of field-grade officers who had been discharged were but disciplinary cases; others had been discharged for reasons other than corruption. The protesters therefore refused to be mollified and demanded President Thieu's resignation.

Although indications of a large-scale Communist offensive became apparent toward the end of 1974, the press and political personalities considered it a ploy when President Thieu called the nation's attention to this threat. This produced probably the most disastrous effect, one that led to the collapse of South Vietnam. Mr. Thieu had obviously lost the people's trust, and only the Communists stood to gain by it. For example, at the beginning of 1975 when the police discovered that several Vietnamese journalists were Communist and detained them, the entire press corps engaged in protests on the grounds of government frame-up and repression. There had always been a great deal of bad blood between President Thieu and the press corps which had criticized him on many counts. While these criticism seemed warranted by genuine opposition, there were also among Saigon newspapers several owned by pro-Communists.

Newspaper seizure under President Thieu's administration was a routine action. For example, 11 out of 41 Saigon papers were seized on 11 March 1972 for having published news considered detrimental to national security. In fact, the papers were merely protesting the government's decision to raise newsprint price by 125%; they attacked it as a move to choke off freedom of the press. Then, when it was made public, the Press Law of July 1972 ran into spirited opposition from the press corps. It forced many newspaper owners into financial difficulties, closed down many newspapers, and threw journalists out of employment. The press corps, therefore, resorted to all means to fight President Thieu and demolish his prestige. Indictment No. 1 of the anti-corruption movement, for instance, was carried in its entirety by three papers. In spite of their seizure, a large number of issues had reached the readership.

The press corps understandably showed a good deal of sympathy for the opposition, and eventually a collaboration among the press, the opposition, and the anti-corruption movement seemed to have emerged. On 30 September 1974, for example, 100 Catholic priests, Buddhist monks, and opposition leaders took to the streets in support of the fight for the

freedom of the press. Gradually the opposition expanded its ranks by cooperating with other groups such as the Anti-Famine Movement and the Women's Movement for the Right to Life, both of which were clearly instigated by the Communists, but this fact seemed not to deter its actions against Mr. Thieu. In reality, though the police knew that Nun Huynh Lien and her anti-famine movement were part of a Communist front they did not dare to arrest her. Mme Ngo Ba Thanh, Chairperson of the Women's Movement for the Right to Life, was a Communist agent. Yet when she was arrested and sentenced to jail, so much protest arose from public opinion and even from the U.S. Embassy which regarded her primarily as an opposition leader that she was finally released.

South Vietnam in the final days prior to the collapse was like a patient going through a political delirium, unable to tell the truth from falsehood, and clamoring for Thieu's resignation without an idea of who would take his place or what would be the future course of the nation. The protesters opposed him on grounds of dictatorship and corruption, but none advanced any appropriate solution to the predicament of South Vietnam. Even if their demands had all been met, the fate of South Vietnam probably would not have fared better and perhaps would have been far worse than it was because of anarchy. Clearly, no one knew what balance to strike between total freedom and total restraint. This was a real crisis of democracy in the face of imminent threat to its survival.

All things considered, Mr. Thieu's regime was perhaps not as totalitarian as it appeared to be because what the opposition demanded might not even exist in a true democracy; besides, not everyone agreed that Mr. Thieu was a dictator. On the contrary, many were of the opinion that South Vietnam was a case of excessive democracy and freedom which bred a breakdown of law and order. Their main argument was that if South Vietnam was a dictatorship, then what would North Vietnam be called?

Generally speaking, the democratic experiment in South Vietnam was a failure of defining the limits of freedom and democracy for a country at war which had just recently been initiated to the democratic system of government. South Vietnamese leaders from 1954 to 1975 seemed to fall into two groups: weak demagogic leaders moved by opportunism and

having no solid leadership qualities such as those emerging between 1963 and 1965 and strong leaders like Diem, Ky, and Thieu, who were opposed for being dictatorial. It must be conceded, however, that in spite of allegations to the contrary, South Vietnam did enjoy some measure of democracy which made possible at least two periods of stability. The trouble with South Vietnamese political parties, opposition leaders, and extremist young men was that they had gone too far in demanding unrestrained implementation of Western democratic practices. This self-delusion was aptly compared by Mr. Diem to "a child who wants to run before he can walk."

Some argued that leadership was the key to it all and that with good leadership South Vietnam would have been able to overcome its problems of political immaturity and lack of democratic experience. However, this ideal leadership was perhaps impossible to achieve. After a long period of French repressions followed by Communist treachery, South Vietnam no longer had any truly devoted and capable nationalist leader left who was worthier than Mr. Diem. His errors such as nepotism and favoritism for Catholics were not irremediable. In him people could at least discern the stature of a genuine leader and unequalled nationalist zeal. Mr. Thieu paled besides Mr. Diem in personal prestige. He did not have the necessary background for a leader of the people. He lacked what was termed as revolutionary virtue which the people in the South or North wanted to see in a national leader. The next flaw in his leadership was his overreliance on the United States, which kept him from planning ahead for the day when South Vietnam had to go it alone. Owing to U.S. policies he had been protected from coups d'etat. Yet his excessive trust in the U.S. President's authority had led him astray. He had probably deluded himself in thinking that what the President of the RVN could do, the U.S. President should be able to do also. He seemed to ignore the fact the U.S. Congress could also limit the powers of the U.S. President.

Finally, political infighting in South Vietnam, the internecine fight to the death among men in the same boat, could only benefit the Communists. Those South Vietnamese who had struggled for the implementation of democratic rights in times of war could not bring themselves

to think that some of these rights did not even exist in a Western society in times of peace. Now that South Vietnam is suffering under the Communist yoke, these people have an eye-opening chance to see for themselves what democracy is or is not. Most probably they will not live long to see it.

CHAPTER VI

Observations and Conclusions

South Vietnamese society was clearly polarized into two segments, the rural and the urban, each with a way of life and attitudes entirely different from the other.

Rural society consisted of the majority of the population, the stolid people who toiled the year round amid verdurous rice fields and placid hamlets with patience and perseverance. This social group bore all the traditional aspects of the Vietnamese society for generations. Eighty years of French colonial rule and even the French-Viet Minh war brought little change to the environment and folk life of rural Vietnam. It was with the same social environment that South Vietnam greeted a new regime after the country's partition and the return of peace in 1954.

The average Vietnamese citizen living in the countryside was basically submissive to authority and leadership. For him the Confucian trinity "King-Teacher-Father" of traditional times represented perhaps what he revered most in his life. "The Emperor's law yields to village rules," a somewhat exaggerated dictum which depicted rural political life, did not imply anarchy. It simply reflected the large measure of autonomy and freedom enjoyed by rural folks under monarchial rule of former times. The Vietnamese people always equated "loyalty to the emperor" to patriotism, which was their own way of expressing love for their country despite deep attachment to their home villages. Without this patriotic spirit perhaps Vietnam would have long ceased to be a nation. That the Vietnamese nation had survived and continued to expand southward until it reached the confines of the Mekong Delta was certainly not a mere accident of history. But despite its homogenity and latent strength, rural society, the very force that had held the

nation together, was in general non-combative and adverse to disturbances and changes. It readily accepted and submitted to the authority and guidance provided by the urban class.

Prior to the French occupation in the 19th century, the urban society of Vietnam was just a tiny minority. With the exception of Hanoi, the ancient capital, and Hue, the new seat of the Nguyen dynasty, very few Vietnamese towns qualified as cities in the modern sense. Most in fact did not look much different from the more prosperous villages. Saigon at the time was just a fishing village.

Under French rule cities proliferated and developed. A new class of urban people emerged. It consisted primarily of civil servants, private employees, businessmen and merchants, large landowners, service-men, and workers. Their offspring attended newly created schools, learned and observed a lot more than rural children. Western ideas became widespread and gradually permeated the urban people's lives and modes of thinking. With this, the concepts of freedom and individualism began to take roots.

The influence of Western civilization on Vietnamese society had its good and bad side. The Vietnamese no doubt benefited from extended knowledge and initiation to science and modern technology. The cities, which quickly absorbed novel political philosophies, became the cradle of revolutionary movements fighting against French rule for national independence. All this meant progress and foreshadowed a bright outlook for Vietnam's future. Against this backdrop, however, a traditional culture was in the process of decaying. Old values rapidly vanished while a new order was yet to be established and the new excellence fully absorbed. Urban people only saw the decline of monarchy, which symbolized national sovereignty, and the subservience of their monarch to foreign authorities. The majority of men of letters formed by Western education turned their eyes toward the foreign world, worshipping individualism as a new creed and caring only for career advancement and personal wealth. The old scholar's pride, which had been symbolized by men such as Phan

Thanh Gian, Nguyen Tri Phuong, and Hoang Dieu no longer existed.[1] In time city dwellers were increasingly engrossed in the materialistic life of the petty bourgeoisie, constantly looking for more benefits and becoming self-seeking and wily in the process.

The onset of war against the French in 1946 saw most city dwellers seeking refuge in the countryside. Driven by patriotic ardor, many remained to continue the fight within the ranks of the Viet Minh. Others, deterred by hazards and hardships and often burdened by family responsibilities, chose to return to their urban habitat under the protection of the French Expeditionary Corps. The majority of Vietnamese city people consisted of these returnees, and most belonged to the petty bourgeois class. Selfish by nature, they were not prepared to make sacrifices for any cause. While most naturally preferred national independence, freedom, and private property and abhorred Communism in consequence, it was also true that they were little interested in the common good and most reluctant to struggle for it or for any other group.

Selfishness and factionalism, therefore, were the main traits of South Vietnamese urban society. Pushed to extremity by disruptive circumstances, these traits materialized into internecine infighting among religious sects and interest groups during the last few years of the French-Viet Minh war, for better exploitation of the people. All this occurred while the upper class jockeyed for positions under the indifferent eye of an ex-emperor chief of state whose role had been overcome by historical events.

Under these circumstances, the emergent political leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem, the partition of the country, and the massive exodus

[1] These were prominent scholars and mandarins of the Confucianist school who served the Nguyen dynasty with loyalty and a profound sense of duty. Unable to repulse the French invaders, they all committed suicide to keep national pride intact.

of North Vietnamese refugees came about as godsend events which revived national consciousness. The new government's efforts to piece together the fragments of South Vietnamese society and impart a wholesome vitality to it met with a most enthusiastic popular welcome. These were to solidify into a foundation for the regime of the First Republic.

Placing more emphasis on the requirement to mobilize national strength for a contest with Communist North Vietnam, President Ngo Dinh Diem instituted a limited democracy, reserving for himself vast and truly encompassing executive powers. The National Assembly, as a result, assumed the symbolic role of democracy's watchdog while the judiciary, in keeping with the national goals set forth by the executive branch, felt that it, too, had the obligation to serve the common effort. Despite its recondite philosophy, the regime's guiding doctrine, personalism, sought basically to elevate human dignity and develop democracy through hard work and combativeness. Therefore, the building of democracy was to be a step-by-step progress requiring time and patience.

To strengthen the regime, President Diem endeavored to develop the nation and enlist popular support. His effort to motivate the people took many forms and proved effective especially in the rural areas. This success was primarily due to his personal stature as a leader who inspired the people's respect. With the sophisticated urbanites, however, Mr. Diem was less successful. Despite his prestige and moral excellence, he seemed rather shy and reclusive. His manners and personality still reflected the antique formation of an old mandarin, which hardly aided him in the role of a people's seducer, especially among the urbanites of modern times. His methods of resolving problems related to national security and survival were regarded as those of a despot. Besides, some of his principal associates obviously committed grave errors.

The First Republic was criticized for three main flaws: family rule or nepotism, monolithic party rule, and discrimination on regional and religious grounds. From hindsight, it was quite understandable that during the incipient years of his rule President Diem had to rely on his

brothers and other close relatives because of his loneness and unfamiliarity with South Vietnam's politics. In time, however, this gave rise to excesses by some of his family members, which became the source of popular discontent.

In a close and decisive contest with Communism which took place in the midst of divisive social forces, perhaps the formation of a vanguard, loyal political party to motivate and needle other organizations into constructive action would have been an acceptable necessity. But the predominance of a monolithic party entrusted with overriding powers in a regime purported to be democratic inevitably fueled discontent and led to discord and disaffection. Can Lao Party members as a matter of fact held almost all key positions in the administration and the military, and their ranks abounded with incompetents who had only an eye for favors and privileges. This system was particularly unfair to those truly capable elements who, because of pride or self-respect, refused to be subservient to the party or join it. Although suppressed, discontent was quite widespread.

Discrimination, whether on regional or religious grounds, was the main source of injustice in the use of manpower and personnel management. In religious matters, discrimination was further accentuated by the large favors granted to the Roman Catholic Church and total disregard for Buddhism. This embittered the Buddhists and added to their antipathy toward the regime. Eventually, Buddhist reactions reinforced by disaffected urbanites and the accomplices of some of Diem's most trusted henchmen brought about the downfall of the First Republic. With it were also gone the achievements accumulated by Mr. Diem during the nine years of his tenure.

As soon as the towering figure of the "dictator" ceased to dominate the South Vietnamese political scene, the cities seemed to live in an uproar of freedom, and South Vietnamese society became the stage for a rapid succession of kaleidoscopic tragi-comedy acts. The perceptive audiences discerned among these acts the progress of three major events. First, there was an experiment in boundless democracy in which religions and factions competed among themselves and with the military for power. Second, the involvement of the U.S. in South Vietnam was increasing; and

third, the war was escalating without a definitive outcome in sight. All three events combined to bring about far-reaching consequences for the society of South Vietnam.

On the socio-political scene, the most dynamic force was perhaps the religions. The Roman Catholics and the Buddhists were the only organizations capable of rallying the popular masses. But both also seemed handicapped by their own excesses. The Roman Catholics under the First Republic drew fire upon themselves by exacting too much favor from a Catholic President. Their ostentatious display of organizational prowess under the leadership of Archbishop Ngo Dinh Thuc alienated the public and ruined the standing of the Catholic Church. However, after 1963, it was the Buddhists' turn to enjoy influence. Convinced that the new leaders owed them their ascendency to power, the Buddhists adopted a patronizing attitude toward the government, dictating their wishes and imposing their supremacy. The Buddhist Church's most glaring weaknesses were perhaps its involvement in politics and the rift between its two leadership factions. Buddhist excesses naturally met with reactions from Catholics, and most disturbances that occurred during the two-year period after 1963 could be attributed to this rivalry.

The leaders of the militant Buddhists were too politically ambitious to confine themselves to religious activities. With their followers, they took to the streets in 1966, which caught the government in a dilemma. If the government gave in to their demands, then the Catholics would follow suit, and this meant more trouble. But if the government chose to disperse the demonstrators by force, its action could be condemned as repressive. Relations between the government and religion became tense, disjointed. But it was finally the excesses of the extremist faction that shattered the Buddhist Church's influence while the moderates seemed to gain in credibility. The general consensus was that the militant monks, those who led the struggle movement, could hardly be termed truly devout because Buddhism is a religion, not a political doctrine. The essence of Buddhist philosophy is conversion, not conquest. Buddha taught us humility and to live in harmonious relations with others. He did not advocate retaliation or rivalry.

In contrast to the restlessness of religions, South Vietnamese political parties seemed to be too inactive. In the wake of the disastrous VNQDD armed revolt against French rule at Yen Bai in 1930, Vietnamese nationalist parties suffered heavy losses and appeared to be completely paralyzed. This decline was largely the result of harsh repressive measures by French authorities and the treacherousness of the Indochinese Communist Party.

Not until much later did nationalist parties seem to revive, but their feeble re-emergence was hampered by dependence on foreign assistance. Both the Phuc Quoc Hoi and the Dai Viet heavily relied on the Japanese to fight French colonial rule. The VNQDD and the Cach Mang Dong Minh Hoi could not raise any activities without the support of Chiang kai-Shek's Kuomintang. When these parties realized that they could not collaborate with the Communist Viet Minh, they all turned away from the resistance and cooperated with ex-emperor Bao Dai who had been allied with the French. After 1954, some of the old nationalist party leaders apparently looked forward to obtaining assistance from the U.S. But those few truly self-reliant parties that emerged subsequently seemed neither well developed nor adapted to a new environment.

Another characteristic of South Vietnamese nationalist parties was their divisiness and disarticulation. Unable to join forces for a much-needed alliance, they not only disagreed on ideologies but also opposed one another because of self-interests. It was perhaps this continuous strife for political hegemony and the race for lucrative spoils that gave rise to the unprecedented proliferation of political parties after 1963. The sad fact was that hardly any political party deserved to qualify as such. The leaders of the old generation had become senile, weary and could not catch up with new currents. Among the young, emergent leaders, very few had any stature or prestige. Above all the very ranks of these parties were split by contending new and old schools, and even those well-established parties of long standing were torn asunder by internal disputes. The purposes of most newly created organizations were dubious at best; there was never any question of their getting together, much less forming a cohesive political force.

Because of these shortcomings, no South Vietnamese political party had a significant popular following. With the exception perhaps of the VNQDD and Dai Viet, whose affiliation was quite extensive in the provinces of MR-1, no other parties were able to exert any local influence probably because they all seemed disorganized and ineffective. Some argued that the political involvement of major religions coupled with governmental obstructions was the cause for the failure of political parties to attract a popular following. There might be a grain of truth in that, but the overriding fact was that political parties in general had nothing to show for themselves that could attract followers. Besides, having gone through so many disillusions, the people also tended to be suspicious of parties and politicians as a whole. This popular apathy seemed to derive from the fact that political parties were mainly an urban product, and their leaders, who belonged to the urban petty bourgeois class, were never able to reconcile their egotistic interests with those of the peasants and the workers. As a general rule and by nature, most of them preferred to operate individually and separately, more for their self-interest than for a common cause. Their activities were therefore disjointed, opportunistic; they reflected neither a sincere desire to build political strength nor any well-defined, long range program of action. It was no small wonder that most political activists usually courted the government from which they expected favors. But if they were not satisfied, they would turn to opposition through demagoguery or with the backing of a religion. Over the years, therefore, political parties failed to produce any leader of promising stature. For South Vietnam, this was a most regrettable thing because political parties were supposed to be a proving ground for the nation's future leaders.

The phenomena of divisiveness, discrimination, and infighting were not only confined to religions and political parties; in fact, they existed in every stratum of South Vietnam's social fabric though in varying degrees. The problem of ethnic minorities, for one, was not as serious as foreign opinion had visualized and depicted. For one thing, the individual Montagnard tribes were far too small and too scattered; they spoke too many languages, and their culture was too

complex. Because of these differences, they were unable to form any durable allegiance for any single purpose. The Montagnards therefore seldom posed any problems for the GVN aside from those related to benefits, treatment, and privileges. Had it not been for Communist subversion, perhaps there would never have been any significant Montagnard issue. But the national conflict had turned the Montagnard habitat into an arena of hot contest. The courtship of both Vietnamese sides had the effect of polarizing the Montagnards into two camps just as the ideological conflict had divided the Vietnamese in the lowlands. Within this frame of mind, as long as the war continued, the prospects of ethnic revolt remained a smoldering problem.

Infighting and divisiveness were nowhere as serious and damaging as among the South Vietnamese themselves. Regional discrimination, for one, was latent in every social group, every area of activity. At times it broke out into open consciousness, but most of the time it was contained, repressed.

Factionalism, however, was an all-time scourge that affected the entire fabric of South Vietnamese society. Under the First Republic, factionalism was not too serious because after all there was just one faction -- the Ngo clan -- that dominated all others. But after the Ngo's, factionalism had become an epidemic that no medicine could ever cure. There were so many clans, so many factions that any attempt at bringing them together was just unthinkable. Since every faction was contending for its own interests, it became wary of all others, and each could only trust its own members. Every key office in the government, the military, the regligions, or civil organizations turned into a small power nucleus around which revolved a clan, a faction.
Factionalism was also smoldering between the military and the civilians. Civilian leaders tended to consider themselves more educated and held the military in low regard. They did not want to associate with military leaders whom they derogatorily called "those martial elements." On their part, the RVNAF leaders were proud of the powers they were holding; they also disassociated themselves from civilian personalities whom they considered effete, incompetent, and incomprehensible and slighted as "tearoom politicians." The pairing of civilian and military

officials in the political arena of South Vietnam, therefore, appeared as odd as an uneven pair of chopsticks.

Social divisiveness reached its extreme perhaps under the acute form of infighting among individuals. The South Vietnamese urbanite of the post-colonial era proved to be too selfish. This came as a result of the perils and upheavals he had lived through since the Viet Minh took power. In the persons who held power and authority, selfishness became self-worship. Almost everyone deluded himself in thinking that he was superior to others and he alone deserved to be the leader of them all. This self-worship mentality was the source from which sprang up nearly two hundred political parties and associations and as many leaders during the few years that followed Mr. Diem's death. Thinking of only themselves as such, these leaders naturally opposed and attacked any rival who dared pose himself as an equal. In time, divisiness and infighting among individuals weakened every organization and defeated South Vietnam's every effort at rallying national strength for the common struggle. Even national leaders fought among themselves because of personal incompatibilities and differences or merely because of the unsociableness of their wives. It was a great tragedy that personal interests and pride could have taken precedence over the very survival of the nation.

For these reasons, South Vietnam's experiment in democracy unlimited during a period of a complex war, was a foregone failure. During the 20 months after the 1963 coup, as many as nine governments succeeded one another on the political scene. This was a vicious chain of events which saw a military government brought down by the military who installed a civilian government which in turn was torn apart by opposing civilian elements -- religion, political parties, students -- and had to turn over power of the state to the military. South Vietnam finally ended up with the generals back in power after two years of turmoil. The military had not loosened their grip on political power since then because despite elections designed to confer a constitutional base and a democratic form to the Thieu-Ky government, this government remained in essence a structure of military rule with a civilian outlook. This situation reflected the true balance of power prevailing in South Vietnam. The civilians, whose

dynamic force derived from religions and political parties, were too divisive to win in any national election; they also proved ineffective in the exercise of power. There remained the military who, under these circumstances, constituted perhaps the only truly cohesive and well-organized force capable of contending successfully with the Communists. Civilian rule, for all its desirability, could not be enforced without endangering the nation's survival.

But why, as an antithesis to the Communists' party rule and totalitarianism, did a truly free democracy not work in South Vietnam?

Complete democracy is a complex form of government which is not only difficult to operate effectively but also requires knowledge, maturity, and goodwill on the part of the common people as well as politicians. In the first place the South Vietnamese, especially the urbanites, were by nature obstinate, self-centered people who did not readily tolerate a divergence of opinions, which was the essence of freedom. They seemed adverse to free discussions which contributed to new ideas and helped shape a constructive opposition. Consequently, any faction that ascended to power in South Vietnam invariably sought to dominate and crush its opponents, and those who enjoyed a majority never bothered to respect the minority. The contention between Catholics and Buddhists was a major case in point; neither group seemed to let the other alone once it had access to political power. Naturally, the group in disfavor fought back for its own life, and the struggle for survival never seemed to come to an end.

The tendency of self-worship or self-supremacy on the part of political and religious leaders also allowed no chance for prospects of compromise. They seemed unwilling to admit that the rules of the game called for a broad spectrum of participation, that every participant was entitled to have its own voice, and that opinions sometimes differed or even opposed one another. Hardly any leader recognized the simple fact that no one could possibly hold all the truth and all the knowledge and that the essence of harmonious cooperation lay in tolerance and compromise. Unfortunately, it was a fact of South Vietnamese political life that almost every leader regarded himself as "the one and only." This was also true of religious leaders who engaged in politics but

could not see beyond the confines of their church or of suspicious military leaders who did not want any civilian participation in state affairs. In retrospect, South Vietnam during the war was not a good soil in which the seeds of a true democracy could germinate.

Another obstruction to the democratic process was antagonism between freedom and order. The South Vietnamese urbanite cherished freedom and loathed everything that interfered with his private life or business. Naturally, as any free and selfish individual, he tended to maximize his freedom. But this yearning for maximum freedom conflicted with order and control that society required to avoid chaos. Our ever-present Communist enemy also took advantage of excessive freedom to intensify his subversive activities. His agit-prop agents, therefore, always joined in every clamor for more democratic freedoms. Obviously as long as South Vietnam struggled with this enemy for its own life, it still found it hard to reconcile what benefited the individual with the common good of society.

To the rulers of South Vietnam, complete democracy was apparently too sluggish and inefficient to fight the war. It neither guaranteed policy continuity nor adapted well to an emergent nation struggling for its own survival. Indeed, the co-option of policies through open debates and the quest for consensus among political groups and within the national assembly were not processes that could be achieved rapidly. A country at war perhaps needed some other modality by which it could make timely decisions; to achieve this, a concentration of authority seemed to be indicated. Democratic processes such as opinion polls, hearings, and debates, were procedures better suited for nations living in peace. Above all, the requirements of the fight against Communism clearly dictated a continuity in national policies. Undoubtedly, this concern for policy continuity was the major motive that had prompted military leaders to take over power especially when the situation was getting out of control.

Democracy, though desirable, is a complex way to govern a country. For South Vietnam, this process of government proved even more complex. Building democracy was not just a matter of producing a constitution adapted from Western countries or duplicating many of their

formal institutions. The dangers lay in the insistence upon these formalities because they conveyed the impression that every freedom was permissible in the name of democracy. But even the founding fathers of the French and U.S. constitutions had found it necessary to institute a democracy with certain limits because it was a slow process of development. Like a tree, democracy could only develop if it had time to germinate, take roots, and grow. In South Vietnam, the urban society and especially politicians did have a sincere desire for democracy, but they lacked the patience and goodwill to allow their democratic infant to grow and mature. Besides, the true process could only start from the grassroots level, never from the top. During all this time the rural society, which was the starting point for this democratization process, never had the chance to live in security. Given a time for peaceful settlement, the villages of South Vietnam, with their prevailing sense of discipline and order, and which had for generations lived democratically by tradition and in spirit, would have been the very proving ground for a stable and durable democracy.

The early imposition of a Western-style democracy on South Vietnam, therefore, resulted in many problems. The infighting among factions was so vicious that a civilian prime minister became disenchanted with politics and relinquished his government to the military who put up a democratic front by producing a constitution and holding elections. No doubt, this was dictated by circumstantial needs because the U.S. insisted on some form of democracy to facilitate its provision of aid. But the democratic make-up failed to make the regime a democracy in its true sense. It was the kind of democracy in which elective offices were all held by military appointees and the executive ruled with emergency legislative powers by restricting both opposition and certain vital freedoms. It was a half-hearted democracy whose true nature was autocracy. But under pressure from U.S. public opinion which had a basic penchant for democracy, this turned out to be a weak and trembling autocracy. Suspicious and wary of opposition, this autocracy did not even dare crack down on opposing elements such as the anti-war An Quang faction. Although demonstrations were strictly forbidden, they still occurred, and the police were under orders not to interfere. Many of these unusual social and

political manifestations reflected the controversial influence exerted by the United States.

The U.S. was unquestionably the mentor who raised the South Vietnamese infant and trained him into a strong adult. That South Vietnam existed at all as a nation and for that long was chiefly due to U.S. support. The fact was that by signing the 1954 Geneva Agreements, France already wrote off South Vietnam, convinced that it would inevitably come under Communist rule after the 1956 elections. U.S. support for President Diem had brought the situation around and played an important part in building South Vietnam into a separate, viable nation. However, the involvement of Americans, who represented a dynamic civilization, in a nation whose culture was essentially static seemed not very successful in producing a completely satisfactory relationship. The cultural differences between Americans and Vietnamese are antipodal. Americans are active, impatient, and rationalistic contrasted to Vietnamese who are quiescent, patient, and sentimental. Joining forces for a common effort, Americans and Vietnamese often saw the same problem differently, had different basic concepts, and acted and reacted in different ways. Under the First Republic American influence was not pervasive because the regime's leaders were self-assured and strong-minded to the point of becoming obstinate. U.S. assistance then was substantial but restrained. Discordance finally contributed to the downfall of a regime regarded by Americans as irredeemable. After that U.S. involvement in South Vietnam's own affairs seemed to have no bounds.

Militarily the U.S. had saved South Vietnam from dangers of collapse in 1965 by deploying its combat troops and fighting the ground war. The RVNAF were gradually expanded, modernized, and trained for combat under American military doctrine. Evidently, maintaining such a large and modern military force and ensuring its continued capability for combat demanded big expenditures that only a long-range aid program could provide. This was a most critical problem because South Vietnam's performance in self-defense depended primarily on that aid.

The protracted war, meanwhile, had ravaged South Vietnam's national resources and made a shambles of its economy. To help South Vietnam

make ends meet, the U.S. poured in financial and material aid. But this aid seemed to benefit the urban sector mostly because the cities prospered as a result of war-related businesses and lucrative services rendered to U.S. and FWMAF troops while the rural people continued to labor in hardships amidst the hazards of an escalating war. Those familiar with the war scene of the 1965-1969 period certainly witnessed the overabundance of luxurious goods in the streetstands of big cities and the thriving black market and war profiteering. This only spoiled the urban society, widened the war wounds, and deepened social injustices. The GVN policy of overflowing the domestic market with imported goods because of budgetary needs did not help build an economy geared for long-range development. So when the U.S. began to reduce its involvement, South Vietnam's economic and social difficulties remained very much the same if not more serious.

The ubiquitous presence of Americans in almost every area of South Vietnamese government reflected a conspicuous truth: American initiative in the war. Through its hard-working, devoted, and efficient military and civilian advisers who commanded sizable means and resources, there was no doubt that the U.S. wanted to do it quickly and get it over with in the shortest time possible. This desire for quick results committed the U.S. to bigger expenditures which proved costly in the long run. American initiative also stifled South Vietnam's self-reliant spirit and made South Vietnamese, especially the urbanites who were dependent by nature, increasingly passive. For a developing nation facing the dangers of Communist subversion, this was a serious flaw that might prove fatal someday. The American experience seems to indicate that small nations fighting against Communism with U.S. aid would have been better off if they had endeavored to do things by themselves. Self-reliance should be a motto worth promoting.

American initiative and the deep American involvement in every aspect of South Vietnam's national endeavor brought to light another ill effect on the South Vietnamese national cause. The towering and conspicuous role of the U.S. as a "big brother" gave the impression that everything had been preordained by the U.S. The end result perhaps was that, in the eyes of world and domestic opinion, no GVN after 1963 ever

enjoyed any measure of prestige because nobody believed that it was truly independent. Internally and internationally, this was damaging for South Vietnam's national cause because the war was essentially a political conflict. The enemy was thus given more grist for his propaganda mill, and much of the world at large also doubted the validity of South Vietnam's cause and its ability to fight. What should have been clearly defined and emphasized in a conflict like the Vietnam war was perhaps the exact relationship between the country that gave aid and the one that received it, the exact role to be played by each, and the rules that governed the common effort so as to enhance fully, not to stifle, the indigenous cause.

South Vietnam's over-reliance and total dependence on the U.S. strongly suggested a big void in national leadership, which was perhaps one of its gravest basic shortcomings. The apparent lack of vision, prestige, and strong-mindedness on the part of South Vietnamese leaders accounted for the nation's failure to enhance its cause through self-reliance. The First Republic's leadership had undoubtedly earned its prestigious reputation because of its hard-line approach to national affairs and articulate and cohesive policies. Although this prestige and strong-mindedness sometimes verged on vanity and intransigence, which did not please the U.S., in the eyes of a large segment of South Vietnamese those were the very traits of a strong and capable leadership. By comparison, the Second Republic's leadership seemed irresolute and unsure of itself. Its major flaw was too much preoccupation with power infighting and a rather opportunistic approach to solving national problems.

If Mr. Diem's regime had often been described as despotic and politically monolithic, his rule had also, in a certain sense, a salutory effect on South Vietnamese society. Because of this single-party system, national authority was strong and encompassing; everyone was required to submit to this authority, and order was enforced. For the nation-building effort of a developing country, this must have been beneficial. But after dismantling autocratic rule, South Vietnam found itself splintered into tiny power groups and too many political parties, all vying for political supremacy and suspecting and hurting one another in the process.

Added to this chaotic power struggle, there were also deep-seated discords and infightings between individuals, between religions, and between the civilians and the military. Because of this tumultuous internal strife national authority was shattered, order could not be maintained, and there was no longer any sense of national unity. Continuous disorder and changes taught the South Vietnamese to be wiser and more cautious, because your subordinate of today might well be your superior of tomorrow. Without being told, therefore, everyone became wary and adopted a wait-and-see attitude. In the public service, no one seemed completely eager to enforce control or to demand productivity; in fact, no one seemed fully dedicated for the public good.

Under the First Republic, there was only one Mme Nhu, but after her, there seemed to be too many Mme Nhu's in miniature. The fact was that in the inner circle of every power faction, there was always a Mme Nhu. In contrast to the Mme Nhu of the First Republic who promoted women's rights, organized women's movements, and heavily engaged in politics, her successors participated in businesses, bought and sold influence, sponsored new clans, and disliked each other. This caused rumblings among the public and dispirited the honest public servant.

Mr. Diem had been criticized for discrimination and cronyism in the appointment and promotion of personnel, but somehow his favoritism was limited, and the number of people who benefited from it did not seem too large. Despite criticisms, his methods of personnel selection were rigorous, and the standards of qualification restrictive but meritorious. After 1963, however, cronyism and favoritism seemed to have no limits. Each center of power, each faction nominated its own henchmen to key positions. Fairness and the criteria of talent and morality no longer mattered. The public, therefore, witnessed personnel promotions and transfers "en masse" without any justification which, in the years ahead, was to bring about enormous difficulties in personnel management.

The fact that the majority of middle and low-echelon cadres issued from the urban petty bourgeois class did not help improve national leadership because of their intrinsic shortcomings. The young urban people in general loved freedom and welcomed any change for a better society, but they were also unrealistic and impatient. To motivate them

and enlist their enthusiastic participation in the common effort, constant coaxing and incentives were required. But the leaders of the post-Diem era seemed to have missed every good opportunity to put the urban youth's patriotic ardor and anti-Communist dedication to work. These opportunities existed immediately following the overthrow of Mr. Diem in 1963 when the cities were alive with revolutionary passion, then at the height of the Communist offensive in 1968 when almost every urban youth felt it a duty to join the military service, and finally after South Vietnam was given a chance to stand on its own during the redeployment of U.S. forces. That included the sobering jolt brought about by the 1973 Paris Agreement. This failure to foster the urban revolutionary zeal and use it for the anti-Communist fight seemed to stem from our leaders' very lack of foresight and dependence on the United States.

It came as no surprise, both in the eyes of the public and in the belief in knowledgeable quarters, that every national endeavor and the conduct of the war itself totally conformed to American policies. In time the very survival of South Vietnam came to depend on the will and support of the U.S. Having nothing left to decide and to show for its valor, the South Vietnamese leadership gradually lost all prestige and real authority. This void in leadership loomed larger than ever after the U.S. withdrew all of its troops, settled for a peace arrangement, and reduced its involvement. The ranks of South Vietnamese leadership, who heretofore had proved readily amenable to U.S. wishes, now found themselves hopelessly vulnerable, unable to stand on their own feet, and utterly incapable of pulling the nation together.

After their fortunes had gone through so many ups and downs, the South Vietnamese people became wiser but they did not seem to believe whole heartedly in the future of South Vietnam. This explained why South Vietnamese society became dispirited and devoid of the will to continue struggling. It was not surprising that the wealthy and the influential transferred funds to foreign accounts and sent their children abroad. This was also true of some of our national leaders who found it more reassuring to provide for their own uncertain future. And those who could not do otherwise just let themselves flow along, living a life

without tomorrow. This hopeless situation manifested through the proliferation of anti-war literature, arts, and music and the increasing numbers of youths and misfits indulging themselves in debauchery. It also accounted for widespread draft dodging and the lowering morale among the ranks of civil servants and servicemen. All this seemed to explain why a military force of over one million men plus a significant police force and some four million PSDF members were incapable of maintaining territorial security throughout South Vietnam.

The picture thus depicted of South Vietnamse society was indeed bleak and dark, but it did not imply that all South Vietnamese had lost the will to survive and continue the fight. Certainly not all servicemen, civil servants, and policemen neglected their duties or shunned their responsibilities. There were in fact many segments of the South Vietnamese population which still proved aggressively anti-Communist, and the majority of RVNAF servicemen, national policemen and civil servants continued to fight and serve with dedication and purpose in the hopes that somehow the situation was going to improve. Indeed, there had been too many shiny examples of heroic sacrifices among their ranks to attempt to prove the contrary. In general, no matter what had happened, the South Vietnamese people had displayed throughout the war a most laudable spirit of endurance and resiliency that few other peoples could match.

On the other hand, a comparative study of developing nations under similar conditions revealed that our leadership was after all not as bad as it might appear. Perhaps our leaders still had to prove they could measure up to their tasks and responsibilities in meeting the challenge of combat and conducting the complex war efforts effectively. In the South Vietnamese context, perhaps they still had to prove that they stood by and fully matched the immense sacrifices and sufferings of our people.

Despite its complexity, the problem of South Vietnamese society revealed certain well-defined basic requirements that were to be met satisfactorily in order to motivate, rally, and unite this inherently anti-Communist popular mass. The first requirment was capable leadership. The national leader should have been someone who had prestige,

moral excellence, and talent to inspire respect, trust, and obedience. Then he should have been clear-sighted enough to surround himself with a competent and dedicated staff and create a governmental apparatus completely responsive and devoted to public service. Such a leader would surely inspire the cadres and public servants to perform better. Under this leadership, the armed forces would also fight with more dedication and behave correctly toward the people.

The second requirement was to ensure security and protection for the rural people. To achieve this, South Vietnam would have required an all-efficient and thoroughly polyvalent military force and a professional police force which enjoyed a good rapport with the people. Popular confidence and trust in these forces would help overcome their shortcomings and enhance the solidarity and combined strength between them and the people. Security would make it possible to build and develop the nation and the rural people would certainly benefit from it materially because South Vietnam was not without national resources.

The third and last requirement was to assuage the ardent desire for democracy and freedom on the part of the urban people. But to achieve this without giving a free hand to subversive and pro-Communist elements would certainly require a gradual process of breaking-in. We believe that as long as the subversive war continued, there could not be any question of complete democracy and unlimited freedom. What the government could have done, however, was to accept genuine opposition and allowed it a decent posture as well as certain well-defined freedoms in the nation's political life. Then, as control was assured and the war wound down as it had for sometime after the cease-fire, the government could have permitted less and less restraints until there were no more grounds for continued clamoring. For this course to achieve success, the leadership should abide by the rule of laws and above all set the example of courage, dedication, integrity, and moral excellence. The problem of South Vietnam, after all, was perhaps not democracy versus dictatorship but essentially a matter of how much democratic freedom we could afford at a certain given time.

Unfortunately, the problem of South Vietnam had not been thoroughly understood and correctly solved. Hampered by shortsightedness and re-

trogression, the class of leaders had lost its ability to lead. Society was torn asunder by internal strife, and the popular mass no longer had faith in the government. It semeed as if the vicious and drawn-out war had drained South Vietnam of all its vital resources and brought it to the brink of moral and material bankruptcy. So when the U.S. Congress decided it no longer desired to support a continuing war, most people could readily sense that the fate had been sealed for South Vietnam.

Glossary

CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
DAO	Defense Attache Office (U.S.)
FULRO	Front Unifié pour la Lutte des Races Opprimées (Unified Front for the Struggle of Oppressed Races)
GVN	Government of (South) Vietnam
ICP	Indochinese Communist Party
JGS	Joint General Staff
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (U.S.)
MEDCAP	Medical Civic Action Program (U.S.-initiated)
MR	Military Region
NLF	National Liberation Front (of South Vietnam)
PSDF	People's Self-Defense Forces
RF/PF	Regional and Popular Forces
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VCI	Viet Cong Infrastructure
VNQDD	Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (Vietnam Nationalist Party or Kuomintang)