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SAIGON, VIETNAM--Vietnamese commanders and their American advisors have totally failed in the first major joint government effort in recent months to get the floundering pacification program back on the right track.

"This whole program is as impossible as trying to drive a car with square wheels," one high-ranking Vietnamese official explained in disgust after the major set-back. "The Vietnamese Armed Forces since the Manila Conference (Oct. 24-26) are supposed to be responsible for the pacification program--but none of the Vietnamese commanders in the field are interested in it and the Vietnamese leaders in Saigon are just interested in political intrigue or getting rich."

High-placed officials, speaking privately, ~~vi~~ believe that if the pacification program fails--and it is currently failing in their view--American will be ~~the~~ bogged down in a "can't win" war in Vietnam.

"The ~~R~~ pacification program will be the basis on which American foreign policy about Vietnam will be made in the ~~next~~ next seven months," one high-ranking official predicted. "If there are not substantial gains made in the pacification program, Washington will be tempted to seek an accommodation with the ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Communists."

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The major setback for the American and Vietnamese governments in the pacification field came ten days after the Manila Conference, Vietnamese sources revealed today. Then, on November seventh, the Vietnamese and American governments, ~~after~~ following a month of joint ~~governmental~~ military planning, were to hold the first two-week training course for an assigned enrollment of two hundred key Vietnamese staff officers and commanders from all over Vietnam. The purpose was to initiate a program to revamp the Vietnamese armed forces from an offensive conventional army into one that would pacify the countryside against Viet Cong guerrillas, ~~to~~ eradicate the Viet Cong political cells in each village and ~~to~~ regain the confidence of the rural population living in the rear of the American-screened areas. American combat troops ~~were to take~~ ^{HAVE TAKEN} almost exclusive control of the large-scale offensive operations against Communist "hard-hat" main force units.

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However, the high-ranking trainees were supposed to arrive in Saigon on Saturday, November 5--which is a notorious bad luck day in Vietnam, as is the twenty third day of any lunar month of the Vietnamese calendar. It is a day in which one should stay near his home or hometown, according to Vietnamese superstition. That's what many of the delegates did.

The four Vietnamese corps commanders, ten division commanders and the general reserve forces commanders were sent invitations to come to their inauguration of the course--but none of them ~~showed~~ showed up. Even worse, each division commander was supposed to send majors and colonels to under-go the two-week training; then they would ~~not~~ re-train and re-orient the battalions out in the field for pacification work. However, the division commanders sent only third lieutenants, lieutenants and a handful of captains and majors "who are the useless type," one Vietnamese officer explained. Two hundred high-ranking delegates were scheduled to come to the training course--but only 150 low-ranking ones appeared.

In addition, the ministries in Saigon were supposed to send high-ranking officers to be the instructors and lecturers for the training course--but again, only third ~~lieute~~ lieutenants were sent, according to reliable Vietnamese sources.

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After such a "bad luck" beginning, the two-week training course was temporarily cancelled and rescheduled for December 1, a slightly more auspicious lunar day.

"We sent alot of nasty cables to the Vietnamese corps commanders," one senior Vietnamese military source explained. "The Vietnamese generals at the High Command were furious that they didn't obey orders. And the American generals and pacification experts were in a state of shock. They couldn't believe the Vietnamese had so little interest in the pacification program, even though they had been warned beforehand."

"By July we are supposed to have 275,000 Vietnamese regular troops trained for pacification work," the source said with exasperation. "But how can we do it if they send us only third lieutenants to do the training!"

Many Vietnamese officers have voiced resentment that the Vietnamese armed forces on the whole will be used for pacification, rather than offensive combat operations, which they feel makes the Vietnamese an auxiliary force to the American combat troops, much as the Vietnamese were of secondary importance to the French troops during the French Indo-China War twenty years ago.