



—Associated Press

A Vietnamese peasant clasps a plastic spoon while awaiting a hot meal issued by U. S. paratroopers in Phong Dien district, near Hue.

Working Our Way Out

By DONALD KIRK

Asia Correspondent of The Star

SAIGON—It is the Indian summer of the Vietnam war.

Roads are open, rice and pigs are moving to the markets, the country is stirring with almost a sense of relief not experienced since the period of relative peace in the middle and late 1950s.

The relief extends from the char-filled offices of the American command to sandbagged district compounds, from cluttered, ill-lit ministries in Saigon to bare-walled village offices and homes.

"We're working ourselves out of our jobs," says a young American Foreign Service officer advising a district chief in Vinh Long, a province in the upper Mekong Delta. "By next year they won't even need advisers here."

"A few years ago a small group of leaders in Saigon exercised all the power of the government," said a senior American official in Saigon. "Today we're beginning to involve the mass of the population."

"Before if you came here you had only the appearance of security," said President Nguyen Van Thieu, on a visit to a village in Ba Xuyen, another delta province. "You could not go by

The United States, as President Nixon noted in his Nov. 3 address, is yielding "primary responsibility" for the war to the Saigon government. This is the first of four articles on problems encountered in fulfilling that goal.

road to this village, and the chief did not stay here overnight."

"Many people can go back to their fields and make a living," said a merchant near Can Tho, the largest town in the delta. "For a long time they had to stay in the towns because the Viet Cong were in the countryside where they lived."

THE REMARKS of both Vietnamese and Americans reflect the state of the struggle nearly a year after President Nixon assumed office and began his policy of turning "primary responsibility" for the war over to the South Vietnamese.

Nixon and other senior officials have often

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U.S. Working Its Way Out of Vietnam War

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and the low level of conflict as evidence of "progress" in carrying out this policy, but it is probably too early to reach such a judgment.

The real test will come when the Communists can challenge the South Vietnamese government authority without nearly so much interference from American soldiers and Marines on the ground.

The relative calm in the war, broken by what Americans describe as "high points" of enemy activity, has provided the Nixon administration with a rationale for withdrawing some 60,000 troops since last summer. And earlier this month, Nixon announced plans to pull out 50,000 more troops by April 15.

U.S. forces, totaling more than 540,000 men only six months ago, probably will have fallen to 200,000 or 300,000 by the end of 1970.

Officials in Saigon caution against hasty withdrawals but often argue the United States no longer "needs" the vast military establishment it maintained at the height of the fighting in 1967 and 1968.

THE CASUALTY FIGURES alone prove the war is not what it was a year or two ago. The latest weekly death toll for Americans, for instance, was down to 66, the second-lowest week in 1969.

It is far from clear, however, to what extent the low level of conflict reflects current enemy weakness or merely the desire of Communist leaders to exploit Nixon's policy.

The Communists may have decided to postpone a new offensive as a tactic until the President was irrevocably committed to pulling out the bulk of U.S. forces.

The level of fighting began to drop after the enemy's last real offensive in February and March of this year. The emphasis then shifted from military to civilian programs as North Vietnamese regiments and divisions gradually fell back to base areas along the Cambodian border.

For the first time in the war, in fact, military and civilian officials began to think Communist strength might have fallen so markedly as to all but offset the possibility of a full-scale offensive.

Analysts believe the Communists are building up for a major series of attacks but doubt if they have yet recovered from the losses suffered in the Tet and May offensives of 1968.

In assessing the changing nature of the war, perhaps the most controversial question is whether or not the United States should ever have introduced large-scale forces here in the first place.

CIVILIAN OFFICIALS often argue that skillfully planned and executed pacification programs might have achieved the same level of relative calm that now prevails over much of the country.

Senior military officers say, how-

ever, that American infantry and airpower provided the "security" that the pacification program needed for survival.

The American military effort has focused on two critical areas, the northern tier of the country below the Demilitarized Zone dividing the two Vietnams, and the provinces around Saigon.

The 3rd Marine Division, deployed beneath the DMZ, left Vietnam this year, but the Army's 101st Airborne Division remains in the northern region.

The South Vietnamese 1st Division, highly rated by American commanders, attempts to cover the northern two provinces while the 1st Marine Division still pursues North Vietnamese troops south and west of Da Nang.

The Army's 1st Air Cavalry Division was rushed to the northern provinces during the Tet offensive of 1968, participated in the fighting around Hue and Khe Sanh and then was sent to the jungle regions northwest of Saigon.

SINCE THEN the "CAV" has played perhaps the most important role of four American army divisions largely responsible for frustrating repeated enemy attempts at building up for attacks on Saigon similar to those in 1968.

The enemy this year infiltrated sapper squads and fired rockets into Saigon from time to time but never presented a serious threat.

One reason for the success of American troops, particularly in the past year or so, has been their ability to pick up signs of relatively minor enemy activity and move quickly in small units.

The combination of helicopter combat assaults and highly accurate artillery and air strikes had discouraged Communist leaders from committing more of their depleted forces while the Americans are still in the country.

Despite Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird's remark that American troops are now engaged in "protective reaction," field commanders contend they are pursuing the enemy as aggressively as ever.

The only difference, they insist, is that enemy troops are not nearly so numerous as a year ago and tend to move in squads or platoons rather than companies or battalions.

THE COMMUNISTS have made clear, however, that the war is far from over.

In the delta, three north Vietnamese regiments, the equivalent of a division, have infiltrated into swamps and mountain base areas. Intelligence analysts believe Hanoi plans a major campaign against three South Vietnamese army divisions, previously confronted only with local Viet Cong insurgents.

In the highlands along the Cambodian border, enemy regiments threaten special forces camps and may well

attempt to drive the South Vietnamese to defensive positions around cities and towns once the United States has withdrawn more troops.

Perhaps the most significant indicator of these intentions is the presence of four North Vietnamese divisions anywhere from 50 to 150 miles from Saigon.

These divisions, the 1st, 5th, 7th and 9th, withdrew most of their forces to base areas in Cambodia earlier this year, but elements of them have returned in the past two or three months.

THE ENEMY poses the same threat from the highlands to the Demilitarized Zone.

Forces across the border, in northeastern Cambodia, southern Laos or North Vietnam itself, already have indicated their plans to resume the fighting in the next year. North Vietnamese troops holed up in the hills and mountains overlooking the coastal lowlands are certain to contest the South Vietnamese after American withdrawal.

The Communists have revealed their basic strategy in a morass of orders, reports and propaganda documents picked up by American and South Vietnamese troops.

"In parallel with diplomatic activities, urgently strengthen political and military forces," said a 98-page resolution adopted in July at the ninth conference of Viet Cong leaders. "Develop strategic offensives in the three strategic areas, the cities, the rural and mountain areas."

"Frustrate the enemy's plans to end the war in a superior position and his plans to 'de-Americanize' the war," the resolution went on. "We must carry on attacks to force the United States to withdraw its troops and cause a collapse of the puppet army."

THE VIET CONG strategy, moreover, called for timing military offensives with a political campaign to wear down the prestige of the Saigon government and replace it with a Communist-dominated coalition.

Besides preparing for new military offensives in the midst of the "lull" in the fighting, the enemy stubbornly advanced its position in the Paris peace talks and carefully supported a Vietnamese "third force" political movement as a possible bridge to coalition—and Communist rule.

One aim is to isolate the Thieu government from leftists, anti-Communist intellectuals and professional men who espoused some form of "reconciliation" to end the fighting.

At the same time, the resolution that emanated from the ninth conference was a significant indication of the weaknesses and fears that had pervaded much of the Communist movement since the disastrous losses suffered in the 1968 offensives.

The Viet Cong leaders did not proclaim "victory," as they had in the past. They did not overemphasize the

theme of "popular uprising," as they had during their costly military campaigns.

Communist strategists appeared to realize that "victory," if it were ever to be achieved, would require much more time, and perhaps a more subtle approach, than they had anticipated at the beginning of 1968.

THE GREATEST SURPRISE of the year was that American and South Vietnamese officials were able to extend their influence over areas once virtually "controlled" by the Viet Cong before the Communists quite realized what had happened.

It was months after the "accelerated pacification" program of late 1968, in which civilian and military forces quickly introduced government influence into selected villages throughout the country, that the Communists began to indicate alarm over their declining power.

"Apparently they thought 'accelerated pacification' was just another name for one of those big American programs that didn't mean much," said an official, speculating on why the enemy was so slow to respond to the new threat. "We expected him to try to frustrate this program before it even got off the ground."

But by the end of November, more than a year after the "accelerated pacification" program had been launched, officials estimated that nine-tenths of the population of South Vietnam was under government control as opposed to less than 60 percent after the Tet offensive.

Much of the allied success may be illusory. The figures may not reflect real government "control" so much as enemy "weakness"—the inability of the Viet Cong to mount its own political and military campaigns and contest government forces in many areas.

THERE WAS NO QUESTION, however, that Viet Cong leaders, when they convened for their ninth conference in the summer, had finally awakened to the dangers of a program that threatened to undo a generation of Communist planning.

"Frustrate the enemy's pacification plan and significantly disorganize the enemy's administrative organizations in rural areas one area at a time," enjoined the resolution of the conference. "Control and liberate a large part of the rural areas. Make every effort to place the enemy's important installations under our control."

The wording of the resolution was perhaps the greatest compliment the Communists had ever paid any American or South Vietnamese program.

It was, at the same time, a warning of the crisis that lay ahead before either side could claim "victory" in the struggle for permanent control of South Vietnam.

Tomorrow: "Vietnamization" Poses Test of Nixon Policy.

The Real Meaning of Vietnamization

By DONALD KIRK

Asia Correspondent of The Star

SAIGON—Key American officials here responded with dismay to official statements from Washington on the "replacement" of U.S. combat forces by South Vietnamese troops.

"It's most unfortunate the term 'replacement' ever crept into the lexicon of the war," said one knowledgeable source. "It's not a term ever used out here. There was never any concept of a 'one-for-one replacement' of one force by another."

The problem of "replacing" American with South Vietnamese units epitomizes the whole question of whether or not the United States can hope for success in Vietnam under the policy outlined by President Nixon.

After more than four years of large-scale American military involvement here, officials believe nine-tenths of the country's 17.4 million citizens live in areas "controlled" by Saigon.

The basic fear, however, is that the enemy might soon undermine government influence after the bulk of American combat troops have left Vietnam, possibly by 1970.



—Associated Press

South Vietnam recruits go through basic training near Saigon.

As it proceeds with that withdrawal, the United States is undertaking an ambitious effort to train, equip and motivate a full-scale military establishment in the midst of war.

The Americans call the program

"Vietnamization," a term to which President Nguyen Van Thieu objects on the grounds the Vietnamese have been fighting the war for more than 20 years.

The United States, as President Nixon noted in his Nov. 3 address, is yielding "primary responsibility" for the war to the Saigon government. This is the second of four articles on problems encountered in fulfilling that goal.

The real aim of the program, in fact, is not "Vietnamization."

But total "Americanization" of forces often hindered by corrupt leaders, inexperienced younger officers and lack of both the will and the means to win.

SOME OF THE BEST American divisions—the 3rd Marine, the 101st Airborne, the 1st Air Cavalry, among others—have been largely responsible in the past year and a half for turning back a series of enemy offensives and reducing the threat to populated areas to the lowest level of the war.

Since the withdrawal of the 3rd Marine Division from along the Demilitarized Zone in November, the enemy has carefully begun to rebuild the guerrilla infrastructure on which it based its main force campaigns.

Continued on Page A-3, Col. 1

The Changing War: Real Meaning of Vietnamization

Continued From Page A-1

Enemy squads, once blocked by aggressive Marine ambushes, patrols, air and artillery fire, are free again to traverse jungle regions where previously they risked heavy casualties.

In the upper Mekong Delta region, the enemy has slipped North Vietnamese into Viet Cong units some 40 miles west of My Tho and is slowly raising the tempo of the fighting in rice paddies and tree lines patrolled until last summer by two brigades of the U.S. 9th Division.

"Vietnamese troops can't walk as fast or go as far as the Americans," observed the captain of a company of South Vietnam's 7th Division after leading his men through rice paddies in waist-deep water. "It is impossible to expect we could do as much as the Americans."

The size and strength of the average South Vietnamese soldier is secondary, however, in the over-all comparison between American and South Vietnamese forces. The basic point advanced by American and South Vietnamese officers is that the latter lack the training and material to "replace" departing American units.

THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE. observers believe, won't be able to hold remote firebases as tenaciously as the Americans or move as swiftly and efficiently on combat assaults by helicopter into enemy areas.

Against this negative picture, however, officers predict South Vietnamese troops still will be able to defend "populated centers" and "main lines of communication." The hope is they can hold them long enough to discourage the enemy and maintain at least a stalemate in the war.

"We're attempting to develop a force with the capability of dealing with an enemy that poses the same threat as now," said a senior American official. "With U.S. air and logistical backup, we think improving Vietnamese units can take on the forces the enemy has in the country at the moment or in its base areas across the border."

The new strength of the South Vietnamese lies to a large extent in numbers — quantity as opposed to quality.

The South Vietnamese armed forces now total more than a million men,



South Vietnamese Popular Forces soldiers return to their village after a fight.

—Associated Press

375,000 in the regular army, more than 400,000 in the regional and popular forces, another 100,000 or so in the national police.

In the most important phase of "Vietnamization"—the effort to turn quantity into quality—the armed forces this year are sending more than 400,000 men through everything from basic infantry training to officers candidates' school to English language study. The number of trainees in Vietnam for the next two years will almost equal that in the American Army.

ONE PROBLEM, according to Americans, is that the Vietnamese "were under French influence for so

long they still use training methods obsolete by our standards." They lecture "hour after hour," said an adviser, "instead of letting a man take a weapon apart, put it together again and fire it."

And many of the instructors lack battlefield experience.

"The army just doesn't have the reservoir of experienced officers to spare for training," an adviser said. "Often we depend on aspirants—sub-lieutenants just out of officers' candidate schools—to do the job."

But the greatest single difficulty, in the opinion of many advisers, has been the absence of a sense of urgency. "It's apparent they're getting a

little bit concerned now that the Americans are pulling out their troops," an American noted, "but they'll still lock up their headquarters at noon on Saturday. It's no secret that many of the top officers look after outside interests such as real estate and import-export."

ENLISTED MEN desert at the rate of 3 percent or 4 percent a month, sometimes so they can re-enlist in units nearer their homes or delay their entry into combat by going through another training cycle.

In visits to South Vietnamese units however, a reporter senses the same combination of zeal and weakness that

often baffles American advisers despite their more or less ritual praise of their Vietnamese counterparts.

"There are two categories of soldiers, the draftees and the volunteers," observed Col. Tran Ba Di, commander of the 9th Division, while directing his troops against two enemy regiments on the fringes of the U Minh area an almost impenetrable swamp-forest on the southwestern coast.

"And there are two kinds of draftees, those who report on their own and those who must be sought out," he went on. "The enlistees and draftees who report on their own have good morale. The others require surveillance."

Both kinds of soldier were on a recent patrol through rice paddies southwest of Vi Thanh, the deep-delta forward headquarters of Col. Di's division. A reporter accompanied the troops.

SOME OF THEM complained they had been out in the field "too long," but the battalion kept moving despite snipers and mines that killed five men and wounded several others in a day of off-and-on fighting.

The South Vietnamese soldiers sometimes lack the low-level leadership or over-all direction to pursue the enemy as hard as they should.

"Command leadership at the company and platoon level is always a problem," said Col. Di. "It's a problem, but it's not insuperable. You just need time."

Senior American advisers are more confident now than six months or a year ago of the fighting capabilities of regular South Vietnamese divisions but admit their over-all record is "extremely spotty." They're teaming them with U.S. units for training in hopes they can benefit.

Advisers admit the Americans are likely to go on the riskiest phases of an operation while South Vietnamese provide "blocking forces" or patrol relatively secure areas. The South Vietnamese also depend on Americans to coordinate air power and artillery.

BEYOND THE LEVEL of field operations and tactics, perhaps the greatest single weakness in the South Vietnamese military establishment has been that of logistics—relaying supplies from docks and airports to storage areas to the field.

South Vietnam counts on American planes to ferry supplies almost as much as it needs them to provide close air support in the field. The U.S. Air Force flies 70 percent of transport missions for South Vietnamese men and material.

In briefings for correspondents, American officials indicate the South Vietnamese will some day undertake all their own logistics, fly most of their own combat missions, man their own communications network and fire their own artillery.

Senior advisers admit, however, they do not envision the day when South Vietnam can bear the burden entirely on its own.

"We've got to keep at least 100,000 men here for some time," said an American experienced in both the military and civilian phases of the advisory effort. "We'll have to keep advisers here more or less permanently."

Critics of the American effort question if the United States should place such emphasis on highly sophisticated forms of warfare. American commanders themselves concede the matter of who "wins" or "loses" in the next few years may depend not so much on the regular divisions as on the regional and popular force units assigned to each town and village.

THE REASON for this belief is that the regional and popular forces generally live near where they're assigned and, in a direct sense, are fighting for their own homes and communities. The question is whether or not they can wipe out small Viet Cong units who attempt to gain control or influence over the population.

Senior officials invariably claim "tremendous improvement" in these forces, but field reports on them vary widely. The deciding factor, as in the case of the regular units, often is that of leadership. Some commanders are reluctant to send troops more than a mile or so from their outposts.

"The enemy strategy may be to wait a year or two until after we've gone," said an official intimately familiar with the Vietnamization process.

"But if we're able to hold the line here and move ahead in pacification for another year or two, the complexion might change. The government might be in a position of strength that would undermine the enemy threat.

Tomorrow: The Pacification Program.

Pacification Is Vital for Saigon

By DONALD KIRK

Asia Correspondent of The Star

HOA DA, South Vietnam—This fishing district on the central coast 130 miles northeast of Saigon could hardly be categorized as a "pacification showcase."

One American adviser was transferred for failure to get along with the district chief. Another was skinned alive by some Viet Cong whom he had approached on a sand dune under the impression they were "friendly" South Vietnamese troops. A third was killed in an ambush.

The province chief, in the provincial capital of Phan Thiet, on the coast 15 miles to the west, contented himself with signing papers and attending ceremonies.

His underlings in the district spent most of the time in their compounds and rarely visited units or projects outside the main villages.

And, according to the province senior adviser, Daniel Leaty, the Viet Cong "have a damn good infrastructure" here.

"The attitude of some officials is negative. They don't seem to grasp their duties and responsibilities. They need strong leadership," said Leaty, a veteran of nearly eight years in Vietnam.

THE PROBLEM of Hoa Da district—and the province as a whole—seems typical of some of those con-



—Associated Press

Boys play in a South Vietnamese refugee village.

fronting the pacification program in almost all South Vietnamese towns and villages.

The only difference, perhaps, was

one of degree. Officials claimed Hoa Da was below the standards of most other districts. Hoa Da, they said, might be comparable to the situation

The United States, as President Nixon noted in his Nov. 3 address, is yielding "primary responsibility" for the war to the Saigon government. This is the third of four articles on problems encountered in fulfilling that goal.

in a typical Vietnamese district after the Tet and May offensive in 1968.

Since then, the United States has engaged in one of the most intensive pacification efforts in history. For the first time, in fact, senior American military officers reluctantly admit this aspect of the war might prove more important than combat operations.

The reason for this change in attitude is that American commanders feel they have no chance of winning a "military victory" as long as the United States is committed to a policy of withdrawal of its combat forces.

The hope for anti-Communist forces in Vietnam appears to lie in strengthening the will and resources of the populated regions before the enemy again is able to mount a large-scale military offensive.

The pacification program, inaugurated as an integral part of the American military command in 1967, combines political and military, civilian and guerrilla efforts in a concentrated drive to put 99 percent of the population of South Vietnam under control

Continued on Page A-5, Col. 1

"rallied" to the government side under the Open Arms program this year as opposed to 18,171 in 1968 and 27,178 in 1967.

• The number of those classified as refugees has declined from 1.4 million early this year to 500,000. Approximately 400,000 were dropped from the refugee rolls after they returned to

fled.

Some 350,000 of those no longer considered refugees still live in the same refugee camps—merely renamed "resettlement areas." And thousands of others stay in towns with relatives or friends but would gladly return to their old homes if they thought they could live in them safely.

A Vietnamese peasant walks to his fields.

—Associated Press

The most bitter disappointment—and the sharpest sign of latent enemy strength—has been the lack of success of the "Phoenix" program, an effort at coordinating all intelligence

activities on both the provincial and district levels.

AMERICANS CLAIM the program has "neutralized"—killed, captured or

out of the one million piaster government has allotted each local construction."

On the negative side, adv that village funds often are small dams, storage rooms and that benefit only an "in-group" chants and officials—or the deliberately misappropriated spent at all.

The Changing War: Pacification Seen Vital to Saigon

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of the government before American combat troops have withdrawn.

"The regular military units have to keep the government in such a position that the enemy cannot win a military victory," said a senior official in the vast American pacification program called CORDS or Civil Operations for Revolutionary Development Support.

"That means the enemy must wage a war of protraction," he went on.

AMERICAN OFFICIALS admit, perhaps more frankly than they ever have, the problem of pacification, but they seem more hopeful now than a year ago of the program's eventual success.

They cite an array of statistics to support this point:

- The People's Self-Defense Force, a civilian militia organization, has grown from almost nothing to nearly 3 million members, half of whom have received a week or so of training. Almost 400,000 of them are armed with cast-off weapons, ranging from shotguns to carbines.

- The regional and popular forces, full-time territorial troops, now total nearly 500,000 men, up 200,000 from before the Tet 1968 offensive.

- More than 40,000 enemy operatives, most of them low-level guerrillas, porters, messengers and the like, have "rallied" to the government side under the Open Arms program this year as opposed to 18,171 in 1968 and 27,178 in 1967.

- The number of those classified as refugees has declined from 1.4 million early this year to 500,000. Approximately 400,000 were dropped from the refugee rolls after they returned to

their homes once rendered uninhabitable by war.

- Nine-tenths of the country's villages and hamlets have held elections for chiefs and councils. An election was a prerequisite for a village to receive a fund of a million piasters—roughly \$7,000—for investing on its own in local community projects.

No responsible American official, however, would deny that the facts behind these statistics were sometimes disillusioning.

ADVISERS CITE countless cases in which self-defense force members have vanished at the approach of the enemy. These part-time troops, ranging from teen-agers to old men, are improving, they say, but the main value of the program is more political than military.

Regional and popular forces still are lax at setting up ambushes at night or thoroughly patrolling their areas. Advisers here reported one case in which an RF patrol had killed several guerrillas but another in which RF soldiers had run away in the face of what they thought was a larger enemy force.

Enemy "ralliers" to the government side rarely are important figures in the Viet Cong organization. They generally "rally" after the government has established some degree of control or influence and the Red leaders have fled.

Some 350,000 of those no longer considered refugees still live in the same refugee camps—merely renamed "resettlement areas." And thousands of others stay in towns with relatives or friends but would gladly return to their old homes if they thought they could live in them safely.



—Associated Press

A Vietnamese peasant walks to his fields.

The most bitter disappointment—and the sharpest sign of latent enemy strength—has been the lack of success of the "Phoenix" program, an effort at coordinating all intelligence

activities on both the provincial and district levels.

AMERICANS CLAIM the program has "neutralized"—killed, captured or

persuaded to defect—some 16,000 enemy agents.

But intelligence analysts doubt if the program has substantially damaged the top of the VC "infrastructure" on which the enemy bases its efforts. They estimate the manpower of this "infrastructure" at approximately 75,000.

The inadequacies of Phoenix are manifest in this district, where the Viet Cong have long maintained an effective network even in the populated "secure" areas.

"The people actually are very uncooperative in reporting enemy activity," said a lieutenant in charge of advising the District Intelligence Coordinating Center. "In incidents where the VC come right into a village it's hard to get any information."

Even in Hoa Da, however, officials saw hopeful signs.

Military assistance teams were training RF and PF troops on the use of M16 rifles. Roads, although not secure at night, were generally open in the daytime. An American could wander unarmed through the main fishing village of small shops and homes.

ON A RIDE through the twisting roads of one of Hoa Da's hamlets, advisers pointed to a long low wall protecting a row of houses from a canal leading into the sea.

"This place was just a junkyard beside the stream," said one of the advisers. "The villagers built this wall out of the one million piasters the government has allotted each village for local construction."

On the negative side, advisers note that village funds often are spent on small dams, storage rooms and the like that benefit only an "in-group" of merchants and officials—or the funds are deliberately misappropriated or not spent at all.

One difficulty here, as in almost every other district in the country, is communicating the aims of the government to the people.

The Vietnamese Information Service, a government agency designed to spread propaganda, functions sporadically or not at all in many areas.

"Information officials don't go to the villages for very long," explained an American charged with studying overall problems in CORDS.

"They talk on loudspeakers for a few minutes and then leave," he said. "There's no follow-up. It's the same problem you have in other programs of relating the central government to the countryside."

THE FLAWS in the Phoenix and information programs to some degree epitomize the basic weakness of the entire pacification effort.

"It is all much too thin and far-spread," said an American who has lived here a number of years. "You get the feeling one good crisis could wipe it out."

Pacification officials hope that by stressing village development they can solidify the gains made since the Tet offensive.

The emphasis on the village is a belated effort at persuading the farmers to contest Viet Cong influence without direct support from remote, often corrupted, officials in Saigon or some provincial capital.

"The object is not just to build 'things,' such as dams and schools, but to build a community," explained the deputy American ambassador, William E. Colby, a former CIA agent in charge of the over-all pacification effort.

"The war is about people. The more people you get, the more likely you are to win."

Tomorrow: Politics—Talk of "Coalition" and "Tet"

Thieu Faces Political Challenge

By DONALD KIRK
Asia Correspondent of The Star

SAIGON —The catchwords of "coalition" and "neutrality" today dominate the language of Vietnamese politics as never before in the course of the war.

"If a coalition rises in Saigon, the country will be Communist in six months," President Nguyen Van Thieu says.

"And if South Vietnam becomes neutralist, North Vietnam will dominate us within a year," he added. "Therefore, we of the majority cannot let the minorities lead us to commit suicide."

In a society fragmented for decades among widely differing political and religious groupings, the will of the majority may be impossible to determine. Professional men in Saigon and peasants in the countryside often give the impression they support neither Thieu nor the Communists but simply want "peace."

It is to appeal to this sentiment that politicians and religious leaders, some of them obviously far to the left, are proclaiming their support of a "third force" between the extremes of the Saigon regime and the Viet Cong.

THE RISE of the "third force" presents Thieu with his most severe political challenge since his election in



An elderly woman casts her ballot in Vietnam's general election.

1967. The question is whether or not his non-Communist opponents, ranging from inflexible leftists to vacillating political opportunists, may somehow force

his downfall before the next regular election in 1971.

On the answer to this question may hinge the success or failure of the

The United States, as President Nixon noted in his Nov. 3 address, is yielding "primary responsibility" for the war to the Saigon government. This is the last of four articles on problems encountered in fulfilling that goal.

American effort to turn over "responsibility" for the war to the Saigon government.

If Thieu falls, his successors may well want to compromise with the enemy and reject the American alliance on which Saigon now depends.

One irony of the "third force" movement is that some of its leaders hope eventually to gain the support of American policymakers anxious to find a "way out" of Vietnam.

The feeling here is that President Nixon might abandon all enthusiasm for the Thieu regime if it appeared unable to defeat the Communists or make any real "progress" after the withdrawal of American forces.

The Nixon administration, in this view, might insist on a major move toward "reconciliation" sometime during the 1970 congressional campaigns.

THE UNITED STATES could undermine Thieu by pressuring him to acquiesce to either a cease-fire or a

Continued on Page A-5, Col. 1

enslave the country."

The An Quang Pagoda provides the spiritual and political inspiration for a movement that encompasses former generals, students, politicians — even members of the National Assembly and government ministries supposedly controlled by Thieu's allies.

The most outspoken among An Quang politicians is an attorney, Tran Ngoc Lieng, whose program for South Vietnam's future closely resembles the propaganda line of Hanoi and the National Liberation Front.

would head a council of advisers, but gradually it became clear neither Thieu nor Minh had any intention of cooperating with the other. Minh conferred with An Quang leaders and other politicians noted for their opposition to Thieu's policies.

"I was a military adviser to President Diem," Minh told reporters at a reception held by Sen. Don in October. "I don't want to go through that again."

THE MERE PRESENCE of Minh in

A graduate of St. Cyr Military Academy in France, Don speaks French more naturally than Vietnamese. He was, in fact, born in France, the son of a French-educated physician.

A relationship with Big Minh could offset the frequent charge that Don was a Francophile opportunist who wanted only to gain power for himself. Some of Minh's prestige as a "true nationalist," Don apparently hopes, will rub off on him.

At the same time, Don appealed for

the "once honored policy of blind alignment to any one bloc by small and developing countries."

MINH WAS NOT certain how closely he wanted to identify with Don, but he told reporters that he thought the "majority of the population" remained "uncommitted" between the "Communist bloc" and the "free world."

Minh suggested the government determine the "will of the people" by a

politicians and hangers-on. Thieu's troubles were by his decree of Oct. 23 in range of "austerity" tax 100 percent increase in the line.

The taxes resulted in percent to 100 percent rice and other commodities who had never heard of complained, as they alv the Saigon government and "starving" them.

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ND HIS OWN dent has not been g political support Democratic So Thieu formed earl five organizatio ing the interests se Catholics, volutionaries" o some of them n rties that fough pwwer in the 1 s to the offices o reveal they are re. Their staffs a they are ineffect for an odd assort

The Changing War: Thieu Faces a Political Challenge

Continued From Page A-1
... election, both of which would
... Communists and leftists to im-
... their military and political posi-
... tions.

As long as Ellsworth Bunker re-
mains the American ambassador, how-
ever, analysts doubt strongly if the
United States would undertake this pol-
icy. The 75-year-old ambassador has
generally opposed suggestions for com-
promise and sympathized with the posi-
tion of Thieu and other Saigon leaders.

Vietnamese officials and politicians
trust the word of the ambassador but
predict he may return home soon for
"reasons of health." His departure, af-
ter nearly three years in Saigon, might
well prove a turning point in American
relations with the present government.

In the campaign to force Thieu out
of power, dissident monks, laymen and
students have emerged after three
years of police-enforced quiescence
since the bloody Buddhist uprisings of
the spring of 1966.

The strategy of the monks, head-
quartered at the An Quang Pagoda in
the Chinese quarter of Saigon, has been
to put Thieu in a position in which he
would risk more opposition by suppress-
ing their views than by letting them talk
freely.

THE MONKS do not criticize the
president by name but claim they are
"working for peace" despite the "new
imperialists" who want "foreigners to
enslave the country."

The An Quang Pagoda provides the
spiritual and political inspiration for a
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trolled by Thieu's allies.

The most outspoken among An Quang
politicians is an attorney, Tran Ngoc
Lieng, whose program for South Viet-
nam's future closely resembles the
propaganda line of Hanoi and the Na-
tional Liberation Front.

"A genuine reconciliation should in-
clude an immediate cease-fire," said a
statement issued by the Progressive
Nationalist Force, which Lieng founded
in June. "We call for the establishment
of a government acceptable to all sides,
withdrawal of all externally forced
troops and a neutral foreign policy."

Since the Communists have rejected
any possibility of a coalition that in-
cludes Thieu or Vice President Nguyen
Cao Ky, the act of establishing a gov-
ernment "acceptable to all sides" would
first require Thieu's resignation or
ouster from office. Lieng does not deny
that he espouses this goal.

THE MAIN HOPE of An Quang
strategists is to ally with national fig-
ures who might persuade Thieu to "step
aside" in a showdown.

This ambition accounts in part for the
curious relationship between An Quang
and two of Vietnam's most famous per-
sonalities, Gen. Duong Van (Big) Minh
and Sen. Tran Van Don, a retired lieu-
tenant general.

Big Minh, stocky, bluff, often smil-
ing, led the 1963 coup against the dicta-
tor Ngo Dinh Diem and then headed a
military junta for three months until he
was overthrown and exiled to Thailand
by another general, Nguyen Khanh.

In a gesture that American diplo-
mats believed would enhance the
chances for political unity, Thieu per-
mitted Minh to return from Thailand in
late 1968.

The talk for months was that Minh
would head a council of advisers, but
gradually it became clear neither Thieu
nor Minh had any intention of cooperat-
ing with the other. Minh conferred with
An Quang leaders and other politicians
noted for their opposition to Thieu's
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"I was a military adviser to Presi-
dent Diem," Minh told reporters at a
reception held by Sen. Don in October.
"I don't want to go through that again."

THE MERE PRESENCE of Minh in



—United Press International

GEN. DUONG VAN (BIG) MINH

Don's villa seemed to confirm suspi-
cions that the pair were allying with
each other as well as with An Quang
monks. For Don, who conspired in
Diem's overthrow, the advantages of
such an alliance were obvious.

A graduate of St. Cyr Military
Academy in France, Don speaks French
more naturally than Vietnamese. He
was, in fact, born in France, the son of
a French-educated physician.

A relationship with Big Minh could
offset the frequent charge that Don was
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only to gain power for himself. Some of
Minh's prestige as a "true nationalist,"
Don apparently hopes, will rub off on
him.

At the same time, Don appealed for

An Quang support by declaring the fu-
ture of Vietnam was "neither left nor
right but just between the two worlds"
of capitalism and communism.

He borrowed the term "third force"
to describe this concept and criticized
the "once honored policy of blind align-
ment to any one bloc by small and
developing countries."

MINH WAS NOT certain how close-
ly he wanted to identify with Don, but
he told reporters that he thought the
"majority of the population" remained
"uncommitted" between the "Commu-
nist bloc" and the "free world."

Minh suggested the government de-
termine the "will of the people" by a

"popular convention," convened by na-
tionwide referendum. Otherwise, asked
Minh, "how could we know if the people
want Thieu to withdraw or not?"

Confronted by the eroding effect of
Minh's influence, Thieu has attempted
to tighten his control over his govern-
ment and has campaigned against those
who advocate neutralism or other
changes in national policy.

He shrewdly solidified his position
by a cabinet shakeup last summer in
which he appointed the powerful minis-
ter of interior, Gen. Tran Thien Khiem,
as prime minister in place of the popu-
lar but ineffective Tran Van Huong.

American diplomats had hoped the
"reshuffle" would "broaden the base"
of the government, but it had exactly
the opposite effect. It narrowed — but
strengthened and unified — the circle
around the president.

BEYOND HIS OWN government,
the president has not been successful at
organizing political support.

The Democratic Socialist Front,
which Thieu formed early in 1969, con-
sists of five organizations ostensibly
representing the interests of millions of
Vietnamese Catholics, "nationalists"
and "revolutionaries" of one sort or
another, some of them members of po-
litical parties that fought the Commu-
nists for power in the 1930s and 1940s.

Visits to the offices of these organi-
zations reveal they are "fronts" and
little more. Their staffs admit they lack
funds. They are ineffective except as
forums for an odd assortment of minor
politicians and hangers-on.

Thieu's troubles were compounded
by his decree of Oct. 23 imposing a wide
range of "austerity" taxes, including a
100 percent increase in the rate on gaso-
line.

The taxes resulted in increases of 20
percent to 100 percent in the price of
rice and other commodities. Peasants
who had never heard of the president
complained, as they always have, that
the Saigon government was "robbing"
and "starving" them.

THIEU'S OPPONENTS, ranging
from Gen. Minh to the An Quang pago-
da to the Viet Cong, turned the "auster-
ity" taxes into an excuse for fresh criti-
cism.

The taxes resulted in only a slight
increase in government revenue since
the value of the Vietnamese piastre
promptly plunged to a record low value
on the "free market."

The "austerity" decree alone proba-
bly will not ruin Thieu, but it contribut-
ed to a general atmosphere of displea-
sure with his leadership during the criti-
cal period of withdrawal of American
combat forces and fresh challenges by
the enemy.

In the midst of these problems, his
only sure allies apparently are northern
Catholic refugees, approximately 1.5
million in number.

"We can never forgive those who
live on nationalist territory and worship
Communist ghosts," said one Catholic
leader, demanding prosecution of three
National Assembly deputies Thieu
charged as being pro-Communist.

"These neutralists are stupid," said
Thieu in one of his speeches. "They are
helping the other side in hopes of gain-
ing high posts promised by the Commu-
nists."

The president's assessment of the
ambitions of some of his enemies seems
accurate. The question is whether or not
he can survive until the next presiden-
tial campaign and fight them in a legiti-
mate political contest.

"He's got the guns, the ammunition
and the resources," said an American
official. "He should have enough to pre-
vent a coup against him."

But then there's a corollary ques-
tion: What if the Communists win a
significant military victory in 1970, dis-
credit the armed forces — and induce
certain military commanders as well as
civilians to want to compromise?

On the answers to these questions
rests the political future of South Viet-
nam in 1970.

Continuing Progress In Viet Pacification

By DONALD KIRK

Asia Correspondent of The Star

CAN THO, South Vietnam—The body, shrouded in black pajamas and streaked with blood, lay beside the pot-holed road, evidence of an abortive Communist effort at setting a mine on the main artery from Saigon through the Mekong Delta.

"Death to the enemies of the nation," said the black-lettered sign in Vietnamese on a white sheet stretched over the chest. "Death to those who destroy our roads."

It was the rawest form of propaganda, seeking to impress on the populace the new strength of the government in the heart of the delta, the home of a third of Vietnam's population of more than 17 million.

A squad of Popular Force soldiers had ambushed the Viet Cong guerrilla the night before as he was attempting to lay the mine on the road from Vinh Long to this regional center, headquarters for South Vietnamese and American efforts at "pacifying" the delta.

The killing symbolized the nature of the struggle for the richest rice-growing region in all Vietnam, North or South.

Main force enemy battalions supplemented by regular North Vietnamese regiments, remain in distant swamps and mountains, but the real war for the delta has broken down into a low-level conflict of isolated skirmishes, political proselyting and propaganda.

There seems little question that South Vietnamese officials—and their American advisers—are ahead.

"All that bothers me is the myth of invincibility of the VC has not been destroyed in people's minds," said an American adviser who arrived in My Tho, 50 miles southwest of Saigon, shortly after almost half the town's buildings were wiped out in the fighting in the 1968 Tet offensive. "There is a little more confidence, but not the confidence I would like to see."

"It's easy to tell the GVN (Government of Vietnam) is picking up strength," the American went on. "All 78 villages in the province held elections this year for a village chief and council. We go day after day without hearing gunfire."

Some Irony

The assurance of Americans in My Tho was reflected in every other delta province. Almost all Vietnamese and American officials reported more progress in "pacifying" the countryside than anyone had expected after the demoralizing period of the 1968 offensives.

"I'm astonished at how far we've

gone," said Lt. Col. Roland Tausch, senior adviser at Vinh Lon, the province between My Tho and Can Tho.

The irony is that Tausch, as an adviser to local troops in 1963, had told Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara that "the situation was so bad militarily we wouldn't have the means to do the job." The secretary listened politely, said Tausch, but accepted "the more optimistic views presented at briefings in Saigon."

In those days, Tausch said, the VC controlled about 70 percent of the people south of the Bassac, the upper branch of the Mekong River that passes by Vinh Long and My Tho.

"Now the opposite is true," he added, "except that the government probably controls more than 80 percent."

Roads Are Opened

In Vinh Long, he said, the number of "VC hamlets had fallen from 70 to 4 since I came here last year." In the past few months government troops have opened roads to district centers in the eastern fringes of the province for the first time since before the Tet offensive.

Senior Americans in Can Tho, led by John Vann, in charge of the pacification advisory effort for the region, estimate half the Viet Cong leadership has been broken or destroyed in the 16 delta provinces.

"The situation was badly deteriorating before the Tet offensive," said Vann, often a sharp critic of American policy in Vietnam. "But Tet antagonized much of the population against them. Last year was the worst the VC had ever had."

After the Tet and May offensives of 1968, in the view of many observers, "the real question was who could get to the countryside first."

Officials here believe the government controls or influences at least 5 million persons in the delta—some 2.5 million more than it did in February 1968, the month of the Tet offensive. The VC, the officials say, control only 300,000 persons as opposed to 2 million at that time.

"There's no question the enemy can make limited gains," said Vann, "but whenever he sticks his head out he gets shot at."

Officials are not especially alarmed about the arrival in recent months of two North Vietnamese regiments, one of them now in the U Minh forest on the southwestern coast of Camau peninsula and the other entrenched in caves in the Seven Sisters Mountains region along the Cambodian border.

"They may send in two or three North Vietnamese divisions," said

Vann. "Previously the Communists fought the war in the delta entirely with local guerrillas. The introduction of North Vietnamese is an admission of VC failure."

American claimed the North Vietnamese had been unable to win any support or sympathy from local farmers. "They were isolated," said one American. "North Vietnam will never give up its objectives," the American went on, "but it will eventually find the cost of sending troops down here and fighting South Vietnamese units too heavy to keep up. I see a gradually diminished level of fighting, though never a real end of it."

The problems the North Vietnamese might encounter in a prolonged delta campaign are perhaps most obvious in An Giang, a province dominated for years by the Hoa Hao, a militant anti-Communist Buddhist sect whose followers also fought the French colonialists and the government of the late dictator Ngo Dinh Diem.

"The Hoa Hao morale would be strong enough to hold up under any attack," claimed Maj. Nguyen Minh Tam, a district chief who let the Hoa Hao against both Communist and government troops in the 1950s. "All we need are the weapons and the money."

The state of "pacification" in An Giang has not improved markedly since 1968, mainly because the province was essentially "pacified" at that time and hardly affected by the Tet offensive.

Observers believe the only way the Communists could bring An Giang to their side would be through a wholesale terror campaign.

The influence of the Hoa Haos, often an embarrassment to government officials who still are not always able to control them, extends to Chau Doc, the neighboring province bordering Cambodia.

North Vietnamese troops, crossing into Chau Doc, avoided populated regions and hid in the "Seven Sisters," a range of seven mountains traversing the Vietnamese-Cambodian frontier.

The legendary toughness of the Hoa Hao hardly typifies the attitude of the average delta peasant, but it does indicate the virtual impossibility of complete Communist victory even if a Communist-dominated coalition government were to emerge in Saigon.

Communists Weak

The Communists at present are so weak they cannot maintain themselves in strongholds once barely contested by the government.

The most obvious example is the



—Associated Press

Vietnamese villagers rebuilding an outpost in the Mekong Delta as a part of the accelerated pacification program.

southernmost province of An Xuyen, whose swamps and forests still provide base areas for Communist troops.

"Until a year ago this town was an armed fortress," said the senior adviser, Lt. Col. Donald Sawyer, in the provincial capital of Ca Mau. "The government controlled only one-tenth of the land and not much more of the population."

It is now possible to go by canal, the most common form of transportation, to almost all the populated areas and to drive north on Route 4, the main highway of the delta, from Ca Mau to Saigon. Government troops have returned to three of four district towns in An Xuyen abandoned during the worst period of Viet Cong "rule."

"The VC can collect taxes in the eastern part of the province where there's no government," said Saw-

yer. "You don't get rid of the VC infrastructure overnight." But half of An Xuyen's 18 villages were secure enough this year to hold elections.

Against this picture of progress in the delta observers still emphasize the skepticism of the majority of peasants regarding the Saigon regime.

"You get the impression they don't want the VC to rule them, but they don't like the government either," explained an American who has traveled extensively through the region. "You ask a farmer what he wants most, and almost inevitably he'll answer, 'peace.'"

A general complaint among farmers at the moment is spiraling inflation, exacerbated by a new set of "austerity" taxes imposed by President Nguyen Van Thieu. The price of rice has risen between 20

percent and 50 percent on the retail market, and the cost of some commodities, such as tools, clothing and the like, has more than doubled.

Officials hope eventually to counterbalance the effects of the taxes by vast increases in the production of rice as a result of both military security and the introduction of new strains of "miracle rice," less tasty but capable of growing much faster than local varieties.

Another problem, which the government shows no signs of conquering, is that of corruption. In the towns shopkeepers and soldiers talk freely about the thievery of American-supplied tin roofing, cement and other material, later sold at exorbitant rates.

Equally prevalent is bribery in granting licenses to merchants and traders to do business.

Americans tend to minimize the importance of these problems.

"The key difference is that province and district officials now have definite goals to attain despite all the corruption and nepotism," said a senior American adviser. "They have to keep a government presence in the hamlets, hold local elections and keep their troops out at night. For the first time it's not just a question of going through the motions on paper."

"The attitude of the Vietnamese peasant—not officials—is the key issue in stopping the invaders from the North," the American added. "Military and economic security are the most important factors. We're doing better than anyone a year ago had a right to expect in providing what the peasant needs and wants."

Southeast Asia's Future Marked by Uncertainty

By DONALD KIRK
Star Staff Writer

THE SUNDAY STAR
Washington, D. C., January 11, 1970

C-3

BANGKOK — The struggle for Southeast Asia, like the war in Vietnam, enters the new decade in a stage of transition and uncertainty. None of the nine Southeast Asian powers, from the sprawling island nation of Indonesia to the south to the war-racked Indo-Chinese states of Laos and South Vietnam, appears in immediate danger of "falling to communism," but none seems wholly confident of its own or the region's political or military future.

Suharto, the general who replaced the leftist dictator Sukarno

Donald Kirk has just completed 2½ years as The Star's Asia correspondent and is going on leave to write a book. This is his appraisal of the situation in Southeast Asia at the beginning of the new decade.

in Indonesia three years ago, summarized the doubts of all the region's leaders in a New Year's address in which he observed there would, in the coming year, be a "shift of military powers in Asia, especially in Vietnam."

"Whether we like it or not," said Suharto, in the matter-of-fact, almost shy style he adopts on public occasions, this shift "should be estimated" and "forces us to step up our alertness and national endurance on the basis of our independent and active foreign policy."

Suharto's words epitomized the desire of Southeast Asian governments to build up their defenses against incipient Communist revolt and veer away from dependence on the United States or other Western nations.

"We have come out in favor of withdrawing the American forces," said Thanat Khoman, the outspoken foreign minister of Thailand, America's strongest ally in the region. "This is a confirmation of our policy of self-reliance, of not calling on foreign forces to fight Communist activity and Communist attacks."

Surprisingly Strong

The political-military situations in the Southeast Asian nations vary widely, but they are bound together by the common theme of Communist revolt. Most of them also seem to share problems of endemic corruption, poverty and administrative inefficiency, all of which encourage rebellion.

For all these factors, however, the nations have somehow emerged from the 1960's in a surprisingly strong position.

They are attempting, more than ever before, to reduce regional rivalries and cooperate with each other. They all have embarked on long-range, if faltering, economic

more strongly than any other power in the region.

"The Thais say they accept the proposition that we're leaving the area," noted an official, "but then they ask why we also are cutting back on aid as well as troops."

Critics have claimed the Thais wanted a large American aid allotment as sort of a "bribe" for supplying the bases and also sending a division of troops to South Vietnam, but most observers here believe the reasons for uneasiness are considerably deeper and more complex.

"The Thais find it tough to know what we're talking about," said one analyst, referring to the confusion arising from President Nixon's "doctrine" for Southeast Asia. "One official in Washington says one thing. And another says something else. They don't know whom to believe."

The most persistent question, of course, is how far the United States would go to defend Thailand — and other nations in the region — in case of invasion by Chinese or North Vietnamese troops, marching through Laos, or a sharp increase in persistent guerrilla warfare in the northern and northeastern provinces.

New Policy

The crux of the "Nixon Doctrine" is the United States will supply materiel and advice but will never again immerse its own troops in ground combat in Asia. American officials have qualified this aim by pointing out the United States might change its mind under "exceptional circumstances," presumably a Chinese or North Vietnamese invasion of Southeast Asia.

To many Asians, however, this approach only seems to rationalize America's decision to abandon the region. They point out the chances of such "exceptional circumstances" are extremely small and argue the only kind of military support that really counts is that aimed at guerrilla war and infiltration.

Symptomatic of the new American policy in Thailand and the rest of Southeast Asia was the reduction of Voice of America broadcasts beamed at Thailand and the phasing out of American-advised propaganda and psychological warfare efforts in the northeastern provinces.

U.S. spokesmen publicly claimed the Thai government could "do a better job in these fields," but privately they said they thought such moves were unwise and premature. The feeling was the Thais still had much to learn before they could manage propaganda operations with the same interest and skill as the Americans.

The Thais, as Thanat Khoman

tures to a period in which Thai and Vietnamese armies clashed and finally partitioned the Laotian kingdom.

The position of Thailand, in fact, fits neatly into the "domino" theory in that it would certainly be the next nation to "go" if Communist divisions poured across Laos into the rest of Southeast Asia. Most analysts, however, foresee a much more protracted and subtle conflict than that implied by this old and discredited thesis.

The feeling is that a Communist success — or even American withdrawal and compromise — in Vietnam and Laos would encourage Communist guerrillas and leftist politicians to step up their activities in all the other countries. The result might be a series of low-level clashes, possibly as a prelude in the next 10 or 20 years to a major regional war.

In the past six months the threat of revolt, encouraged but not directly aided by Communists, has increased substantially in countries praised only a year or two ago for having eliminated all but the last remnants of Communist influence.

In Southern Thailand, for instance, Communist guerrillas are mounting what some analysts predict will be a new, protracted campaign to undermine the power of the almost feudalistic Malay princes across the borders in Malaysia. The leader of the Malaysian Communists, Chin Peng, had hidden out in the jungles in the 1950s.

One consideration in the Communist plans is the prospective withdrawal in the early 1970s of the last British troops from Malaysia and Singapore. The question for Malaysia is whether or not its British-trained army and police can put down a new Communist revolt with the same skill with which the British stymied the terrorists more than a decade ago.

Resent Power

The Communists in Malaysia can capitalize on racial differences between the Malay and the local Chinese, who fought each other in the capital of Kuala Lumpur last May.

Most of the Malaysian Communists, in fact, are Chinese who resent the power of the ruling princes. Chinese traditionally dominate business in Malaysia, as in all other Southeast Asian nations, but are denied positions in the civil service and government.

"In 1970 and perhaps for some years to come we are faced with two major problems, race relations and economic development," said the Malaysian director of operations, Abdul Razak, the country's second-ranking leader.

"Unless the people are unified," said Razak, "our society would split, our economy collapse and no

ny from 1896 to 1946, except for three years of Japanese occupation in World War II.

Nixon and Vice President Spiro T. Agnew have concentrated on the Philippines in swings through Southeast Asia in which they attempted to explain their attitudes and policies.

The question in the Philippines, as in the other countries, is whether the government might shift much further from its traditional relationship than Nixon or Agnew had anticipated. Marcos' outlook has been ambivalent. "In Asia we must now forge a constructive unity and coexist in purposeful peace, not on terms that must yet be drawn by a conquering ideology," he said in his inaugural address Dec. 30.

He did not specify which ideology he really feared more, communism or Western-style democracy, and he did not say with whom he hoped to "coexist."

Some observers believed, however, that he was alluding to his hope of forming a "viable relationship" with Communist China or the Soviet Union. The Philippines is still far from forming relations with Peking but may exchange ambassadors with Moscow in the next year or two.

Marcos' outlook was characteristic of that of Southeast Asian leaders looking for new ties in the form of regional associations with each other as well as close relations with powers competing for influence in the area.

As might be expected, the United States is enthusiastic about moves toward a regional association, which might conceivably unite Southeast Asia in an anti-Communist alliance not dependent on America.

Such an alliance ideally could substitute for the American supported Southeast Asian Treaty Organization, which has never functioned effectively since its formation 16 years ago. Only two Southeast Asian countries, Thailand and the Philippines, are SEATO members.

The most encouraging sign of regionalism was a series of conferences in December of foreign ministers representing all the members of Association of Southeast Asian Nations, known commonly by its initials, ASEAN.

It was during the ASEAN meetings that the Philippines and Malaysia decided to resume relations. The move symbolized what most observers regarded as the success of the conference in improving economic relations among the members, who often have failed to cooperate with each other despite their common opposition to communism.

Indonesia

One of the strongest voices at the ASEAN conference was that of



— Associated Press

A Catholic children's group does a stick dance and girls display banners during an election campaign in front of the Saigon city hall.

even after the Vietnam war ends. The other "neutral" Southeast Asian state, the Union of Burma, also is fearful of Communist revolt, greatly encouraged by the country's overwhelming economic problems.

Burma, bordering Communist China as well as Laos and Thailand, might find long-range accommodation almost impossible.

may be the island city-state of Singapore, off the end of the Malay Peninsula and across the straits from Indonesia.

Capitalizing on trade with all the countries in the region as well as with the rest of the world, Singapore can legitimately claim significant increases in commerce, production and the average income of its 2 million citizens.

flict increased in neighboring countries.

Singapore's aggressive prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, summed up the sentiments of much of the region as its leaders warily approach the era "after Vietnam."

"The 1960s have shown how much can be achieved despite prolonged periods of conflict, unrest and disruption," said Lee. "There could be

most of them still offer varying degrees of popular democracy.

From the viewpoint of the United States, the region toward the end of the decade probably had never respected America's policies or power more in any other period since the halcyon era after World War II. The commitment of American forces to Vietnam encouraged, directly or indirectly, anti-Communist sentiment in other countries to an extent not realized in America.

The confidence of some Southeast Asian leaders began to change, however, with President Johnson's decisions in 1968 to cease the bombing of, first-part, and then all of North Vietnam. Now that American troops are finally leaving the war zone, no head of a Southeast Asian nation would gamble his future or that of his country on the final success of the government of President Nguyen Van Thieu in Saigon.

The remarks of Suhart, Thanat and other Southeast Asian leaders indicated the gnawing fear that perhaps they bet on the wrong winner in the war, whose eventual outcome is likely to set the tenor of the region's development for the next generation.

"It's a very difficult time here," noted an experienced analyst in this traffic-choked capital of modern office buildings, neon signs and dank alleys and canals. "It's impossible for them to be certain now what America will do."

The Thais, of all the Southeast Asian nations, might suffer the most as a result of an American debacle in Vietnam. Thailand has provided the bases from which American planes have bombed North Vietnam and Laos, and has defended the anti-Communist cause

indicated, seemed to urge a withdrawal from Thailand of American troops, now totaling approximately 45,000, but many observers viewed these remarks as a typically Asian effort at "saving face." Thai leaders are embittered by criticism in the United States of their role in Vietnam.

"Not a single American soldier has been engaged in fighting Communists in Thailand," Thanat said in a recent interview. "The American forces are here to repel Communist aggression in Vietnam. . . . We have repeatedly expressed our determination to fight Communist activity with our own resources, and especially our own manpower."

Struggle in Laos

Thanat's remark was correct in the sense that most of the Americans here are engaged in the air war over Laos and Vietnam, but the United States has poured at least \$250 million into training and equipping Thai forces. Although the United States has withdrawn some 6,000 troops, Thai leaders would be extremely disappointed if Washington cut down its military aid programs.

Exacerbating the uncertainty of Thai leaders is the gloomy outlook for Laos, whose "coalition" government now depends exclusively on American aid and air support in a slowly deteriorating conflict against Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces.

North Vietnam shows no sign of giving up the struggle to turn Laos into a Communist-dominated satellite state. The fundamental conflict between Thai and North Vietnamese interests goes back several cen-

litical democracy could not be restored."

Despite the urgency of Razak's tone, Malaysia is generally regarded as one of the region's more secure and stable nations. The problems appear much more serious in the Philippines, which resumed diplomatic relations with Malaysia toward the end of last year after having broken over its claim to the east Malaysian state of Sabah.

Although the Philippines, an entirely island nation, does not border on any of the countries fighting on the Southeast Asian mainland, the Communist revolt in the provinces north of the capital of Manila is more serious now than at any point since the late President Ramon Magsaysay suppressed it in the 1950s.

President Ferdinand Marcos, entering his second four-year term, has followed a policy of political compromise with the Communists in hopes of weakening their will and, at the same time, keeping his own anti-Communist military forces from gaining too much power. Observers blame the Philippine preoccupation with politics for much of the country's corruption and current economic difficulties, which in turn inspire leftist sympathies.

The deescalation of American military activities in Vietnam may indirectly affect the Philippines, where the United States seeks to continue to keep up these bases after the war, but nationalist anti-American sentiment may force treaty revisions that would seriously compromise their usefulness.

The "Nixon doctrine" might well fit in with the changing attitudes of the Philippines, an American colo-

nia, whose country until 1968 had engaged in a policy of "confrontation" against Malaysia and Singapore, branded by Sukarno as "neo-colonialist, colonialist and imperialist."

The destruction of the Indonesian Communist party and the downfall of Sukarno marked the most sensational victory of the decade for anti-Communist forces in Asia.

Sukarno, at the height of his power, had expelled virtually all American and other Western business and aid, but now Indonesia is more receptive than ever to investment and assistance.

The outcome of the Vietnam war might appear little related to life in Indonesia. But some analysts doubt if the Communists could have been defeated so thoroughly if pro-American generals had not been encouraged indirectly by the symbol of American troops fighting in Vietnam.

Student leaders in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta, planning demonstrations and riots in support of the generals, often told this correspondent the United States should "fight to the end" in Vietnam.

The arrival of several hundred thousand American troops in Vietnam in 1966 and 1967 seemed to have the effect of galvanizing the Indonesian movement against the Communists.

Russian and Japan

But deescalation of American involvement in Vietnam probably will not have the opposite effect of inducing the overthrow of Gen. Suharto and his allies, who might attempt to improve their deteriorating relations with the Soviet Union and Japan.

The Russians, who provided Sukarno with a billion dollars worth of arms, would doubtless like to regain diplomatic prestige in Jakarta. Russian diplomats, ascribing local Communist revolts to Chinese and not Soviet influence, have carefully nurtured good relations in most Southeast Asian countries.

As for the Japanese, they are easily the region's most successful traders. Japanese cars, radios, cameras and other products are exported to every Southeast Asian country, and Japanese businessmen have entered into lucrative, often secret, partnerships in local companies.

As the American influence and presence declines, some analysts believe Southeast Asia, ideally, will turn into a kind of open trading area for all the major powers, including China.

This prediction, however, seems too optimistic as long as the Vietnam war remains unsettled. If the war does not spill over into Thailand, it may yet engulf part of Cambodia, the country sharing the longest border with South Vietnam.

The Cambodian chief of state, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, has adopted a "neutral," pro-Communist policy, in hopes of placating and conciliating Hanoi, but he has grown increasingly afraid the North Vietnamese troops based inside his borders will never leave,

In the web of similar fears but differing interests, the nation with the brightest future in the region

It probably would maintain its unique position as a regional trading center even if the level of con-

a turning point in the 1970s. There certainly will be some anxious moments."

The Legend of Bay Dom Lives on With Buddhists

LONG XUYEN, South Vietnam — The legend of Bay Dom lives among the million or so disciples of Hoa Hao, a Buddhist sect named after the village in which its prophet was born.

Bay Dom, a lieutenant colonel who had once commanded Hoa Hao troops against much larger forces ranging from the communists to the French to the Saigon government, was killed while firing his grenade launcher at North Vietnamese who had ambushed his men.

"He shouldn't have been firing at all by conventional standards," a South Vietnamese army officer observed. "The ordinary practice in an ambush would be for the commander to get down and remain under cover."

But Bay Dom, a sinister figure who sometimes threatened to kill South Vietnamese officials even though the Hoa Hao had supposedly surrendered to them several years ago, had little respect for conventional military attitudes.

Small Fiefdom

As commander of three companies of Regional Force troops, he controlled a small fiefdom near the Cambodian border in the manner of a feudal lord. And he also was reputed to command two more battalions of Hoa Hao who had fled across to Cambodia rather than ally themselves with either the government or the communists.

"The intention of the North Vietnamese is to conquer Chau Doc," the province beside the Cambodian border, "and use the capital of the province as a bargaining tool in peace negotiations," said Bay Dom's executive officer, Capt. Thanh Liem. "Whether they can take it or not depends on how well we fight against them in the mountains where they're hiding."

Bay Dom, sitting in a jeep behind a 50-caliber machine gun, was leading his troops along a road through the mountains when the North Vietnamese ambushed the column in November.

"This is part of their winter-spring campaign," observed Capt. Liem, wearing a white armband in mourning for his leader. "They'll keep on trying to do the same. From those mountains the enemy will try to fight against all three provinces where the Hoa Hao live."

Some observers doubt, however, if the North Vietnamese are so ea-

ger to encounter the Hoa Hao. Their primary objective at the moment may be simply to infiltrate through the Hoa Hao region with as few casualties as possible and wage their campaign deeper in the Mekong delta.

The reason for the reluctance of the enemy to tangle with the Hoa Hao was apparent in conversations in this pleasant, tree-shaded capital of An Giang Province, the center of Hoa Hao influence.

"We would fight a Communist government until we were all wiped out," vowed Van Dan Nghiep, the chairman of the "capital council" of one of the Hoa Hao's many splinter groups.

"We and the Communists are as opposite as water and fire," explained Nghiep, talking before elders in a Hoa Hao "reading room" at which the faithful can peruse the works of the prophet, Huynh Phu So, who disappeared in a Communist ambush 22 years ago.

"The Communists are completely without belief in a higher being," said Nghiep, "but we live ultimately for the spiritual."

The religious faith of the Hoa Haos provides, in effect, the rationale for a prolonged struggle, dating to the period of French colonialism, at maintaining independence against incursions from all outside intruders.

The prophet Huynh, in his teachings, expressed this desire by urging his followers to "feel it our duty to defend our country if it is invaded, if we want our life to be easy and our race to survive."

"Let us contribute to save our country when it is in distress and to make it strong and prosperous," wrote Huynh, "Let us try to liberate our country when it is dominated by foreigners."

It is ironic that the wrath of the Hoa Hao against "foreigners" has never seemed to encompass the Americans, whom Hoa Hao leaders often criticize but have always seemed to prefer above the French and the Communists.

One reason is the United States has never sent combat forces into An Giang or Chau Doc, the main Hoa Hao regions. The Americans maintain relatively inconspicuous advisory teams, whose members are all well versed on Hoa Hao sensitivities.

Hoa Hao leaders today put on a public display of support for the government although the last of them did not abandon their struggle against the late Ngo Dinh Diem until the final years of his rule.

"I only feel sorry Diem made the mistake of becoming a dictator," said Major Nguyen Minh Tam, who commanded some 3,000 Hoa Hao troops after Diem executed the Hoa Hao general, Le Van Vinh, in 1956. "If he had not been dictatorial, he would have been able to rid the country of communism."

Major Tam, who "returned" to the government side on the understanding he would be commissioned in the South Vietnamese army, believes official pacification programs indicate a desire in Saigon to compensate for some of the wrongs of the Diem period.

"When the people can decide for themselves what they're going to do, it's one more mark against communism," said Tam, the chief of a district in An Giang province. "If the VC blow up a bridge or a school built by the people, the VC only hurt themselves in the end."

One factor impeding the Hoa Hao, however, is the conflict among the faithful.

Leaders Quarrel

In this town, almost entirely free of barbed-wire compounds and other signs of war, Hoa Hao leaders quarrel over who is "officially recognized" and charge each other with "opportunism" and "bribery" to win followers.

"We're still brothers in religion," said Quang Hoan, deputy chairman of the provincial committee of one group, "but many members are bought off by politicians for personal advantage."

Hoan also evinced traditional Hoa Hao resentment against authority by the central government.

"Sometimes the government says things that sound good, but then the government officials don't do what they say," he claimed.

The average Vietnamese, whatever his sympathies, would not contest the Hoa Hao reputation for toughness.

A Saigon taxi driver, on a trip with this reporter through the Hoa Hao region, said he was not afraid of the Viet Cong. Instead he warned of the dangers of the Hoa Hao.

"If you insult them, they will kill you," said the driver, originally from the central Vietnamese city of Hue. "You must be careful of the way you talk to them."

"For sure," he said in local pidgin American, "for sure. They very dangerous. They hate VC. They want everyone same-same hate VC."—DONALD KIRK.



—United Press International

Thai soldiers go through jungle warfare training at an American Special Forces base.