

THE "UGLY AMERICANS" IN VIET NAM

by NGUYEN VAN KHAI

At UNB this year is a second year Engineering student, Nguyen Van Khai. Born in north Viet Nam, he moved to Saigon after the Geneva Conference of 1954.

Every time they talk about the war in Viet Nam people contemptuously call it a "dirty war." How can this purest war, in which the Vietnamese are not only fighting for themselves, but also for the free world, be charged "la guerre sale"? Well, it is dirty because there is a number of "Ugly Americans", top officials who think they are efficient and intelligent, but, in fact, are the most stupid of the stupid diplomats in the world. It is they who are ruining the ideals the American people are pursuing in Viet Nam. Unfortunately, one of these ugly men is the one who claims to be the most powerful man in the world.

Everyone remembers how disgraceful it was to the U.S. when they failed in an abortive attempt to take over Communist Cuba in mid-1961. All the world was shocked, not only the Communists, who would naturally be infuriated, but also Asians, who were no less shocked to see how easily the American government gave up the exiled Cuban nationalist troops, even in the first day of the intended three-day operation Pluto, and thus left them until their terrible disaster. Because of this Cuban crisis, as well as the events in the Korean War, Asians cannot believe in American promises and willingness to help. The U.S. Foreign Policy is the clumsiest and most egotistical in the world.

Their first fatal error in Viet Nam was the coup d'etat overthrowing constitutionally elected president Ngo-Dihn Diem. Diem was a fervent patriot who ably led South Viet Nam out of anarchy and disorder to partial prosperity and security, quite contrary to observers' predictions in 1954 (the year of the North/South partition), that his shabby country could exist for a maximum of six months. Diem introduced the successful land reform program and helped industrialize the country. Around 1959, the Communist cadres who were secretly left over and disguised as peasants after the ceasefire — anyone who has experience living with the Communists may know their wily tactics and their disregard for international laws — began to cause troubles by some minor rebellions and terroristic activities.

In 1961, their power began to be felt due to Hanoi's public acceptance and the formation of the so-called "National Liberation Front", an appealing name, but as meaningless as "Democratic Republic of Viet Nam," the name the Communists call the North. The situation was severe enough to force Diem to call for help. President Kennedy sent 16,000 advisors but more important was his economic and military assistance. By Diem's leadership and his ability to handle the situation, the war was so

improved that U.S. Defence Secretary Robert S. McNamara in his 1963 visit to Viet Nam optimistically declared that the war might end in 1965 at a maximum, though one notes that there were no U.S. forces in Viet Nam at that time.

Then the "ugly Americans" appeared on stage. They wanted to direct Diem in their own way, and conducted the war themselves, regardless of their apparent inexperience in this unconventional guerilla warfare. Considered an Asian Winston Churchill by Lyndon Johnson — then Vice President — Diem, who was an independent man, quietly refused his friends' indignant proposals. As anyone could expect, the Americans threatened to cut off all military and economic assistance. And they did; Diem could manage to fight without American help, and to preserve his country's independence. He planned to fight alone, convinced that the ultimate victory belonged to him, as the majority of the people were. Unluckily for him, there were some massive protests against him by a dissenting religious group. Seizing the opportunity, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Ambassador-at-large Averell Harriman, and CIA chief Allen Dulles initiated a meticulous plan to overthrow him, or to at least oblige him to change his policy. On November 1, 1963, the coup burst out. Diem and his brother were captured. On second thought, Ambassador Lodge wanted to keep him on as head of state, but he was killed by the enthusiastic troops.

This seemed to be a victory to Lodge and his government, but would prove to be a disaster later on.

Lodge then made his second fatal mistake. He chose Nguyen Ngoc Tho, the Vice President under Diem's regime to head the new government. (Although this choice was made public by the Vietnamese Revolutionary Committee Chairman, it must be understood that he was under powerful U.S. pressure.) Lodge reasoned that the nation needed an experienced administrator to prevent it from being thrown into a political vacuum. He soon learned that he was wrong. The people wanted a revolutionary leader. Inevitably, another coup ousted Tho, this time led by goateed General Nguyen Khanh. After that, coup succeeded coup, some incited by the Americans themselves, who wanted to correct their grievous mistakes; others by Vietnamese who were frustrated by the Americans' incessant interference in the country's internal affairs.

The situation became calamitous. Taking advantage of the coups, the Vietcong usurped many important military posts and controlled almost half of the country. This is

how the Americans virtually ruined a tiny unhappy nation and left it as lamentable as it is today.

The mistakes, however, can be corrected, the war can be shortened considerably, but only if the Americans know how erroneous their present policy is. They can not know because they are blinded by ethnocentrism. This war, as stated elsewhere, is a revolutionary war. It is the combination of a guerilla war, a political war, a cultural war, and a psychological war. I do not intend to abuse the term 'war', but the fact is the Vietcong try any means possible to attain their goal: seizure of the South Vietnamese. So they fight in every other field, not only in the battlefield. In this ideological war it seems that which ever side has the just cause will win. How could the 'dirty Vietcong' manage to fight for such a long time, even though they had to suffer the worst things ever encountered by any troops: from insomnia and malaria in deep jungles, to a daily ration consisting barely of a handful of rice and salt? Because these stupid and ignorant cadres have been indoctrinated that they were fighting to liberate South Vietnam from US aggression.

It is ironical that this is our war, but the conditions to end the war were made by President Johnson or by someone who has nothing to do with Vietnam such as Tito or Nasser. This is our war, but they did not let us have any chance to talk about war, but in the press all over the world, the big victories were tagged 'made in the USA'.

Seeing some terrible things such as a picture of a wounded GI in Life or Paris Match, they shout, 'Dirty war!' almost regardless of how dreadful is the sight of an stabbed to death, his throat cut, his belly ripped open by the VC, just because he was a good administrator and loved by the villagers.

The Americans cannot bring an end to this war unless they change their policy. They must help the Vietnamese as a friend to a friend not as master to servant. They should be less 'talkative' and let us talk it over with Hanoi. They should be less proud, and let our one million armed forces account for the victory. They can make any proposal about the war, but please, please inform us, have our agreement and let us decide instead of chanting it noisily all over the world before we can make head or tail of it. Then the Communists will not have any opportunity to charge that the Americans are invading South Vietnam. Once the Reds lose

their 'just' cause it is certain that they will lose the war, this queer ideological war. In short, the Americans should stand behind us, and be silent. This will hurt their pride very much and they can hardly accept it. Still, if they do not accept, there is no possibility that the war will end soon.

Poor South Vietnamese! This is their war, but it is apparent now that it becomes an American war. The South Vietnamese are robbed of their just cause by the Americans. What are they fighting for?

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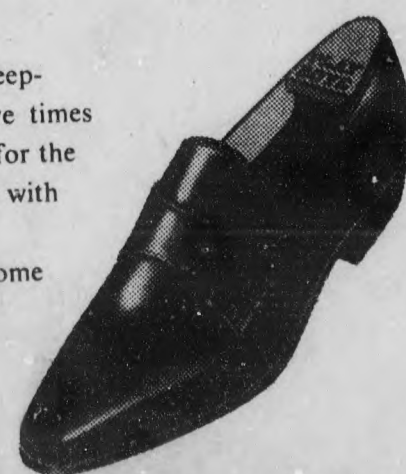
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