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AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE  
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NIGERIA VIETNAM DIAFRA ADMINS  T 137/A	SUBJECT: <i>Reports</i> <i>General</i> Mission to V. N. (Morgan) CIRCULATE:
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KENNETH MORGAN'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

August 1, 1965  
Tokyo, Japan

Those of you who saw my letters from Saigon probably noticed that little was said about the political situation. I did not want the censors to have any reason for limiting my activities in the study of Buddhism there, and since they have a strict law against any hints of peace activities, it seemed best to avoid the subject. Furthermore, I am very much a layman in politics, and I was not asking political questions.

The situation in South Vietnam has grown steadily worse. The Vietcong controls most of the countryside so it is not wise, though sometimes possible, to travel on the roads. The railroads can run on only 10% of their tracks, and that without security. The road is open from Saigon to the military camp about 15 miles away, but the road to the seashore, 15 miles in the other direction to a big military camp, was cut the other day by destroying 7 bridges. The road across the center of the South, to Pleiku, was cut for a long time and then opened for emergency convoys by a major military operation. An American colonel with whom I talked said it is impossible to keep the roads through the jungle and hills open -- it would require a man every ten yards, and more soldiers than there are in Vietnam to back them up. Another marine with whom I talked said that in his camp, which has been there six years and is built of concrete and equipped with electricity, the Vietcong understands that the marines want to serve their time and get out alive, so neither side bothers the other; he said that the other evening his buddy borrowed his jeep to run into the village, and someone threw a grenade into the jeep as he drove along the road, and killed him. The Vietcong go all around their base, and have a regular route up the river for transporting rice north, and no one can stop them. The other day the Youth Volunteer program rented a bus to take their group to a service project in a relatively safe area, and on the way back the three of them in the bus stopped for a cold drink in a village and a truck load of Vietnamese soldiers passed them; a few miles down the road the truck hit a mine, and the bus came up shortly afterward, and gave them first aid...Shell oil gets through; the company provides the trucks and contracts for delivery, and the drivers pay tolls to the Vietcong; it is too profitable to the Vietcong for them to stop that traffic... The villagers are reported to be weary of the double taxation, for the Vietcong demands have been much higher lately; and the young men who are found in the villages are forced into the Vietcong army, or killed....Thus far, the Vietcong have not been strong enough to take any major town, for the townspeople are generally opposed to them...Much of their supplies come down from the North, carried along jungle paths...They also get a good part of their arms from the Vietnamese they capture and kill, which means that they have American arms; they got so much that way that we have limited the arms we issue and no longer send to Vietnam our most powerful machine guns because they can shoot down helicopters, and we don't want the Vietcong to have them; we also have limited the size of the mortars we issue. The bomb used to blow up the Minh Canh floating restaurant was American. When I asked if the Vietcong was warned of the approaching B52 bombers, they said it was most likely that the information leaked out through the S. Vietnam government...The South Vietnamese think

that the Vietcong could not go on without help from China...North Vietnam is described as a grim country; "No one smiles there", an Indian on the International Control Commission said. The North Vietnam papers are full of stories about people who work extra hours to meet their production schedules; most of the men have been drafted. They haven't enough food and cannot produce enough arms. They must have help from China. Ho Chi Minh is old, almost senile, and kept as a figurehead, they think; the real struggle is between a powerful group friendly with China and another group which prefers Russia. They are absolutely confident that they will win the war, in fact they seem to think they have almost won it since they have so effectively covered South Vietnam.

An Englishman who knows the situation well says that the most effective effort against the Vietcong is the expansion of our air war, using it primarily to bomb "concrete, not people"; he says that if the civilian population is bombed it will stiffen their resistance, but if the roads, bridges, and industrial plants are bombed it will break the ability of the Vietcong to continue the war. It will not be possible to root out the Vietcong in South Vietnam until their source of supplies and men is stopped...Our present military build-up was carefully planned by Taylor, with major bases on the sea which can be defended and from which sorties can be made; and then a major bombing effort against North Vietnam; there will be a considerable expansion of the use of helicopters with air support to attack concentrations of Vietcong. In the North, there seems to be little doubt among the South Vietnamese, the mass of the people hate their present government, but are powerless to rebel.

I found practically no suggestion that the South Vietnamese are opposed to the presence of American forces in their country. A couple of times, monks expressed the wish that there were no foreign powers in their country, meaning Chinese as well as Western, but they did not suggest how that could be accomplished. It was generally agreed that if the Americans pull out there would be a blood bath, worse than they had in North Vietnam -- running to thousands of people killed. They would prefer an international force, but seem to think that the Americans are not there permanently. The reaction to the reappointment of Lodge was more favorable than unfavorable, but they wondered why someone else was not sent. The usual explanation was that Taylor was a good military man, but not a diplomat, and maybe now some political solutions might be sought. I do not share their hopes for anything from Lodge.

Those who urge immediate negotiations should bear in mind that North Vietnam sees no reason to negotiate since they are confident that they are winning and will inevitably win. And negotiations which include the National Liberation Front, the Vietcong group in South Vietnam, would make sure that they were at least represented in the South Vietnamese government -- which would place a hard corps of communist trained men in the government, and an almost certain take-over by the communists fairly soon. To negotiate with the Vietcong, or NLF, is about like suggesting negotiations with the KKK in Mississippi, except that the NLF would use the familiar strategy of communist domination of the government.

There is a general feeling among the Vietnamese that even if China does not come openly into the war, the U.S. escalation must go on at a more rapid rate -- 50,000 is only a beginning. They dread such a large-scale invasion of Americans, and welcome it as the only way to avoid what has happened in North Vietnam.

The reaction to Premier Ky seems to be that he is better than they had expected, but still likely to be impetuous. One former minister refused to enter his government so long as he threatened to use capital punishment against offenders, and offered no positive alternative to repressive measures.

One does not get the impression that there is a strong government in South Vietnam, nor likely to be one. One elderly Vietnamese who returned recently from exile in Paris said that the only hope is for the government to be put in the hands of those who are under 35 years of age; over that age, all the best leaders have been killed in the last 20 years, they don't have anyone who can lead; they must risk the mistakes, and start with young people where the percentage of able people is much higher.

In the meantime, very little is being done for the villagers to convince them that they would be better off with the central government. Without adequate protection from the Vietcong, and under the threat of violence and terrorism, they become Vietcong when necessary, and on the side of the government when possible. It is too rarely possible.

I suppose one can still talk about negotiations -- but it should be remembered that this is war, and the talk is of negotiations after the war, not to prevent a war. They might include the reaffirmation of the line of division (which South Vietnam would oppose, certainly) with binding trade pacts to insure that the North could get supplies from the South, and that the South would receive coal and industrial products from the North -- probably enforced by a strong international commission. Perhaps, after a quarter of a century, they might be able to come together in one country again. This would be unsatisfactory, as all partitions are. The alternative is to fight until one or the other is destroyed...A major difficulty of the present situation is that the U.S. acted alone; every effort should be made to get the peace-keeping and peace-seeking activities in the hands of the U.N., even though we would not get our way. In the meantime this senseless war goes on: it is a civil war and it is an international war; for North Vietnam it is a disciplined, all-out, skillfully managed effort; for South Vietnam it is sometimes casual, sometimes heroic, rarely all-out, a nightmare they wish would go away. For the Americans it seems to be something that has to be done, they don't know quite why, a grim, unpleasant, jungle war, which they can't manage according to their best judgment, fought with allies they don't quite understand, sometimes distrust, and sometimes admire.