

REPRINT

No. 5

FOCUS ON VIETNAM

A SERIES OF REPRINTS BY THE AMERICAN FRIENDS OF VIETNAM - 234 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10001

Under fire

By Herman Kahn

BATTLES IN THE MONSOON: Campaigning in the Central Highlands, South Vietnam, Summer 1966. By S. L. A. Marshall. Illustrated. Morrow. 408 pp. \$6.95.

On March 7, 1936, German troops marched into and occupied a piece of indubitably German territory, the Rhineland. It is now known that these troops had two sets of contingent orders, one of which they carried out; the other was to retreat without fighting if the French or the British moved. The French and the British did not move, even though British intelligence seems to have picked up information about the second set of orders. (Daladier is supposed to have argued that British intelligence could not be certain.) Many now believe that if British and French troops had acted on that fateful day the Hitler regime very likely would have been overthrown—perhaps by the German generals—or, failing that, that Hitler's charisma and authority would have suffered severely and most likely there would have been no World War II. If this conjecture is reasonable, some 50 million people would not have been killed and countless others not driven from their homes.

Of course, even if an intervention had been successful, both Britain and France would have come under much criticism. In particular, any subsequent instabilities in the German government or sense of grievance among the German people would doubtless have been blamed on this "premature and unnecessary" action. The world would not know, and could hardly be able to conceive even in its most extreme imagination, what this action might have averted.

It is not, of course, clear that if Hitler had come a cropper other events might not have occurred of equally disastrous consequences, though it is difficult to believe that anything like World War II could have happened. One can also argue—20 years later—that World War II had some good effects. Such things as a very successful worldwide decolonization and the current prosperity and rapid growth of Europe may be in part due to the shock of the war and its aftermath. But these are conjectures and I would imagine that nearly everyone today would agree that France and Great Britain should have intervened in the Rhineland. They did not, and as Churchill said in a speech two weeks after Germany occupied the Rhineland, the result was "an immense gain in prestige to the Nazi government."

The prestige gained was not only in Germany. In Latin America many anti-U.S. and anti-capitalist forces began to coalesce around fascist ideologies of one sort or another, probably less because these ideologies were intrinsically attractive as because fascism seemed a winner—and an enemy of the U.S. In Eastern Europe anti-Soviet and anti-democratic forces similarly began to rally to the banner of Hitler. And extremist elements in the governments in Italy and Japan took heart at this and other signs of weakness in France and England.

Since this is a review of a book about Viet Nam, any reader who has persisted to this point has doubtless guessed that I am about to make some analogies between resistance to the National Liberation Front and resistance to Hitler. If he is a liberal, he is probably annoyed at the likelihood that I am going to argue against appeasement and in favor of domino theories, arguments which are in disrepute in liberal and other quarters in the United States and elsewhere. The reader is perfectly correct, but if he will bear with me, perhaps I can convince him that these issues should not be prejudged.

Let us start by considering a hypothetical Viet Nam scenario. On November 4, 1964, President Johnson

won an overwhelming election victory, partly because, as a Republican once said to me, "They told me that if I voted for Goldwater, we'd be at war in six months, and, by gosh, I voted for Goldwater and we were." On that same November day Premier Tran Van Huong carried out the sixth major change in Vietnamese government since Diem's fall. At the time there were 20,000 American "advisors" in Viet Nam. In retrospect it seems clear—as it was to many at the time—that if the bombing of North Viet Nam (whose major effect probably was on the morale of the South Vietnamese) and a massive U.S. reinforcement had not been carried out, Viet Nam would have fallen at some point in the next three to four months. Indeed, between that November 4th and roughly June 19th (when Ky came to power), and even perhaps for some time afterward, few sober observers in the United States would have given great odds—even with the reinforcement—on preventing the collapse of the Vietnamese war effort. Governments—American or otherwise—are not in the habit of predicting their own defeats (rather the opposite), but in their hearts most U.S. officials and nearly all foreign and American reporters and other observers were almost totally pessimistic.

Let me now write a scenario for what might have happened if the United States had not reinforced South Viet Nam. One assumes that there would have been a collapse of the Saigon regime and most likely withdrawal of U.S. advisors—perhaps after some bloody incidents. Most people would concede that there would have been—under these circumstances—a quick "effective" union of North and South Viet Nam, perhaps under the guise of holding, somewhat belatedly, the scheduled 1966 election. One can also assume, as is now widely conceded, that the Chinese would not have moved into the United North and South Viet Nam.

This new united country with more than 30 million people would enjoy a high morale. (Had it not just triumphed over the policy of the largest power in the world despite every attempt this power made to prevent such defeat?—or at least this is what would have been claimed and believed. And indeed it is doubtful that the United States would have resisted had it known the cost.) This Viet Nam would doubtless have been prepared to settle scores with some of its neighbors. Prince Sihanouk has said on several occasions that under these circumstances he would assume that his country would have to accommodate to the communists and might even be absorbed by Viet Nam. Laos would clearly have gone under unless the United States had tried to fight there (a much more difficult and hopeless job than in Viet Nam). Strong pressures would have been felt in Thailand. While the Thai government today looks to many like a "genuine" government, the many strains that exist in that country would clearly have been increased, and at least in Northeast Thailand serious communist rebellion would have been possible. Perhaps the United States would have sent troops to put this rebellion down. Whether this would be a difficult or an easy job is hard to say. It is also possible that Thailand, which throughout its history has not been known for policy consistency at the price of self-destruction, would have changed sides, or at least tried to do so. But this might not have helped it.

Malaysia would have been in a difficult situation, flanked by communist Viet Nam and Sukarno's fellow-travelling Indonesia. Presumably the 500 or so communist guerrillas still left in Northern Malaysia would have been greatly reinforced, creating one serious problem to the Malaysia government. Doubtless, also, many Moslems in Malaysia, realizing that they now faced a Hobson's choice between a revival

of civil war and acquiescence to Indonesia—a fraternal Moslem country—would have tried to settle with Sukarno. It is now possible to write, if with difficulty, a scenario in which this turned the balance in Indonesia and the equivalent of the communist uprising of September 30, 1965, succeeded with Indonesia either turning communist or at least joining China as a firm ally. At this point one can assume that leftist dissidents around the world would have asked Viet Nam and China for advice on "how to do it." Further, the same kind of person in Latin America who chooses his politics on the basis of being anti-U.S. and who was in the '30s fascist, in the late '40s and early '50s pro-Soviet, and in the late '50s pro-Chinese, would have turned pro-Chinese again.

The Soviets too, having to compete with a successful international Chinese movement, might also have found themselves driven to extremism, particularly since extremist tactics might now pay off (despite all the scorn heaped on domino theories, the kind of people who make good recruits for mass movements tend to like extremist movements which look like winners).

While the above scenario is not wildly plausible, it is not wildly implausible. Whether or not one accepts it or something like it, almost everybody agrees that the United States reinforcement did turn the tide in Viet Nam and did prevent a National Liberation Front victory in 1964-1965. What this reinforcement can produce in positive achievements is still uncertain, and the subject of much controversy. What is amazing is that there is almost no interest in the details of the military campaign which followed the reinforcement. S. L. A. Marshall, who has written more than 20 books on military affairs, does, however, tell us what actually happened. *Battles in the Monsoon* should go on the "must" list of interested citizens and journalists.

The book concentrates on three medium-sized battles, those of Crazy Horse, Bien Gia Map, and Toumorong. The first and the last of these battles are best remembered by the public because of specific incidents. In the first, Samuel Castan, a reporter for *Look* magazine, was killed, and in the second Captain William Carpenter called down fire on his own unit to prevent its overrun by the enemy. Except for these two incidents, the battles would have had almost no news coverage, at least during the stages of buildup and approach to climax, for, as Marshall says, "Nothing intelligent is written of tactics, of new problems encountered and either solved or contended with . . . No American living, though he be a military scholar or only an armchair expert, may be able to understand . . . by what he reads, or from what all government agencies have to say on this subject." Someday we will have a better understanding of why newspaper men seem to prefer "any story that may add to tension, doubt and divisiveness at home, any subject that may whet controversy . . . and concentrate on the gore, the shock, the horror and the agony disproportionately."

What Marshall's book makes clear is the enormous competence, dedication, bravery and devotion to duty of America's civilian and professional soldiers. Many reporters have commented that there is much less griping in this war and almost no gibes of "Johnson's war" as there were in World War II or "Roosevelt's war."

None of the large issues of the Viet Nam war are touched on by Marshall. Possibly a little unfairly, he refers to some opposition to the war as being close to treason or cowardice. However, without necessarily endorsing some of the—perhaps inevitable—evasions and inefficiency of the Administration, he makes clear that in strictly military terms the highland war has been a success.

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Stalemate in Vietnam?

By Roscoe Drummond

Washington

When it comes to judging the state of affairs in Vietnam, I have one guide: above all, beware the cynics.

On the political side the cynics have been completely wrong all the way. Every one of their forecasts proved unfounded—that a constituent assembly could never be elected, that it would not be allowed to function, that it never could agree on a constitution, that the generals would never accept the constitution or permit a general election.

And, now, on the military side, what are the cynics asking us to believe? They are asking us to believe that we are hopelessly stalemated, and that even if we're not losing, we're not winning, and can never defeat the aggression.

I do not take the rose-colored view that victory is just around the corner. It is impossible to guess how long it will take to halt the aggression, but the objective evidence shows that the Vietnam war is not at a stalemate.

There are good reasons why Hanoi would like the American people to believe that a stalemate has developed. It is, therefore, particularly valuable to look at the military picture in perspective.

Is there a stalemate on the ground?

The most reliable military intelligence shows that enemy strength is declining by a minimum of 2,500 a month. The Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese forces are losing about 15,000 a month in battle and in desertions, and new recruitment and infiltration are providing at the most not more than 12,500 monthly.

Enemy defection rose from 10,000 in 1965 to 20,000 in 1966, and this year is running at a rate which will reach 40,000. At this point about 40 percent of the VC bases in South Vietnam have been neutralized.

Is the war at a stalemate in the North?

The fact that the enemy is losing many more men than they are able to infiltrate and recruit is the proof that it isn't. There is other evidence. Some half-million workers are kept constantly busy repairing bomb damage. For the first time the official government press is describing the growing manpower shortages and is exhorting the North Vietnamese to work longer hours to make up for it. The appeal is especially directed to youths and women to help with "wartime labor output."

Hanoi has lost something near to half of its MIG fighters, and during the past 10 months 3,500 trucks and 4,000 watercraft have been destroyed.

What support are South Vietnam and the United States getting from the non-Communist world?

More than twice as many countries are in one way or another aiding South Vietnam as aided South Korea. Total nations helping Korea: 14; total nations helping South Vietnam: 37.

Two years ago there were 500 free world troops in Vietnam besides those of the United States. At the present time there are 54,000—more than ever fought beside the United States in Korea.

There are many ways to measure how well the South Vietnamese forces are fighting. One revealing measure is this: in 1965 the South Vietnamese were losing three weapons to the enemy for every one captured. Today they are capturing more than three weapons for every one lost.

Enemy strength is declining, the frequency of enemy attacks is declining, enemy morale and enemy ability to supply its troops are declining. The Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese have not scored a single tactical victory in two years.

No wonder Hanoi is so eager that the American people be made to believe that the war is stalemated when it isn't. The test of strength today is between the will of Hanoi to conquer the South against the will of the American people to stay the course in defending South Vietnam.

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