



"It hurts only when you smile"

## Nixon's big game

# Scaling down the war to a manageable size

By STAN VITTOZ

Stan Vittoz is a professor in York's history department.

The war in Vietnam is far from over. Nor is American intervention and the consequent suffering of the Vietnamese people ended.

U.S. intentions are the same today as they were in 1950 with the beginning of American aid to the French colonialist effort in Indochina; in 1954 when the U.S. took on the entire burden of military intervention after the defeated French left the Vietnam; and in 1961 and 1965 at the time of the massive American military escalations.

Their aim — the integration of the Indochinese political economy under U.S. tutelage into the Pacific constellation of capitalist power. While adhering tenaciously to the original purposes of U.S. intervention, Nixon is now out of necessity attempting to reduce the conflict in Indochina to manageable proportions.

As early as March 1969, plans were being formulated to cope with situations similar to the one now at hand in Vietnam. Under the auspices of the Asia Society and the Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group (SEADAG) a seminar was held at which Samuel P. Huntington, a Harvard colleague of Kissinger's and a long-time U.S. adviser, presented the now widely distributed paper "Getting Ready for Political Competition in South Vietnam." Huntington is the originator of the doctrine of "urbanization", the forced migration of the South Vietnamese population to the major cities and the squalor of refugee camps as a mode of demographic warfare. (According to senator Edward Kennedy's subcommittee on refugees, since 1964 between 8.5 and 9 million people in South Vietnam have been either driven from their homelands by the effects of the war, or administratively relocated through the "strategic hamlet" program. Approximately 700,000 people were in one of Thieu's refugee camps early this year.

The subcommittee also estimated that

## Massive US aid to Saigon

about 75 per cent of the thousands upon thousands who were forced to flee from the northern-most provinces early last spring did so to escape the indiscriminate terror inflicted by the unprecedented fury of U.S. bombing — an opposing view to the reasons generally given for the phenomenon by the government.)

During the anticipated period of "postwar" political competition, Huntington argued that the object would be "to get the opponent to agree to play the game . . . , and then, secondly, to beat him at the game which he has agreed to play." And since vast numbers

of the South Vietnamese population were being driven from the countryside into the cities, along with the threatening fact that, in Huntington's own words, "The NLF is, after all, the most powerful purely political national organization . . ." he felt that ultimately it would be "in the interest of the U.S. and the Thieu regime to trade off local control for national power . . ."

Since the Huntington study, plans for "political competition" have been among the foremost concerns of a number of White House and State and Defense Department consultants, including the subject of another SEADAG conference in October 1970. (See Asian Survey, April 1971). In general all of the planners, while having worked their schemes through a number of revisions, continued to foresee a time when it would be both desirable and practicable for the U.S. to pump massive

## Thieu regime has no political base

economic aid into Saigon (a dependency which was expected by most to last almost indefinitely) while Saigon forces with the aid of stockpiled and a continuous infusion of U.S. military equipment would assume a relatively "static defense" posture, in perhaps a temporary "leopard spot" partition of South Vietnam.

At the October 1970 SEADAG conference, Allan Goodman, a consultant on Vietnam to various U.S. government agencies, described this strategic innovation as essentially "the establishment of a system of base areas to separate rather than engage VC forces," an "auto-defense" network throughout the countryside, designed perhaps on the model of the Israeli kibbutz. This would presumably be undertaken in conjunction with an effort on the part of Saigon, with indispensable U.S. assistance, to extend and consolidate its national economic and political position, the outcome of which would depend largely upon Saigon's ability to maintain control over the vastly increased "urbanized" elements of the population. They would allow refugees to return to selected areas of the countryside only when a tactical military advantage could be coupled with extended political control and economic development.

But as we have seen, even in the view of Washington's experts the Thieu regime is ill-prepared today to assume its earlier idealized role in the so-called political struggle. Saigon has a large, well equipped, but essentially uninspired and tragically incompetent military, as well as endless U.S. moral and material commitments which have gotten Thieu and his army exactly where they are today, and nothing more.

"Consequently," according again to Goodman in Orbis last fall, "Saigon's basic strategy in the period ahead is to negotiate

with the communists and then resume fighting." Indeed it is probable that the fighting will never really stop as the U.S. and Saigon go through various public relations motions and an effort is made particularly on the part of the U.S. to pare the conflict down to somewhat more manageable proportions commensurate with its altered tactical intentions and limited strategic capabilities.

The Thieu regime quite simply has no political base, only a group of untrustworthy supporters composed for the most part of a small war-profiteering oligarchy and a highly paid officer corps primarily interested in wealth and privilege at any human cost. And the Saigon economy is as unstable and war weary as the political structure, with desperately sought foreign business investment "waiting in the wings," according to the Wall Street Journal, with no apparent enthusiasm because of the vast political uncertainties. The situation is virtually irremediable.

Thieu, with U.S. concurrence, has systematically excluded the political "third force" from any constructive role in what is loosely referred to as "postwar political reconciliation" precisely because any relatively broad-based political reconciliation in South Vietnam would necessarily bring with it a degree of social justice for the South Vietnamese masses under the strong influence of the PRG which would inevitably

## Fear and terror used by gov't

undermine the very political relations upon which the U.S.-Thieu link sustains itself. For the Thieu regime and U.S. interests in Vietnam, now as in the past, absolute political domination is the only alternative to the demise of their totally interdependent existence. Ultimately, to survive, Saigon will have to rely upon either U.S.-aided police powers and the even more brutal manipulation of the South Vietnamese populace, or renewed full-scale war, including the possibility of further U.S. military intervention.

The U.S. government and Thieu have no illusions about the intention of the Vietnamese liberation forces to carry on their decades-old struggle for political self-determination and social transformation. And all can be assured that U.S. plans, such as the apparently already faltering scheme to dissuade the DRV and PRG from pursuing at an uncomfortable pace the realization of a unified and independent Vietnam with inducements of economic reconstruction aid, will come to naught. Further U.S. intervention in the South is therefore inevitably

underway.

With all U.S. military personnel now leaving Vietnam under the terms of the January agreement, it has been widely reported that up to 10,000 civilian advisers and technicians, most of them under Defense Department contract, are being readied for duty in Saigon and throughout the South. The U.S. is also reportedly letting cost-plus contracts to numerous private firms (one of the most prominent being the infamous CIA front, Air America). These firms will service, train Saigon forces in the use of, and perhaps even employ, the vast store of U.S. military and aerial hardware rushed to South Vietnam in recent months. This is of course an important aspect of U.S. plans for a "secret war" in the months, and perhaps years ahead. But U.S. advisers, technicians, and weapons have been tested time and again in years past, only to demonstrate failure at every critical juncture in the war. And there is absolutely no reason to expect that the outcome will be any different this time around.

The critical task immediately ahead of the U.S. and Saigon is the control of an uprooted population. Short of renewed full-scale war, threats of terror and the mass manipulation of the populace to which his army and police still have access are the only weapons Thieu has left to confront the PRG's incomparably superior political aptitude. South Vietnamese sources told the Washington Post before the cease-fire went into effect that "there will be virtually no restrictions placed on what is done in the name of political security" during the truce period. On another occasion, reported by the same publication, a Saigon political figure described as "draconian methods" the means by which Thieu would attempt to contain the present volatile political situation in South Vietnam. And a prominent North Vietnamese intellectual living in Paris told Anthony Lewis of the New York Times in January that nearly "every family in South Vietnam has a political prisoner under Thieu" with whose life or freedom he will attempt to force their political cooperation.

Indeed Thieu has yet to account for the whereabouts of literally thousands of people who are known to have been swept into his prisons at one time or another.

Fear and murder will now be used by Saigon on an unprecedented scale as Thieu attempts to control the huge refugee population. He has made it clear that no one will be allowed to return to PRG governed areas, and he will use every means at his disposal to combat the expected tendency of the uprooted to begin moving back to the countryside at will as the fighting dies down. One old man from a refugee camp in the Danang area told the Washington Post that the police had warned him that

Continued on page 10