

VC Power Will Continue In Viet Nam After War

By MIKE McGEE
LAST OF A SERIES

Observations from a year in South Vietnam. . . .

The Viet Cong have had and will continue to have an influence on the political structure of South Vietnam. There can be no post-war government that is not a coalition with some of the political ideas of the Viet Cong and some of the VC themselves.

The present regime is a combination government, much as we would hate to admit it. Most of the "reforms" of the Saigon Government are reactions to some idea presented by Ho Chi Minh and the VC.

The VC have preached Land Reform (the violent takeover of farmland from landlords by the masses) and abolition of social classes as their chief goals. The Saigon Government probably exists today only because it has imposed limits on aristocracy, especially since Diem fell, and started a gradual program of peaceful land reform even under Diem. (The richest man in Saigon was executed this spring for profiteering.)

The VC preach freedom from foreign domination. Much of the force of American diplomacy is spent in denying that there is any prospect of our dominating Vietnam. Much of our work and many of our frustrations within that country are connected with assuring the Vietnamese their independence.

Would this have come about if the VC had not raised the questions first: the "land reform," the abolition of aristocracy, the independence? It's a debatable question.

Vietnam is deeply rooted in custom and the Mandarin tradition of rule by the strongest. Few aristocratic leaders or colonial administrators would have gotten the idea. It was up to the peasants, under the leadership of the foreign-educated peasants Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap, to put the arguments before the oppressors. Sixty per cent of a crop is too much rent for a poor peasant to pay for his land.

What we and the Vietnamese are fighting for now in that country is only the method by which the final goals will be achieved. Communist regimentation versus the welfare state. Either way the peasant supposedly gets the benefits.

Any post-war government will have to be a coalition. Sometimes as I walked through a small jungle village it occurred to me that when the war is over, assuming we win, the Viet Cong armies will be disbanded and the men will return to their homes. In every village, town and city there will be hundreds of ex-VC and former sympathizers.

Will they be excluded from political power in the peacetime government? I don't see how. Since nobody knows now who is a VC, ex-VC's will not be any more easily recognizable. Men who were commanders in the Viet Cong armies may emerge as natural leaders in Vietnamese communities. They may abandon Communism, but they will not give up reform.

And the only way to get them to abandon Communism is to defeat them in the field, and demonstrate a desire to listen to their complaints. The latter will probably be the hardest for the Saigon Government (with our help) to accomplish.

If the war goes well for our side for the next year or so we ought to recognize and negotiate directly with the Viet Cong command. When the time comes there ought to be an actual surrender of troops and a document like the one Grant and Lee signed at Appomattox.

Then the troops can go home. Their children will form Daughters of the Viet Cong chapters and erect statues in the town square to the noble but defeated Viet Cong warrior. Maybe they will even have a secret hooded society to drive out the white man.



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