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a risk? Reporter Don Oberdorfer, writing in the Washington Post of Sunday, December 14, assessed this very question and concluded that the chances of the policy now being pursued working were reasonably good—by that, he meant better than 50-50. I ask unanimous consent that the article be printed in the RECORD.

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

U.S. PULLOUT MAY NOT MEAN LOSING WAR
 (By Don Oberdorfer)

SAIGON.—One of the wisest and most discerning of Vietnam's intellectuals is preparing to write a history of his generation, which was brought up under the mandarins and has known the French, the Japanese, the Americans, the Vietnamese Communists and 25 years of war and turbulence with only a few interludes of national peace.

The title of his work will either be "Vietnam Between Despair and Hope" or "Vietnam Between Hope and Despair." He still hasn't decided which.

The uncertainty is understandable and widely shared. In four years of periodic visits to this country, I have encountered only a handful of men, mostly Americans, who were certain they had a clear vision of the future. The majority of these men are long departed, and few of them left with either their visions or their careers intact.

Surely there is no other place on earth where what seems impossible today so often takes place tomorrow and where the foreseeable future for natives and foreigners alike usually runs to about noon on the following day. "The problem of projection here is the if factor," one of the most experienced U.S. officials observed wryly the other day. "You can formulate a handy-sounding program for the future, but there are always three ifs in every sentence."

AN EDUCATED HUNCH

Nonetheless, projection is now more pressing and perhaps more feasible for Americans and Vietnamese than it has been in many months. The U.S. government has taken a clear new direction—the gradual withdrawal of U.S. ground combat troops in the next year or two—and the insistent question is whether this can be accomplished without losing the war.

Can the United States withdraw 300,000 or so men on such a schedule without drastic military reverses or a political collapse in South Vietnam? Can the South Vietnamese government hold its own in the short run—say the next three or four years—with substantial U.S. economic help plus American artillery, air and logistical support? In short, can the Nixon policy work?

After a return visit of four weeks and with some trepidation, my guess is that as of today the chances are reasonably good, by which I mean something better than 50-50. The chances for South Vietnam's survival in something like the present form in the long run appear to be considerably lower, but that is another story.

Anyone who ever spent much time here can cite a dozen reasons for a hundred supposed facts to support or refute almost any side of any question. In this country, it is usually the estimate that comes first and the reasons later, which is another way of saying that people are forced to rely in the end on educated hunches. Here are some of the factors behind my hunch of the moment:

First, there is the sheer inertia force of regimes and events, which counts for much in this part of the world. Nobody expected Ngo Dinh Diem to last a year or Nguyen Cao Ky to last a month, but both lasted for as long as the military were behind them. At

present, Nguyen Van Thieu appears to be unchallenged from within the army, which amounts to nearly one million full-time soldiers under arms and is likely to be raised soon by another 100,000 or so. Roughly one in every nine South Vietnamese is in the government's armed forces.

The United States has now supplied the South Vietnamese with 70,000 M-16 rifles, 1,200 tanks and armored vehicles, 30,000 machine guns, 4,000 mortars and nearly 25,000 Jeeps and trucks. The enemy force of Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops has also been supplied with modern weapons by their allies, Russia and China.

But the human arsenal of South Vietnam is no pushover so long as its soldiers fight. There is every sign that they will do so, particularly when self-preservation is involved.

Second, South Vietnamese leaders and officials are finally beginning to act as if this is their country and they have a real stake in the war. This is less true of the general populace, who have less room to maneuver and less at stake. It may be significant, though, that the children in Hue are playing childhood games of how to defend the city against the nasty Vietcong.

Third, the Vietnamese government, from necessity if not conviction, has begun to accord a greater measure of military and political power to the villages and hamlets in the countryside. Two of the most important changes since my last visit were the decision in the summer of 1968 to distribute weapons to a people's self-defense force of local volunteers, and the decision that fall to put local village chiefs in control of the paid Popular Force soldiers in their areas.

As of today, military conditions are better in most places than they have been for several years. According to the hamlet evaluators and the computers, 92 per cent of the people are under government control at midday. An American general says that "Saigon is safer than Washington, D.C."

Favorable as present conditions may be, they could change rapidly with changing military pressures. This has happened before. Since much of the progress is reversible, the great question is not so much the pattern of today or even of the next several months—when some sort of Communist offensive is expected—but the pattern of a year from now or two years from now, as American forces are gradually withdrawn.

One of those who has been living with the problem for the longest time is Gen. Cao Van Vien, who turned 48 years old this week and by popular repute is the only top Vietnamese general who was ever wounded in action. For more than four years, Vien has been chief of the joint general staff of the Vietnamese armed forces.

His spacious office, where the top political and military leaders gathered in refuge the first morning of the 1968 Tet offensive, is on the second floor of a former French headquarters building in a heavily guarded compound near the Saigon airport.

Vien is a handsome man who speaks good English, and he had prepared written answers to some questions submitted in advance. One of them said that he realizes "the U.S. commitment is bound to diminish." He estimated that "if nothing out of the ordinary should come about—such as a dramatic increase in the rate of North Vietnamese infiltration—I do not foresee any serious military reverses for the South Vietnamese army." The clause about infiltration was underlined.

Throughout his written and oral remarks in an interview lasting an hour, there was an underlying note of concern about a possible Communist military buildup during the period of American military withdrawal. Vien said that on the average, 12,000 soldiers monthly have been coming from North Viet-

TROOP WITHDRAWAL IN VIETNAM

Mr. McGEE. Mr. President, in the aftermath of President Nixon's announcement last night that he is continuing his policy of phased withdrawal of U.S. combat forces in Vietnam, it is well that he ask the very question the President proposed: Is this not taking

nam into the South this year, plus 3,000 tons of supplies monthly through the mountains and another 600 tons through the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville. The infiltration has stepped up in recent weeks.

"We may have to come up with something absolutely novel to sever the North Vietnamese infiltration flow, the single most important factor contributing to the enemy's capability to prosecute this war," the general says. This novel method must cut the flow "effectively and entirely." Otherwise, South Vietnam will continue to be threatened for 10 or even 25 years more.

DAFFLED MARINES

By Vien's reckoning, it would take a minimum of three divisions to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos with a ground invasion (informed Americans estimate the required force at five divisions) and that kind of strength is simply not in sight. At the moment, South Vietnam lacks sufficient force even to stop the flow of men across the demilitarized zone—just as the U.S. Marines who formerly manned this area could not stop it.

Unless the infiltration is stopped, the general said, "the Vietnam war may still produce results that, for us Vietnamese, are to be expected, but for outside observers may prove the ill-foundedness of the present strategic approach." He is anxious to be able to turn to American air and artillery troops for support in such a case. He wouldn't say how many such troops would be needed, but he reported hearing that the United States plans to leave 250,000 troops in enclaves at least for several years.

An American general with as many stars as Cao Van Vien was asked if there is any realistic prospect of cutting off the infiltration into South Vietnam. The answer was no.

Vien describes the problem of infiltration as "the single dark spot in an otherwise rosy picture," and no doubt it is a fundamental problem. Nonetheless, it is possible to spot many other serious problems that, together with continued Communist pressure, could someday wreck the whole effort.

South Vietnam is basically rich in natural resources—rice, timber, fish and rubber—but as presently constituted, it is not a viable nation in the absence of massive American aid. North Vietnam, with its Communist regime and greater history of hardship and privation, has greater self-sufficiency.

South Vietnam cannot support a million men under arms or anything like it with the resources it is itself willing or able to muster. More than a million people have been driven from their homes and farms by the war, and the country cannot support them either.

President Thieu recently informed his people that the country spends \$600 million annually to import various types of goods, but sells only \$20 million in exports to pay for them. A nation cannot spend 30 times its dollar earnings without large and continuing subsidies.

The hope and expectation of American embassy officials is that U.S. economic aid will increase as the number of American servicemen in the country declines. Failure to foot the bill for these subsidies, whether from refusal by Congress or any other cause, would bring a severe crisis.

Finally, there is the still unsolved political problem, which may well become acute as the country faces the constitutionally prescribed presidential elections of September, 1971.

Many Vietnamese who accept the Thieu regime as a necessity today are dead set against its continuance for four years after 1971. But it seems improbable that Thieu will step aside.

If the constitution is followed and the elections honestly held, Thieu may have a most difficult time winning over any strong or united opposition. If the opposition is throttled or the election rigged, there could

be trouble of a different sort. Meanwhile, North Vietnam is believed to be absorbed in its own political power struggle, which is another factor of first importance.

A SYMBOLIC SOUVENIR

Pondering the past and future of this tragically divided nation, one turns in the end to the blood that has flowed because of ideology, historical accident, geography and conflicts rooted far beyond the borders of Vietnam.

Since my first trip here in April, 1966, in what seemed then to be the last reel of a double-feature war, some 38,000 Americans, 69,000 South Vietnamese soldiers and 446,000 Vietcong and North Vietnamese soldiers have been killed, according to official report. Uncounted thousands of civilians in both North and South Vietnam have also been victims.

South Vietnam has filled one national cemetery in this period, and is 3,000 graves into a new one. Despite all this, the U.S. military estimates that 280,000 Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops are fighting in the South, which is virtually the same number as were carried on the official order of battle four years ago.

Late one afternoon, in search of a change of view, I went to the An Quang Pagoda to see Thich Tri Quang, the sometimes militant and sometimes enigmatic monk who is among the few truly charismatic Vietnamese. He and his Buddhist followers were the surprise catalytic agents who stirred the 1963 revolt against Diem and who almost split the country in a battle for political change in 1966.

The living embodiment of the unexpected and the unpredictable was alone in his cloister inscribing classical Chinese characters on rough paper with a thin brush and a bottle of ink. The temple bells were tolling and the young novices were padding about. The monk spoke of history and philosophy, but would say nothing about the present or the future.

Before saying farewell, Tri Quang agreed to draw an appropriate Chinese character to be carried back to the United States as a souvenir of the visit. First he drew the character *Hou*, an angular, graceful series of strokes meaning a harmonious mixture, like the mixture of pigment and water in his bottle of ink. Then he drew *Binh*, which means serenity and calm.

Together they spell *Hoa Binh*, which means peace. Surely there is nothing the Vietnamese on both sides need more desperately, or seem less likely to achieve in the years just ahead.

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