

Vietnam: The Human Cost of Communism

Sir Robert Thompson

The recent invasion of South Vietnam and the intense fighting of the past five months draw attention once again to the human cost to the Vietnamese people of the continuing war. I am not here referring to battle casualties which, although terrible, can at least be regarded as "legitimate" in war. Nor am I including those refugees who, although their plight may be tragic, are at least still alive. South Vietnam has had, in fact, a remarkable record in coping with refugees and has maintained it yet again in respect of the 750,000 who fled before the invader from the fighting zones.

What should deeply concern us is the number of civilians who have been intentionally killed in both halves of Vietnam and those who may yet die in the future as part of the human cost of communism. The Western conscience is immediately pricked by an American-committed atrocity, such as Mylai, and by civilian casualties caused by the bombing of the North (although such casualties are now far fewer than during the 1965-68 bombing campaign because of the development of the extremely accurate laser-guided bomb). Little or no attention, however, and certainly no equivalent reporting, has been devoted to similar Viet Cong or North Vietnamese atrocities, which have occurred on a scale which makes Mylai and the casualties from bombing of the North almost insignificant by comparison.

These have not occurred because of some aberration, accident or inaccuracy of bombing or shelling. They have occurred, both selectively and indiscriminately, as a matter of deliberate policy. At the time when Hanoi complained of six civilian casualties as a result of the first American raid on the North after

the invasion began, her troops were firing 122 mm. rockets indiscriminately into Saigon and Phnompenh, killing more than ten times that number. Her artillery and mortars have pounded An Loc, Quang Tri and much of Kontum, including their hospitals, to rubble. They would have done the same to Hue, if they could have got within range, without any consideration whatsoever for the civilian population. Hanoi's Russian 130 mm. guns literally shredded the civilian refugee columns fleeing from Quang Tri in May and killed or wounded over 20,000 of them. This was the most calculated act of butchery during the whole war. Such tactics, combined with 36,000 selective assassinations in the past twelve years, are designed, through terror, to soften the will of the people to resist. Hanoi is faithfully following Mao's infamous dictum that there should be no concern for "stupid scruples about benevolence, righteousness and morality in war."

Everyone has heard of Mylai, but who has heard of Cai Be, where the Viet Cong, after its capture, lingered only to murder the wives and children of all the local militia, or of the Montagnard village of Dak Son, where they moved from hut to hut with flame-throwers, incinerating more than 250 villagers, two-thirds of them women and children? Most people have heard of the massacres at Hue in 1968 where the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, after its capture, executed 5,700 people (as assessed from the mass graves found afterwards), but who knows that in captured documents they gloated over these figures and only complained that they had not killed enough?

These incidents were not the work of undisciplined soldiers acting in violation of instructions but part of a ruthless deliberate policy designed to break a people who would not otherwise bend to their will.

The world cannot plead ignorance, because it has all been well documented (from almost entirely Communist sources) by Dr. Stephen Hosmer in a

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book on *Vietcong Repression* (their own word) and by Douglas Pike in his book *The Viet Cong*. The evidence has now been authoritatively put together in a compendium prepared for a United States Senate Committee—surprisingly, the Committee on the Judiciary (the meat was obviously too red for Senator Fulbright and the Foreign Relations Committee).

The question as to what the bloodbath would have been if the invasion had succeeded is fast becoming hypothetical. But there are distressing implications for the future. Four years ago I estimated that the bloodbath would have been several hundred thousands. I now wish to amend that figure to well over a million (out of 19 million people), because if the North is to digest the South then it must eliminate all those at every level who have played any positive part in its defense, not just in the armed forces but also in the villages.

There has been no mass uprising in support of either the Viet Cong or the North. The people of the South are fighting for their survival, sometimes poorly but more often, as at An Loc, with convincing resolution. The conqueror could not hope to hold and govern such a country without a bloodbath on a massive scale. We have the precedents in similar circumstances in Soviet Russia and China, where the minimum figures are now put respectively at 20 millions and 34 millions. But more pertinent to these comments, in North Vietnam, between 1946 and the agrarian reform revolts of 1956,

the estimates are over 500,000 killed and executed.

The critics of the war may claim that the forecasts are exaggerated, but in Hoi Thanh village alone in northern Binh Dinh province, after its capture by the NVA 3rd Division in May this year, a hamlet chief and 47 other villagers were buried alive—and this in an area which many American journalists have written off as being pro-VC. If this happens in a pro-VC hamlet, what would have happened in the thousands of pro-government villages?

Fortunately we have more reliable and authoritative sources than, say, Senator George McGovern. Colonel Tran Van Dac, a North Vietnamese officer who defected after twenty-four years in the Communist Party, stated that the Communists, if they win, will slaughter up to 3 million South Vietnamese, and another colonel, Le Xuan Chuyen, who defected after twenty-one years, stated that 5 million people in South Vietnam were on the Communist "blood debt" list and that 10 to 15 per cent of these would pay with their lives.

When asked in an interview if the possibility of a bloodbath had been exaggerated, Le Xuan Chuyen replied: "It could not be exaggerated. It will happen." When asked whether world opinion would deter it, he laughed and said: "Who would be around to report it? It happened in North Vietnam and nobody cared. You Americans would not be here to see it. Once out, you would never come back. It would just happen. World opinion? It doesn't even grasp what is going on here right now."

Distressing though the thought of a bloodbath may be, it is more disturbing to think, as Douglas Pike expressed it: "The Communists in Vietnam would create a silence." Some there are who would call it peace.

