

The Double Standard

SAIGON—Like it or not, the future of Southeast Asia almost certainly depends upon beleaguered South Viet-Nam. This country is now under heavy Communist attack. The danger here will be vastly greater if Laos is permitted to fall under effective Communist control.



Alsop

Maybe this is a poor time to be asking general questions.

Yet what is happening here insistently poses a rather urgent question. Why are pro-Western governments of this character so prone to trouble? Or, more specifically, why is South Viet-Nam's President Ngo dinh Diem in the gravest difficulties, after bringing to his people a solid increase of prosperity and well-being, while the North Vietnamese Communist regime has been able to take the offensive in the boldest manner, although its people live in the conditions of a bleak prisoner-of-war camp?

The fashionable Western answer is that "we always back the wrong guys." In other words, if this answer is correct, President Ngo is in trouble because he has failed to inaugurate an ideal parliamentary democracy; because his chief adviser is his brother, Ngo dinh Niu, which leads to charges of nepotism; and because, in sum, he is remarkably unlike Adlai Stevenson.

BUT THIS fashionable answer merely reveals the ludicrous double standard that now falsifies most Western judgments of these problems. For why should Ngo be called upon to pass the kind of test which Ho Chi Minh so obviously does not pass?

It is perfect twaddle, in any case, to talk about parliamentary democracy in a peasant country with the thinnest possible crust of educated men at the top, who must, of necessity, manage all the country's affairs. The French, who carefully forbade almost all advanced education except for pharmacists and physicians, did not exactly prepare South Viet-Nam for immediate parliamentary democracy.

That does not mean that President Ngo has made no mistakes. Undoubtedly, he has made many. Probably his

leave in place so much of the machinery of public security and provincial and village administration which the French left behind them.

This was a hard mistake to avoid. Some sort of machinery was needed to manage the country. Non-Communists who had resisted the French, like President Ngo himself, were few and far between. The human materials for a reformed administrative machine were thus extremely scarce. But a more radical change ought to have been attempted, if only to avoid a seeming continuation of the detested French administration.

THIS MISTAKE of President Ngo's, one must add, is far more understandable than some of the follies that were committed by the Americans here, such as the creation of a cumbersome, strictly conventional army in a

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country mainly threatened by guerilla attack. One must add further that President Ngo has been laboring manfully to correct his own past errors. The impressive effort that the former Communist province chief, Lt. Col. Thao, is making in Kien Hoa is a new departure personally sponsored by President Ngo and his brother, Ngo dinh Niu. It reflects their views about the right way to meet the guerilla attack. If they can find many other men to make the same sort of effort in many other provinces, the Communist underground assault on South Viet-Nam may be repelled in the end.

But this business of dolefully denouncing President Ngo for being undemocratic, while utterly forgetting Ho Chi Minh's dark, iron dictatorship, is only the first part of the accepted double standard. The second and even more important part of the double standard is to be found in the rules of the game that are applied to Ngo and to Ho Chi Minh.

Ho Chi Minh's people live in a state of regimented wretchedness. To be sure, they are not being put through the same meat grinder as the miserable Chinese masses. The time for that will come if and when Ho gets South Viet-Nam in his grip. But all the evidence still suggests that the North Vietnamese masses are

and hostile to their Communist regime as are the masses, say, in Poland.

North Viet-Nam, in other words, is a ripe target for precisely the kind of underground assault now being made on South Viet-Nam — if anyone had the guts to take the risk of sponsoring and supporting this kind of assault.

INSTEAD, the Western leaders have come to accept the fact that these two governments—and many other governments which offer the same contrast—must play the game under quite different sets of rules. Provided organized North Vietnamese divisions do not cross the officially demarcated frontier, Ho Chi Minh is at liberty to take any other measures he pleases against Ngo, including sending men, arms, propaganda materials, money, and every other necessity of a subversive movement into South Viet-Nam. He can do all this, furthermore, without fear of reprisal.

But Ngo can do none of these things. He is required, by the peculiar but accepted rules of the game, to stand meekly on the defensive. He is expected to meet and contain a guerilla attack quite openly commanded and sustained from North Viet-Nam without attempting the smallest counterpunch on North Vietnamese territory. Perhaps he will win on the defensive. One must pray that he will, for if he fails, a chain reaction of disasters will ensue in this part of the world, which will in turn produce chain reactions elsewhere.

Yet it is very clear indeed that even if Ngo wins this round here in South Viet-Nam, continued acceptance of the double standard will eventually be fatal to the West. You cannot permit an enemy unlimited freedom to hit you whenever and wherever he pleases, while never hitting back yourself, without suffering mortal damage in the end. That is the ugly thought that must fill the mind of any reasonably thoughtful person who is saying farewell to this unhappy country at this time.

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Sukarno Visits Thailand

Reuters

BANGKOK, Thailand, April 18—Indonesian President Sukarno, here on a state visit, left by air today with King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit for a one-day trip