection. The great paradox was ~~that~~ that as more American troops were dispatched here for military progress, the resulting anti-Americanism had made more difficult the political-economic ^{REQUIREMENTS} ~~task~~ for victory.

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