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Joey

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Saigon—Mrs. Nguyen Du Thieu gracefully hopped into her slightly battered Renault, and carefully ~~examined~~ straightened her fragile pink ao dai before pushing the starter.

"This car is a wreck," he mumbled absentmindedly. "Thang and I were going to buy a new one, but decided against it. Everything we do depends on the situation."

The young, pink housewife and mother of three rambled on, eager to have an attentive ear to listen to her ~~max~~ troubles.

"We "We were going to

"Six months ago, we were going to re-decorate our house and build another wing," she continued as the stu auto lurched up to a modest French villa. "Then the first coup came. We waited a couple of months ~~z~~ and were again going to start construction. Then the second coup came. ~~max~~ Then we gave up—we're not going to do anything because of the situation."

(More)



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crisis—2

She parked the car and entered her neat living room furnished with an odd mixture of French sofas and Vietnamese lacquerware.

Turning on lazy overhead fan, she continued.

"My morale is drov dropping by the minute," she explained, sipping a hot jasmine tea her maid had handed her. "It doesn't show up in military statist statistics, but the Communists who were in jail durer under Dien (President Ngo Dinh Dien, killed in November November coup d'etat) are now coming back to Saigon. They're everywhere. They're working with the agitating the students—I know, because my sister goes to school. They're in business and labor. And they're high up in the government.

"I was talking a a to a close friend I've known for ten years—he's now in the government and high up too. He said something and a light flashed through my mind. I thought he has that tendency too—My God, he's a Communist too. How long and I trust no one; we talk to no one; we do nothing."

She nervously ~~was~~ fidgeted with her chipped red fingernail polish fingernail and with a poignant mixture of frustration and despair continued:

"We don't want to live with the Communists but we know the government won't give us exit permits to leave. I often wonder why we were we born Vietnamese? Why couldn't we have been born Swiss or American or something else?"

(Here)



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Crisis--3

The articulate, well-educated housewife feared what the Vietnamese call the "invisible hands" of the pro-Communists in the urban centers and the potential danger of their assassinating at the right moment staunchly anti-Communist persons.

But she, continued emphasized, in the provinces, the danger is different--armed Communist guerrilla attack--but no less deadly.

"A friend of mine lives in a large Catholic village fifty miles north of Saigon," she said. "Two weeks ago the Viet Cong (Communist) guerrillas came to her village and told the people to move out because they were going to attack. My friend just brought her elderly mother to live in Saigon."

The park housewife represents a small minority of persons--mostly Catholic--who are committed in fighting the Communist guerrillas. They know they will be persecuted under a Communist regime. They are generally strongly pro-American and show an intense concern with developments in Viet Nam, though the Pace Pathet Lao advance in Laos is so remote to concern them. They have enough problems at home.

In the potpourri of views about the situation in E South East Asia, ~~many~~ two other views are more prevalent. A second stream of thinking springs from those persons who have consistently said the Laos neutrality agreements would fold up and the Communist get guerrillas in South Viet Nam would continue to get stronger. They see no crisis at this time.

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Crisis—4

The third viewpoint comes from what the Vietnamese call the "black people"—the peasants, cyc trishaw-drivers and "people of the street." Largely uninformed, and illiterate, they are accustomed to living with from crisis to crisis and their life of labor blue-collar labor would not be much substantially different under Communist regime.

In the Western sense of logic, the young Catholic housewife who fears a Communist takeover should be an avid supporter of the government of prime minister General Nguyen Khanh. The 36-year-old general, however, lacks an amazing amazingly lacks a figment of support from the urban masses, though perhaps the illiterate class have the fewest impressions. Concurrently there is a growing articulation of anti-American sentiment. General Khanh is openly criticized—~~even~~ by pro-American elements—of being "an American puppet", which ~~reinforces~~ only reinforces Communist propaganda. Some charge him with a "lack of political sense," others blame him for corruption in his government "which is three times worse than under Diem." Even civilians working within his government are antagonistic against the predominant authority resting in the hands of military officers. General Khanh has attempted to mediate between all factions & disputes—between the Catholics and the Buddhists, between various political parties, between factions within his own military junta—but has compromised with all, satisfied none and gained the support of few. From these fragmentary reasons, perhaps the core of the criticism is that him in this critical time of crisis, he is not leading this government.

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crisis—5

"If you I had the time and you gave me a piece of clay, I could make a lovely vase," explained an anti-Communist businessman. "But we don't have the time to make mistakes—and you've given me a piece of xml. That's General Khanh. American can't make him a leader, and we can't dump him until Washington decides to. We blame ~~himself~~ the Americans for giving us this chunk of xml."

In the countryside, the government is not General Khanh, but the province and district chiefs he appoints. After whirlwind changes of these provincial leaders during the two coups, the attitude of the rural population is difficult to know.

Americans in Asia see the Indo-China situation as wacky, but sadly so.

"Cambodia is the most neutralist country here spouting the Peking line...but it has no Communists, except those in jail," explained one long-time American resident here. "Then "Everyone thinks Laos is—or was—a neutralist coalition, but it isn't. It's three separate governments with belligerent co-existence. In th And the most anti-Communist country—Viet Nam—has the most Communists, but we can't find them. They're like ghosts."

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crisis—6

Most Americans in Asia genuinely accept the State Department line that the fight is against Chinese Communist imperialism, an argument which has missed even the most patriotic Vietnamese. Vietnamese think view the Viet Cong Communist guerrillas as another political party, but one operating with guns.

The Americans in Asia, however, are far more anti-French than the official American government line. They note that while the Communists have consistently "nibble up ground and then sit back to talk about it" the one important change in this year's crisis is the less open loss of French support in Indo-China. Last fall, Gen. de Gaulle's neutralist proposal directly contradicted American policy for Viet Nam and within the past weeks the French in Laos, who are military, culturally and politically important there, have shifted to the Chinese Communist proposals for solving the current crisis. The French here openly "excoriatingly criticize" the Americans, saying that the West will lose the Indo-China area. The Americans contend the French believe the West will lose simply because the French wa

"The French think we'll lose," explained an American businessman, "simply because they want us to lose so badly. If they couldn't defeat the Communists here, they refuse to believe we can. It's all a matter of national prestige."

Many of the attitudes in Asia revolve around an interpretation of time. The French and Communists believe the West and the nationalists are

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crisis—7

running out of time.

Some Americans believe the West is "simply buying time—especially in Laos. We're not winning, but we haven't lost."

A Western diplomat says confidently, "Time is neutral. It's on the side which utilized it."

But the fatalistic Orientals have learned to survive thousands of years by simply ignoring time.