

# America's Frozen Policy—Vital Political Power Unused

*The dramatic military actions taken by the United States and Vietnamese against the Communists in South Viet Nam have no grand political counterpart. As a result, U. S. strategy is seen solely as anti-Communist rather than pro-something. As one Western military expert put it: "Nothing negative has ever prevailed over something positive." The Herald Tribune's Beverly Deepe explains these failures of U. S. policymakers in the second of a six-part series on Viet Nam.*

By Beverly Deepe  
A Special Correspondent

SAIGON.

United States policy in South Viet Nam is frozen in a negative posture that concentrates on military victory while failing to produce the sort of dramatic political strategy that would make such victory possible.

This, at least, is the opinion of highly placed sources in Saigon who have watched the American involvement here grow steadily for more than a decade.

In their view, the U. S. attitude is essentially anti-Communist rather than pro-something. The overwhelming impression is that the American policymakers are attempting "to stem the tide of Communist aggression" or "to teach Hanoi a lesson." But this implies a political status quo in a country that is changing in its post-colonial development, and is, indeed, fighting for change.

"Nothing negative has ever prevailed over something positive," the Western military expert commented. "One of the most frequently asked questions by Vietnamese captains and majors on the battlefield is 'What are we fighting for?' as they look at the political turmoil in their rear area at Saigon."

## 'HOLLOW WORDS'

While some Americans in Saigon pay lip service to the principles of freedom and democracy, these are, as one American government employee noted, "hollow words that mean little in Asia."

A Western diplomat argues that the Western concepts of democracy and freedom have never been simplified and

codified as have the Communist ideology. There are no American primers for democracy as there are Communist primers for revolution.

"One cannot understand these American principles unless he has reaped the benefits of them, or seen them first hand," the diplomat explained. Hence, he said, the principles in which Americans believe must be translated, demonstrated and visualized for the Vietnamese—by the Vietnamese government—and this has yet to be done.

The main political problem during the past decade seems to have been to realize there is a political problem—and to act positively.

The American policymakers, however, view the battle in Viet Nam as principally, if not solely, a military operation against armed Communist guerrillas. They are operating dramatically on one front while the Communists are operating on six fronts—political, economic, social, cultural, psychological and military, all integrated into one powerful stream of warfare.

"Suppose you lose your billfold in a dark place," one Vietnamese provincial official explained. "But you insist on looking for it where there is light because it is easier. Well, you are now looking for the Communists in the light place—the military field—but you never, never find them all—they are also where you refuse to look."

## 'ECONOMIC AID'

During the past decade, \$1.1 billion was spent on the U. S. Military Assistance Program for weapons, tanks and ammunition for the Vietnamese armed forces. In addition, \$2.1 billion was spent in Viet Nam from American economic aid funds. But 75 per cent of the economic aid was for the purpose of paying expenses of the national army through the commercial import program.

These figures exclude the salaries of American servicemen and government officials, and all their operating costs, as well as gasoline, parts and ammunition for American units.

There is also the fact that the Vietnamese national army was built to counter a conventional invasion instead of a guerrilla war. Once the "slow-motion invasion" began a year ago, the army was slow in reacting.

There is no grand, dramatic political strategy for winning the political war in South Viet Nam comparable to the dramatic military actions.

The bombing raids on North Viet Nam have not and cannot win the political war within the South. But without them the war could never have been won—or contained—because of the sustained influx of North Vietnamese troops, weapons, and the much more significant political leadership cadre. If the raids have not won the war,

however, they have in effect won time—they have provided the time to act politically.

Sources in Saigon now hope for a dynamic political maneuver to reverse the adverse political tide. They feel the military operations then would not be considered an end in themselves, as is now the case, but the means to an end—an honest, efficient government, a land reform program for the peasants, a smashing medical-educational program that would lift the nation economically and politically into the 20th century.

These sources argue that the elaborate and effective military battle plans have in effect given the nation time to formulate and implement a massive blueprint for the political-economic-social development of Viet Nam. Instead of Viet Nam being simply a military battleground, it could also become a political showplace, they maintain.

"But we lack any political imagination," one young American government employee said. "We are fighting against revolution. How can we expect to win? It's like advocating the murder of mother."

One Western ambassador says as an example that it was "politically inadmissible" that 200,000 refugees in the central part of the country—victims of an autumn flood, Communist terror and friendly bombing raids—were not made a symbol of non-Communist revolution by the Vietnamese government. "They are given charity rice and propaganda lectures," he said. "They should be put in factories and apartment houses to show the world the benefits of fleeing the Communist side. Some anti-Communist refugees are not given help by the government, and return to Viet Cong areas."

Another source criticized the American officials for not forcing the Diem regime years ago to establish "centers of prosperity" in which the Vietnamese people and the outside world could see the results of the American presence.

## WOULD INTRODUCE TV

A high-ranking Western official suggests that television should have been widely introduced in Viet Nam to relay government propaganda to the villages, to educate the children and to show adult films on better farming methods.

More than three years ago, private Japanese companies made such proposals for this, and the Japanese government has tentatively offered technical assistance and funds. A television station would cost \$500,000.

But successive Vietnamese governments have postponed a decision on this project and American authorities appear cool to the idea. Economic planners are more interested in Japan's contribution to a \$9 million bridge for the Mekong River.

The U. S. has political power in Viet Nam, but chooses not to use it. Yet at this time the Saigon regime is too weak to act with political dynamism and effectiveness.

"We have the power to take names and to punish," one American explained. "But we don't do it. We are still timorous about interfering in a nation's internal affairs."

A Western ambassador agreed. "The first basic fault in the system," he said, "is you are too respectful of Viet Namese independence, so you do not interfere in making decisions on great issues—and in my opinion you should—while instead you are very particular, you pester them on small things of almost no importance. This creates the wrong impression and does not get the results. Your instructions should be more articulate but fewer."

American generals, colonels and captains admit they do not talk politics with their Vietnamese military counterparts; and no other American agency has been given the responsibility of cementing all the fighting Vietnamese political factions together.

This is in contrast to the Viet Cong and the Communist apparatus—a guerrilla is first and foremost a political cadre, and after that a soldier. The Communist political cadre—perhaps with only the rank of sergeant—decides what villages will be attacked and the military commander, with a rank of major, follows his orders.

## COMMUNISM FIRST

The Viet Cong military apparatus is of a secondary, supporting nature to the Communist political machine. Hence American efforts to defeat the guerrillas still have not defeated the political subversive. American advisers in the provinces admit that even when the Communist guerrillas are defeated militarily, the Communist political cell system in the village is rarely destroyed.

The appearance of new French faces on the main street of Saigon, the arrival of increasing number of pro-neutralist Vietnamese from Paris, and the release of thousands of pro-neutralist and pro-Communist Vietnamese from prison within the last 13 months is more important in the subversive field than the introduction of American combat Marines and paratroopers is in the counter-guerrilla military field.

"With the amount of money you are spending in the military field," one Vietnamese major said, "you could buy all the land from the landowners and give it to the peasants. You could pave Viet Nam with gold."

A 155-mm. howitzer shell costs \$70; a 500-pound general purpose bomb costs \$180—and tons of them are expended daily and nightly in Viet Nam.

Tomorrow: Corruption in South Viet Nam.