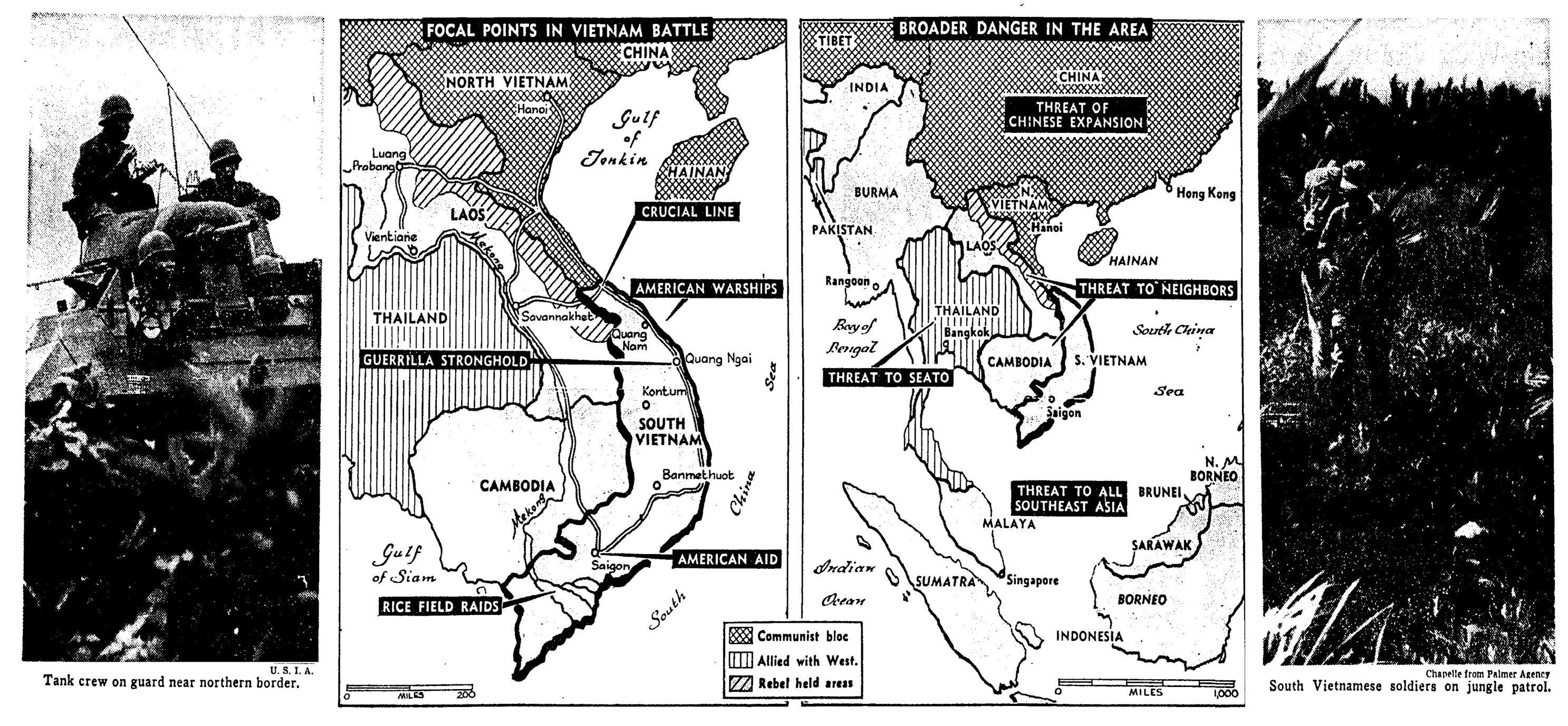
AS THE EAST-WEST CONFLICT INTENSIFIES IN VIETNAM—FORCES AND FACTORS IN THE STRUGGLE



A 'VERY REAL WAR' IN VIETNAM-AND THE DEEP U.S. COMMITMENT

By HOMER BIGART across Laos to Savannakhet on Special to The New York Times. SAIGON, Feb. 24-The Unit- the Mekong River frontier with ed States is involved in a war Thailand. If Highway 9 could in Vietnam. American troops be held from the Mekong to the sea by American, Vietnamese, will stay until victory.

That is what Attorney Gen- Laotian and Thai forces, South eral Robert Kennedy said here Vietnam might be saved. last week. He called it "war The situation right now is far namese Army. * * * in a very real sense of the more stable than it was last word." He said that President September, when the Commu-Kennedy had pledged that the nists were attacking in battal United States would stand by ion strength and were even South Vietnam's President Ngo able to seize and hold a provin- other is missing and presumed Dinh Diem "until we win."

At the moment the war isn't few hours. The September ac-alties will grow. going badly for "our" side, tion seemed a prelude to an to There is a lull in Viet Cong all-out Communist drive activities, and the South Viet- overturn the Diem Government. namese forces are both expand- It precipitated the present flood ing and shaping up better as a of American military advisors M. A. A. G., to unconventional fighting force. But all that is and service troops.

Knox in The Nashville Banner

"Secret war?"

needed to precipitate a major war is for the Chinese Communists and Communist North Vietnam to react to a build-up of American forces.

American support to Vietnam has always been based on the fear that Communist control of this country would jeopardize all Southeast Asia. And it continues despite the fact that Diem's American criticsespecially liberals repelled by the dictatorial aspects of his 20 regime—have been predicting 🧲 his imminent downfall. Diem remains firmly in charge and Wasington's support for his regime today seems more passionate and inflexible than ever.

Laotian border but it extends American Prestige Is Staked on Keeping the Communists From Taking Over in a Critical Area Where the Battle Is Complex and Difficult

> and against two frontier forts recently evacuated by the Viet-

So far our contribution in blood has been small. One American sergeant has been killed by enemy action and ancial capital, Phuoc Vinh, for a captured. Inevitably our casu-

It has not been easy to change from conventional warfare, in which the Vietnamese were trained so many years by

counter-guerrilla warfare. Under French influence, the Vietnamese had developed two tendencies difficult to erase: first, the habit of staying inside forts designed for the troops' protection rather than for the security of the populace; second, the habit of good living-a leisurely lunch followed by a siesta. Hard-Living



incial capitals and so on, the when the Government troops ararmy will be so tied down to rive, sentiment shifts to the static defense duties that it will Government." But generally the not have the manpower to chase village people would settle for the Government side, he said, guerrillas. Last week, in another appar- not because they admired the

Nguyen Khanh who has ap- ent concession to Diem's wis- Government but because they palled Americans by taking dom, the United States agreed wanted peace.

general reserve troops on quick that any relaxation of tight po- Consequently the Government one-shot operations without litical controls would be danger- has a great advantage. He escoordinating with the area ous now. In a speech cleared timated that of the 30 per cent commander. Khanh is young, with the State Department, Am- tending to the Viet Cong, only vigorous and driving but, ac-bassador Frederick E. Nolting a third were hard-core, ancording to his critics, lacking Jr. urged Diem's critics to cease other third would adhere to the balance and experience. carping and try to improve the Communists under adversity,

Lieut. Gen. Le Ven Ty is government from within. while the remaining third would Chief of the General Staff but Just how serious the criticism break off under pressure. he is in his sixties and lacks is is not clear and there seems Freedom from dictatorship vigor. Consequently much of the to be no agreement among ob- and freedom from foreign domimilitary direction comes from servers whether the President's nation are major propaganda the President through Khanh. popularity is rising or falling. lines for the Viet Cong. Ameri-

It is well to remember that One former Diem adviser said cans in uniform have now been Diem has been right and the

United States wrong on some crucial issues. In 1955, for example. Diem wanted to crush the powerful Binh Xuyen gangster sect that controlled both the police and the gambling dens and brothels and made a mockery of government authority. President Eisenhower's special ambassador, Gen. Law-

ton Collins, opposed Diem's

plan fearing civil war. Diem



seen by the peasants in virtually all sections of the country. This has given the Communists a chance to raise the bogey of foreign military domination,

Problems and Prospects

The lack of trained troops to keep the Viet Cong under relentless pressure probably will continue to handicap the military command throughout 1962, because at least a year must elapse before the self-defense units will be really capable of defending their villages. Whether because the Army s beginning to take the initiative and is penetrating secret areas of Viet Cong concentrations or because the Viet Cong has abated its activities in order to recruit and train, the

U. S. Involvement

Actually the United States has been deeply involved in the fate of Vietnam since 1949

when the decision was made helping the embryonic Viet- thus present fat targets for a to subsidize the continuation of namese Navy to guard the sea Viet Cong ambush. French rule against the Com- frontier against infiltration The Viet Cong guerrillas also munist Viet Minh rebellion. The from North Vietnam and U.S. were former rice paddy boys, first United States Military As- Navy servicemen presently will but they became inured to hardsistance

United States is on this particular faraway brink because the Kennedy Administration seems convinced that the Communists won't rise to the challenge of the American presence and assistance.

Forces and Strategy -The battle in Vietnam cur-

But counter-guerilla warfare demands hard living. Troops must live in the jungle just as

Stampone in The Air Force Times "Atmosphere in South Vietnam.

power and used loyal troops to the guerrillas do and eschew based on sketchy intelligence. sonal enrichment of members crush the Binh Xuyen in sharp the comforts of barracks life. They see no justification for of his family have never been fighting in Saigon's streets. There are some minor diffi- such operations until a more proved. And Diem has been Denied Request

culties: most Vietnamese re- adequate intelligence system careful not to arouse Buddhist

cruits are from the densely pop- is developed and greater tactical hostility. He is a man of great More recently the United ulated lowlands —rice paddy mobility achieved. personal courage, but he is sus-States resisted Diem's urgent boys who have a fear of the Intelligence will improve only picious and mistrustful. The requests for aid in creation of jungles, not merely fear of when the Government is able to creation of a central intelligence the civil guard and self-defense snakes and tigers but fear of break the grip of fear with agency here was delayed for corps. The United States ingetting lost. They move fearwhich the Viet Cong muzzles months until Diem found a di- sisted that a 19,000-man regular

fully, with the instinct of a the rural population. Greater rector he could trust.

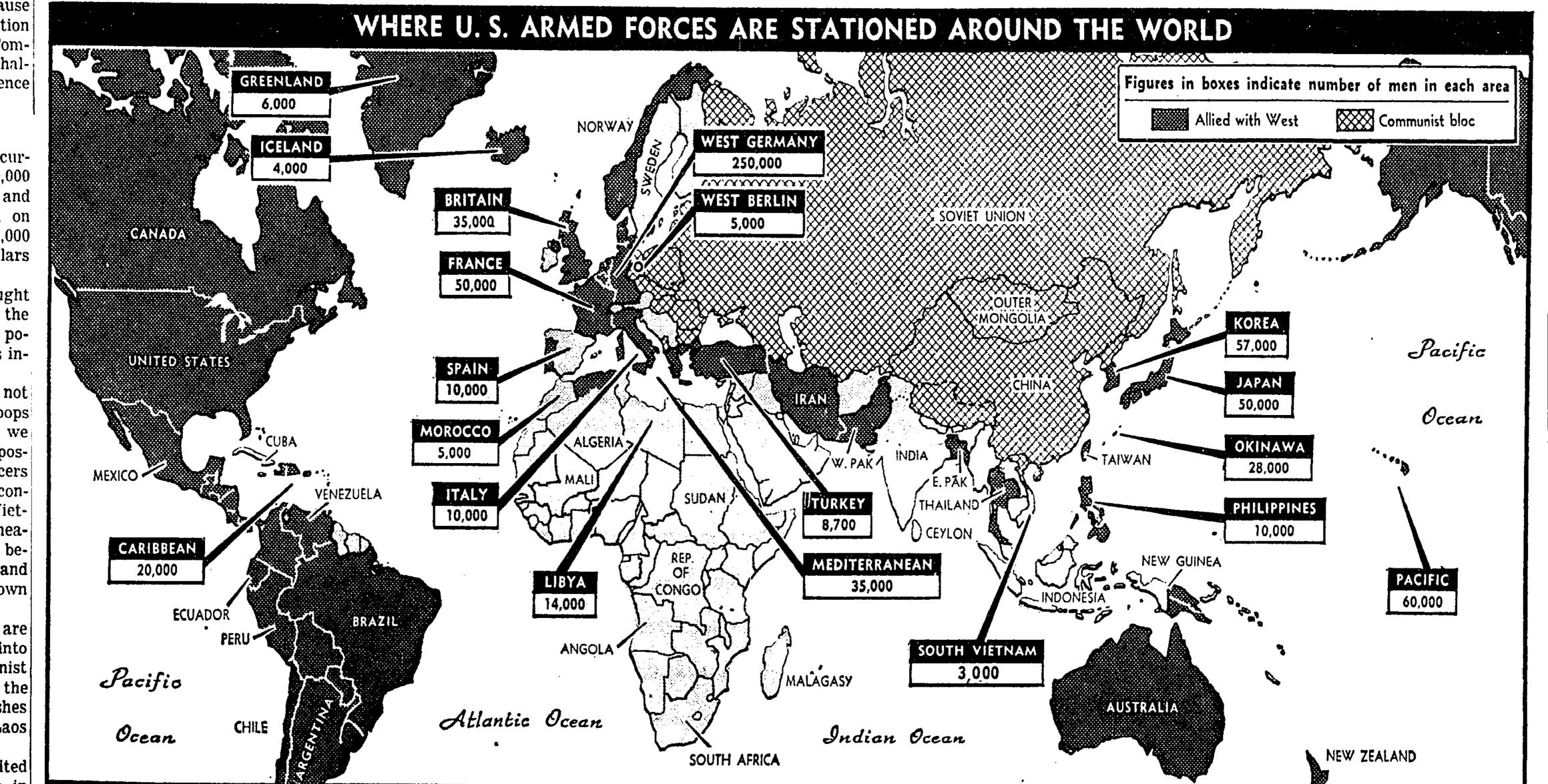
President Diem

army was all Diem needed for he was shocked by the loss of Today American warships are herd, tending to bunch up and mobility is being provided by Diem, a 66-year-old bachelor, national defense. Diem went support among the people in

American helicopter companies, often has been accused of with- ahead and organized the two the past two years. He blamed but this is a costly and dan- drawing inside his narrow fam- forces, arming them with an- this on the fact that Governgerous way to move troops. ily clique and divorcing himself tiquated French rifles. Finally, ment seemed to grope from from reality. Critics say he dis- after alarm bells were ringing crisis to crisis without a clear American officers have been trusts everyone except the fam- to the widespread revival of policy: "It's just anti-Commu-

Advisory Group arrive to help clean out guer- ship by on-the-job training in The man who is at the center ily and takes advice only from Communist guerrilla activity nist and not pro anything." (M. A. G.) arrived in 1951 rillas from the maze of tidal the jungle. Further, the Viet- of the Vietnamese effort and his brothers, particularly Ngo and vast sections of the coun- But another qualified obserto supervise the distribution of waterways in the Mekong River namese are somewhat smaller who is also a center of con- Dinh Nhu, his political ad-tryside were lost to the Viet ver, perhaps less biased, causupplies. Thereafter the United delta. The U.S. Army helicop- than Americans, so they get troversy-President Diem-is visor. His brother Nhu and his Cong, the Americans conceded tioned against underrating States played an increasingly ter crews have come under fire weary toting eleven-pound M1 something of an enigma. He is attractive, influential wife, are Diem's point. Last year the Diem. Increased guerrilla acimportant role. To use a favorite taking Vietnamese combat rifles and pine for the lighter a mandarin (an aristocrat) and leaders, according to critics, of United States started training tivity had not been matched, Washington term, aid was "es- troops into guerrilla zones or French weapons they were for- a devout Catholic. So there are a palace camarilla which tries and equipping the civil guard, he said, by a corresponding rise calated" until today \$2 billion carrying pigs and other live- merly equipped with. two strikes against him at the to isolate the President from It is now generally agreed in popular discontent and this has been sunk into Vietnam stock to hungry outposts sur- At a higher level, United start, for mandarins were re- the people. that the civil guard and the self-failure to respond must have with no end to the outlay in rounded by hostile country. States advisors, besides trying garded by the masses as greedy As commander-in-chief of the defense corps are absolutely depressed the Communists. U. S. Air Force pilots have eliminate political manipulation and corrupt, and Catholics as an armed forces, Diem keeps close vital. For until these reserve Most villages, he added, were This may sound more reck-flown with Vietnamese pilots of troops, are attempting to unpopular minority.

tabs on military operations. His forces are ready to take over like a leaf in the wind: "When less than the best brinkmanship on bombing missions against re- dissuade the Vietnamese from Diem, however, has proved personal representative on the the defense of villages, rail- the Viet Cong enters, the popuof John Foster Dulles' days, ported enemy concentrations launching large-scale operations incorruptible. Rumors of per- General Staff is Brig. Gen. roads, harbors, airports, prov- lation turns pro-Communist;

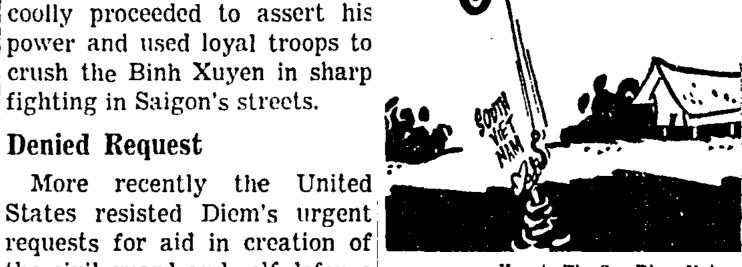


Yoes in The San Diego Union "Sky hook." fact remains that security seems better in most parts of

> Vietnam. In peaceful, booming Saigon there is much speculation on how the Viet Cong will react to an American build-up. Senior studying an enemy guide book to guerrilla warfare searching avidly for clues, as though this modest work were the Viet Cong's "Mein Kampf."

There will never be enough troops to seal off the frontiers. There aren't even enough troops to ring Viet Cong enclaves near Saigon. Not before summer, when the civil guard and selfdefense units are slated to take over the burden of defending their villages will enough troops be freed for a counter-guerrilla offensive. Then, instead of a conventional setpiece offensive of limited duration, a counterguerrilla drive will seek to keep Viet Cong units on the run at all times, tire them out by constant pressure and force them into less hospitable country where food supplies are scarce.

The offensive cannot succeed unless the Government is able to mobilize positive popular support. This will be difficult, for the Government is just beginning to develop grass roots political cadres.



rently involves some 300,000 armed South Vietnamese and 3,000 American servicemen on one side, against 18,000 to 25,000 Viet Cong Communist regulars operating as guerrillas.

- The battle that is being fought is complex—in the nature of the fighting, in the internal political background and in its international implications.

... The United States does not have any combat infantry troops in Vietnam as of now, but we are getting ready for that possibility. Marine Corps officers have completed ground reconnaissance in the central Vietnam highlands, a potential theater of large-scale action between American troops and Communist forces coming down from the north.

- American combat troops are not likely to be thrown into Vietnam unless Communist North Vietnam moves across the seventeenth parallel or pushes large forces down through Laos into South Vietnam.

In that case the United States would have to move in fast. Forty miles below the frontier with North Vietnam and parallel to it is Highway **2.** This road has high strategic importance. Not only is it one of the few adequate roads open across the mountains to thel

In addition to those in South Vietnam the the problem that the Communists would have Together with the forces of the allies, the fundamentally, it is still United States mili-U. S. has large forces positioned in many if they planned a surprise attack. The likeli- United States overseas forces provide deterareas of the world. The forces represent U.S. hood is small that all of these bases could be rent insurance, as do the home-based interconrecognition that the security of the U.S. is eradicated in a single strike.

linked to the security of virtually all free In addition, they constitute a formidable, Air Command. nations against various forms of aggression. strategically placed retaliatory force against The overseas forces increase and complicate any attack short of all-out nuclear strike. ernments into greater defense efforts. But country.

tinental bombers and missiles of the Strategic

tary power that is expected to have meaning for Communist aggressors.

Thus, the Kennedy Administration increased its commitment in South Vietnam in an effort The U.S. is seeking to galvanize local gov- to prevent a Communist takeover in that

Need Modification

Meanwhile something more than narrowly anti-Communist goals must be offered Saigon intellectuals, who are now scorned by both Diem and the Americans. This group may be permanently alienated unless there is promise of democratic reforms. Without pressure from Washington, there is not likely to be any relaxation of Diem's dictatorship. The personal struggle will go on at least ten years, in the opinion of some observers, and severely test American patience.

The United States seems inextricably committed to a long, inconclusive war. The Communists can prolong it for years. Even without large-scale intervention from the north, which would lead to "another Korea," what may be achieved at best is only restoration of a tolerable security similar to that achieved in Malaya after vears of fighting. But it is too 'ate to disengage; our prestige is been committed. Washingon says we will stay until the . inish.

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