

CAN SOUTH VIETNAM SURVIVE AFTER THE GI'S LEAVE?

FILE SUB

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Time of testing is drawing closer in Vietnam. So! W. Sanders, staff member of "U. S. News & World Report," who has covered the war from the start, revisited key areas and cabled this dispatch on Saigon's chances against the Reds.

SAIGON

The U. S. pullout from South Vietnam, picking up speed daily, is raising concern among many Americans whether Saigon really can carry on alone against the Communists.

The enemy shows no intention of laying down arms. Instead, the Reds are waging increasing war in neighboring Laos and Cambodia. In South Vietnam, they continue to fight, while waiting for more U. S. troops to leave.

What happens when the American ground combat troops are gone—possibly within months? Will South Vietnam then be an easy mark for conquest?

The answer, from the South Vietnamese themselves: A Communist conquest no longer is possible.

Effect of U. S. help. Before the massive introduction of U. S. manpower and money in 1965, most foreign experts here—and many South Vietnamese—gave Saigon little or no chance of saving the country.

Today, the mood in South Vietnam is radically different. The nation daily is gaining in strength, self-respect and national unity. Although wearied by 25 years of war, few people are willing to accept a Communist victory as the price of peace.

The South Vietnamese say that the Communist offensives in Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam actually weaken—not strengthen—Hanoi. Tied down by a three-front war and drained in the past by the costly decision to engage U. S. troops in full-scale battles, Hanoi is in trouble. At home, North Vietnam's economy is under severe strain. At the front, more than 650,000 Red soldiers have been killed.

The Communists have not been able to mount a sustained attack in force

since suffering heavy losses during the Tet offensive of early 1968—a disastrous campaign that decimated the Red Army in South Vietnam. Now, North Vietnam has been forced to abandon "big unit" warfare in the South and to return to the guerrilla tactics it used during early days of the conflict.

The drop in Communist capabilities is seen most dramatically in the Mekong River Delta south of Saigon, where 40 per cent of South Vietnam's population lives. While once in danger of falling to the Reds, the Delta region now is firmly in the hands of South Vietnamese forces.

Recruiting difficulties. With the war going against them, the Communists are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit new soldiers among local residents. About half the Reds' Delta strength today is composed of North Vietnamese, who for the most part are cut off from their former supply bases in Cambodia.

Growing numbers of veteran Communist fighters are surrendering under the Government's "Open Arms" amnesty program. The 600 who turned themselves in during the first week of August, for in-

THE TWO VIETNAMS: A Change in Fortunes of War

NORTH VIETNAM: Weakened by a three-front war in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, Hanoi's economy is under severe strain. War weariness is increasing. With battlefield losses totaling more than 650,000 men, North Vietnam is abandoning the idea of sending big units into the fighting, is returning to guerrilla warfare in the South.

SOUTH VIETNAM: Saigon's Army has increased from 170,000 to a 1.1-million-man force now preparing to take over all ground combat from U.S. troops. A sense of national unity is spreading. Many South Vietnamese live better than ever, though economic troubles persist. Most South Vietnamese are convinced a Red victory no longer is possible—even after Americans leave.

