

USIA  
12/65

W file	Civ C73 subj.
date	sub-cat.
12/65	

No. F-65-495  
December 1965  
IPS/F/SWM

### SOUTH VIETNAM'S 700,000 REFUGEES

**SUMMARY:** General Maxwell D. Taylor, for one year the U. S. Ambassador to Saigon, discusses the problem of the 700,000 refugees in South Vietnam in this byliner. The byliner is based on his testimony before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Refugees and Escapees.

**LENGTH:** 1,000 words

**PHOTOS:** None  
(IPS Photo Bulletin No. 21 (October 1965) has photos suitable for use with this feature. See "Hope and Help for Vietnam" (Picture Story 984).

**HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR ON MICROFILM**

SOUTH VIETNAM'S 700,000 REFUGEES

By General Maxwell D. Taylor  
Former U. S. Ambassador to Republic of Vietnam

The rising intensity of the fighting, particularly in the central provinces of the Republic of (South) Vietnam, and the increasing brutality of the Viet Cong terroristic tactics, have sharply increased the number of persons who have fled to safety and assistance in areas controlled by the Saigon government.

Since the beginning of 1965, the number of these refugees has risen to more than 700,000. Only about one-third of them have been resettled, mostly returning to their old homes as local conditions improved. Recently, the number of refugees has risen in areas where sharp fighting has occurred.

The refugee problem will grow in size and require greater assistance in the months ahead from the Vietnamese government, the United States and other free countries. U. S. officials are working closely with the Government of Vietnam on the problem.

It is significant that the refugee movement in all parts of South Vietnam is a one-way street. To escape from the Viet Cong, people flee to areas under government control. They do not seek refuge from the fighting by moving into Viet Cong-controlled territory. They know what happens when the Viet Cong strike.

Rural people in South Vietnam have shown no tendency to capitulate to the Viet Cong. They have resisted the Viet Cong for 11 years. When the Viet Cong come in strength, cut off escape and occupy their towns, the people submit merely because those who resist are slaughtered.

The Viet Cong, after entering a village, normally kill or kidnap most of the leaders. They immediately start impressing the young men into the regular armed forces or the guerrilla units. They confiscate a large part of the rice crop and impose severe taxes on the villagers. There is no wonder, then, that the Vietnamese prefer to flee rather than submit to Viet Cong subjugation.

The question has been raised as to whether the Viet Cong have deliberately adopted a nationwide policy to drive people from their homes so the Vietnamese government would be economically burdened with the problem of handling and caring for the many hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Generally speaking, the Viet Cong need the peasants to give them food, to give them shelter, to give them soldiers, and to give them porters. In some cases, the manpower of a whole village has been conscripted into Viet Cong service to transport supplies.

Though it is against Viet Cong interest to allow the peasants to escape, there have been recent instances where Viet Cong terrorism was used for no apparent reason other than to force the people to desert their hamlets and villages.

The United States is watching this situation, but to date there is no conclusive evidence that the Viet Cong have adopted this tactic on a systematic basis.

The Viet Cong have not hesitated to show their hostility toward refugees. They have attacked refugee centers. One such incident occurred in Binh Dinh province in central Vietnam. The Viet Cong attack resulted in the death or injury to 60 Vietnamese, mostly children and older people.

During my year as ambassador in Saigon, I closely observed the work of the government and of the U. S. Mission in handling refugees. Occasionally I visited refugee camps. While conditions in these camps were often very austere, the government and private organizations provided the essentials of life and did a creditable job despite handicaps. Fortunately, no epidemics of disease have broken out.

The United States and other free countries are giving many kinds of help to the Vietnamese refugees. For example, in one month alone, the United Kingdom provided a prefabricated warehouse, Australia supplied 16,000 blankets and 1,600 cases of sweetened condensed milk, Thailand provided 100 metric tons of rice, and New Zealand gave 10,000 pounds, in cash, for refugee relief. These relatively small, but highly welcome forms of aid to the refugees have been received intermittently throughout the past year.

The United States itself is spending more than \$300 million annually in its foreign aid program in South Vietnam. Some of this money is supporting the care of refugees, the rest is being used to raise the standard of living and the way of life of the entire Republic of Vietnam insofar as that is possible in wartime.

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The whole refugee problem in Vietnam is mobile, changing all the time. The ebb and flow of refugees coincides with the ebb and flow of military operations.

In provinces where life is virtually normal, there is usually no refugee problem. But in most of the 44 provinces, there is some Viet Cong activity that causes more people to join the refugee total.

The problem of refugees is not new to Vietnam. When the country was partitioned in 1954 by the Geneva Accords, the choice was given to every Vietnamese citizen to go north and live in the communist half of the country, or come south and stay in the non-communist area. Almost one million North Vietnamese came south, creating a great refugee problem. Only about 80,000 went to North Vietnam.

Refugee camps encircled Saigon in 1954. The problem was very, very grim. But to the surprise of everyone, these refugees within a year were resettled and absorbed into the city's population.

So long as the Viet Cong continue their aggression and acts of terror against the peasants, the refugee problem will remain a serious one. A solution will come only when the Viet Cong threat is liquidated, when security is restored and when land controlled by the guerrillas can be reclaimed and awarded to the refugees.

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