

Thailand, for example, is experiencing the same kind of terrorist attacks which characterized the early stages of the insurgency in South Vietnam. In Laos the areas under Pathet Lao control are being freely used for the movement of men and material from North to South Vietnam, and, as is shown by the latest report of the International Commission in Laos, made public earlier this week, members of the North Vietnamese armed forces have engaged in attacks against the armed forces of the Royal Government of Laos - all in contravention of the undertakings given in Geneva in 1962. The Pathet Lao have, for their part, protested alleged bombings by United States aircraft of the territory they control. The Commission has indicated its desire to investigate these allegations but the Pathet Lao have not so far been willing to facilitate such a legitimate exercise of the Commission's functions.

In the context of Asia, therefore, Vietnam is not a special case, either as a partitioned country or as a proving-ground for the doctrine of "liberation wars". In a third role - as a new developing country groping its way towards a sense of national identity - South Vietnam shares the plight of nearly all the countries of Africa and Asia.

It is sometimes argued that the shortcomings of successive governments in Saigon are somehow at the root of the tragedy that has befallen Vietnam - that the nature of government in the South provides the basis and excuse for Northern intervention. This argument is not adequate as a justification of aggression, since its application throughout the world obviously would soon result in international anarchy.

Furthermore, it is possible to recognize the inadequacy of governments in South Vietnam, and the existence of internal dissent, without concluding that the present war is in any significant measure the product of these. Internal dissent is something we must expect in any new country where the people live on the margin of subsistence. We must never forget, either, that the difficulties experienced by countries like Burma, Indonesia and Pakistan have shown that the achievement of a viable nationhood, as we in the West are sometimes inclined to forget, is never easy or quick, even in a relatively serene and secure international environment. In the atmosphere of war and subversion fomented from without, the difficulties become almost insurmountable.

We should turn for a moment, however, from the difficult problems which Vietnam shares with other nations and which sometimes make solution of the conflict seem almost impossible to some considerations about the general situation in Asia which offer seeds of hope.

First of all, the "war of national liberation" has not proven to be an effective instrument for the extension of Communist power in Asia. It can be a powerful weapon when used against single states groping their way towards social and political stability. In Vietnam, however, countervailing measures have been taken to redress the military balance and to meet the outside support essential to the success of the technique.

One of Peking's most important foreign-policy objectives has been the removal of American influence from Asia; by now, however, it must be becoming apparent to the Chinese that the sort of situation which was fostered in Vietnam has, as in Korea, led once again to the involvement of United States forces in