

Disturbing Parallels Noted in Saigon

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SAIGON—As a correspondent in China 20 years ago, I watched the Communist takeover of the mainland. The conditions which led to the downfall of Chiang Kai-shek are present today in Vietnam. Here are some disturbing parallels:

Parallel No. 1—The Chinese Communists gradually wrested control of the countryside, bottling up the Nationalists in the cities. Once in power, the Reds would strip the hated landlords of their holdings and parcel out the land to the peasants.

This is precisely what is happening in Vietnam today. U.S. Ambassador Ellisworth Bunker has pleaded with the South Vietnamese authorities to adopt land reforms. However, the Saigon government has made no move to give the peasants a greater share in the land they till. For many of the leaders in Saigon, as in Nanking 20 years ago, happen to be landlords.

Parallel No. 2—Chiang presided over a coalition of war lords, who grew rich off American aid intended for their people. Corrupt officials down the

line siphoned off U.S. goods that passed through their hands. Army commanders pocketed pay and supplies that had been earmarked for their troops.

All of this has been going on in Vietnam. President Nguyen Van Thieu, however, has fired two war lords and has taken the first hesitant steps to curb corruption.

Parallel No. 3—The tragedy of China is that Chiang recognized and corrected his mistakes after it was too late. In his island retreat, he finally adopted socio-economic reforms that have transformed Formosa into a prosperous, progressive country with the second highest living standards in Asia.

Thieu Moves Slowly

President Thieu also appears to be awakening to the need for reforms too slowly to save Vietnam. It will take some dramatic social, economic and political improvements to win the public support that is essential to real victory. But the cautious Thieu is pussyfooting at a time when bold political action is demanded.

In Vietnam, of course, Thieu is backed by American firepower which was not available to Chiang. The Vietcong can no more drive the Americans out of the country than a pack of rats could defeat an elephant. The rats might torment the elephant by gnawing at his

heels, then elude his crushing counter-blows by scattering into their holes. The harassment might persuade him to leave, but they could never push him out.

Likewise, the Vietcong cannot defeat the U.S.; they can only hope to discourage the Americans from remaining in Vietnam. This appears to be the aim of North Vietnam's master strategist, Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, who defeated the French 14 years ago more in the back rooms of Paris than on the battlefields of Vietnam.

Already, he has jolted Washington with his bold attacks against 36 South Vietnamese cities.

Giap, it seems, next hopes to overrun Khesanh, which he would like to turn into an American Dienbienphu.

It is a showdown which Gen. William Westmoreland, the American commander, welcomes.

Westmoreland definitely has no intention of losing the battle. He has assured the Joint Chiefs that Khesanh will not fall. But if he has underestimated Giap, as the French did, the psychological impact would be devastating.

Not even the fall of Khesanh, however, would mean that the U.S. has lost the Vietnam war. On both sides, the conflict has become a war of attrition. Westmoreland is try-

ing to wear down the Communists who, in turn, are trying to wear out American patience. It has become a test of staying power.

But is it worth staying in Vietnam? Certainly the U.S. cannot afford to pour \$26 billion a year, let alone the blood of our boys, into this remote jungle for too much longer.

The purpose, according to Secretary of State Rusk, is to contain Communist China. Admittedly, Peking is trying to foment insurrections in every country in Southeast Asia. These will be given encouragement, no doubt, if the U.S. pulls out of Vietnam. But tiny South Vietnam can never poke more than a finger into the Chinese dike.

It will take the manpower of India to block the manpower of China from sweeping over Asia. India's population increase each year is equal to the entire population of South Vietnam.

Yet, when the Indians for two years begged the U.S. to arm them against the Chinese, Washington refused. The Indians were forced to turn to the Soviet Union, which sold them arms and now has more influence than the U.S. in New Delhi.

It seems to me that our \$26 billion a year could have been spent more effectively building up the great nations of Asia—India, Indonesia, Australia and Japan.

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