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Mr. President, I believe that Mr. Kaiser's report bears repeating and that it should be weighed carefully by those who are concerned with the progress of the battle in Vietnam.

I ask unanimous consent that the first installment of Mr. Kaiser's series on "The New Optimists" be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the article was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Washington Post, Oct. 29, 1969]

MANY FEEL VC CAN'T RECOVER

(By Robert G. Kaiser)

APBAC, SOUTH VIETNAM.—Just when anti-war pressure in the United States seems to be escalating sharply, many American officials here are contemplating the tantalizing possibility that the Vietcong's revolution in South Vietnam has been defeated.

Optimism in Vietnam is a discredited philosophy, and its adherents must accept the status of discredited philosophers: One is allowed to believe that the earth is flat, but please, keep it to yourself. Hardly any American official here outside the military establishment will allow himself to be quoted by name as one of the new optimists, though a large number of them subscribe secretly to the faith.

Virtually all these officials have learned to qualify every optimistic judgment with some variation of the standard post-Tet offensive caveat: "Of course, the Vietcong could still surprise us..." But many dispense the caveat insincerely, as though it were a kind of intellectual conscience money.

The new optimism has infected much of the American mission here, and it is undoubtedly reflected in the official reports from Vietnam now reaching Washington.

The "fact sheet" on Vietnam issued last week by the White House shows signs of the new mood among U.S. officials in Vietnam.

The basis of the optimism is the apparent situation in the countryside, especially in the Mekong Delta, where a third of South Vietnam's 17.3 million people live. The countryside is more fully "pacified" than at any time since the big-unit war began in 1965.

Roads and waterways that have been impassable for years have begun to buzz with commerce during the last six months. Villages long considered part of the "Vietcong society," sometimes for a generation, are now clearly within Saigon's influence and seem to be thriving on the new relationship.

Hundreds of thousands of citizens have demonstrated some faith in (if not affection for) the Saigon government by moving back to their old hamlets, joining the People's Self-Defense Force and participating in government-sponsored local elections.

The new optimists make a good deal of this apparent progress, but they are not talking about "winning the war." They are optimistic about the prospects of controlling the countryside and eliminating the military and political influence of local Vietcong. But this would not necessarily affect the North Vietnamese troops still in South Vietnam—still capable of launching offensives and prolonging the war perhaps indefinitely, even if forced to stay close to their Cambodian and Laotian sanctuaries.

INSECURE AREAS

Nor do the new optimists speak with equal enthusiasm about all of South Vietnam. Several northern provinces are still heavily infested with Vietcong; all the northern provinces and those along the western edge of the country—next to Laos and Cambodia—are subject to incursions by the North

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OPTIMISM IN VIETNAM

Mr. McGEE, Mr. President, Reporter Robert G. Kaiser, of the Washington Post Foreign Service, writes that, despite the many reasons why optimism in Vietnam is considered a risky business, there is a new optimism among American officials on the scene. In a series which began in the pages of the Post on Wednesday, Mr. Kaiser details some examples for this new era of optimism which has, he reports, led many to believe that the Vietcong's revolution in South Vietnam has, in fact, been defeated.

To say that is not to say that the war is over, or that the forces infiltrated from North Vietnam are not capable of launching offensives and prolonging the war. It is to say that in the past 21 months the structure of the Vietcong has been eroded while the government in Saigon has gained substantial strength. It takes into consideration the fact that for more than a year, now, the Vietcong have not made a major effort to challenge the pacification program in the Mekong Delta—that region which many people well acquainted with the situation in Vietnam consider essential. Kaiser wrote that he recently spent 7 days in the delta "walking and driving unarmed through areas

Vietnamese that could mean insecurity in those areas for years.

But the Mekong Delta is the country's wealthiest and most populous area, and it was the home of the Viet-minh and Vietcong movements in the South. It is often said that whoever can control the lush and productive Delta will eventually prevail.

This correspondent recently spent seven days in the Delta on two separate trips, walking and driving unarmed through areas that an American would not have entered without a company of soldiers when Presidents Thieu and Nixon met last June at Midway.

On such a trip one is repeatedly nudged and told: "VC came out of the tree-line over there and ambushed an RF [Regional Force] company last spring."—"This is where the [American] province senior adviser was killed"—"three months ago we would have been called crazy even to think about driving on this road"—"You're walking on land that the government in Saigon never controlled until this summer."

GAINS ARE MYSTERIOUS

The rampant optimism is restrained by the mystery of why the past year's progress in pacification was so easily achieved. The Vietcong have made no major effort to challenge pacification in the Delta for more than a year. Government forces have moved into hundreds of supposedly Vietcong-controlled villages without, in many cases, even being shot at. South Vietnamese officials have often been able to go into these areas, organize government programs and run local elections without the slightest harassment.

Have the Vietcong decided not to contest the pacification program? Or are they too weak to cope with it? Both theories have adherents among American and South Vietnamese officials here, though the second is much more popular.

But even those who believe the National Liberation Front has ignored pacification for the time being seem to doubt that an all-out Vietcong effort would now do as much damage as, for instance, last year's Tet offensive.

SAIGON'S GROWING STRENGTH

They reason that during those devastating attacks and in the 21 months since the Vietcong structure has eroded substantially while the Saigon's government's military power in the countryside has grown steadily. South Vietnam has about 100,000 more troops than it had at the time of the Tet attacks.

The boldest of the new optimists are those who contend that the Vietcong are too feeble to make a comeback in the Mekong Delta. But there are a great many officials talking that way, including some of the best-known hands in Vietnam once known for their criticism and pessimism. Though they are optimists now, they are talking only off the record.

"Villages we thought were controlled by a company of VC turned out to have only one or two armed guerrillas" one of these veterans said recently.

VICTONG INSTRUCTIONS

Another hand, who has been studying the Vietcong for four years, points to captured documents containing instructions to local Vietcong to assassinate fixed quotas of important South Vietnamese officials in the countryside. Despite these instructions, the government has lost very few important officials.

Other officials point to the reports of prisoners and defectors from the Vietcong who say that the enemy's once remarkable organization—the layers of associations and committees built on a tight base of cells—no longer exists in many parts of South Vietnam. In other areas the organization seems to be a parody of its former self. In one village in Dinh Tuong Province, the party

secretary—an important figure—turned out to be a 16-year-old boy.

The zeal of the revolution also seems dissipated, the new optimist say. "When we fought the French," a 55-year-old Vietcong colonel who rallied to the government told an American official, "the people supported us, they loved us. But these young new cadre don't know how to win the people's support . . ."

DELTA'S ASSUMPTION

All over the Delta one hears that "time is now on our side." It is widely assumed that each week the Vietcong get weaker and the government presence becomes stronger.

The fact that American patience with the war could run out before the South Vietnamese are ready to stand alone causes bitterness here. "I wish I could show Sen. McGovern around this province," a Foreign Service official who has been working on an important pacification job said recently. "How could he want us to give up now?"

Men like this one (including senior members of the American mission in Saigon) who have coped with failure and frustration in Vietnam are now exhilarated by the apparent success. Efforts in the United States to ingore or to sabotage that progress anger many American officials here.

"It's good to be back where some constructive work is being done," one senior diplomat said recently after a discouraging trip to America.

The fruits of that work—be they relatively permanent or just temporary—are visible all over South Vietnam. There have always been models of successful pacification, but in the old days those were matched by models of pacification's complete failure. Now that second category is rare indeed.

APBAC'S EXAMPLE

This hamlet of Apbac in Longan Province is a good example of the new model. When one flies over Apbac at 1,000 feet the tall buildings of Saigon are clearly visible rising out of the rice paddies 20 miles off. Longan Province is at the very top of the Delta, but its proximity to Saigon never had much influence on its politics. The area around Apbac has been home for the Vietminh and Vietcong for years.

In 1963 Apbac became famous as the site of a disastrous battle for the South Vietnamese army. Five American helicopters were shot down in that fight, and people in the United States began asking what was going on in Vietnam.

In 1965 the hamlet fell completely under Vietcong control. Many of its residents fled to nearby towns or government-controlled areas to avoid the war, the rigors of life under the Vietcong or both.

ENTERED IN JULY

Government forces entered Apbac this July. Then 600 people lived in this dirty, dilapidated little town or right around it. They were served by four small shops and an old Buddhist pagoda that sits atop the highest hill in Longan Province, a 35-foot mound of Paddy mud.

Popular Force platoons built outposts in the area and by force or default, established security in the area. Revolutionary Development cadre, the black-pajama shock troops of pacification, moved in to begin cheerleading the pacification of Apbac.

The RD cadre are masters of the showy gimmick: They paint South Vietnamese flags beside the front door of every house, put up flagpoles so every family can fly the government flag, build fences and make minor repairs. They also often reopen schools, as they did here.

The Vietcong had destroyed the hamlet's 13-room schoolhouse and used its brick and concrete walls to reinforce their bunkers, so there had been no school in Apbac for four

years. When the new government officials announced last summer that they would open a temporary school, they expected about 200 children to turn out, but 523 came the first day from as far as two miles away.

Now a visitor sees young students repeating their lessons in unison and scratching out their arithmetic problems in pen and ink, as the French taught them. Because there had been no school for four years, students 8 to 13 years old are all in the same class.

VILLAGERS RETURN

The large school turnout reflected the influx of former residents of Apbac that began soon after the government took it over. Now at least 1200 people are living here.

At last count there were 18 shops and the government is constructing and repairing buildings. (Damage from the 1963 battle had never been repaired.)

In the first month after government forces entered Apbac and the surrounding villages, 108 Vietcong or their sympathizers rallied to the government. Most of them were unimportant, but one was the old Vietcong hamlet chief. Another 54 suspected Vietcong were arrested.

According to the toothless old monk in the pagoda, Thien Loi, all the Vietcong officials in the area have been killed, arrested, have rallied to the government or have "gone away." Thien Loi, who has lived there for 61 years, told an American visitor he does not expect the VC ever to return.

VC LACKS MUSCLE

Apparently the Vietcong controlled Apbac with just a few cadre and guerrillas.

"But they used to have the muscle on hand to back them up, if they needed backing up," according to Maj. Carl Neely, the enthusiastic American district adviser in the area. "Now they don't have the muscle."

The Vietcong have made no effort to re-enter Apbac or to harass the government officials who have been here since July.

There is no evidence that the people of Apbac have become, overnight, devoted followers of President Thieu and his government. But the evidence is plentiful that they are happier with their lot now than they were as recently as the day, three months ago, that Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon.

The war is not over in Apbac. North Vietnamese soldiers are hiding, in groups of six to a dozen, in Longan Province and there are still occasional incidents nearby. But the new optimists in this part of Vietnam cannot see how the Vietcong can regain the dominant position they once held.