

# After the War, Still Vietnam

By EDWARD G. LANSDALE

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — Two things predictably will be awaiting us around the next bend in history whenever formal warfare ends in Indochina. One is that the Politburo still will be ruling in Hanoi. The other is that the basic issue of the war, the question of whether the people on that battleground are to live in a closed society or an open society, will have remained unresolved. These two probabilities, combined, are going to generate problems in the future for every thinking American.

The Politburo, ever since being elected by a few cronies and holding its first meeting in 1945, has been of one mind about its major aim. It wants all of the people of Vietnam to live in a closed society of its own design, with, of course, the Politburo members as overlords. It created political, military, and economic instruments to force and cajole its will on the people of South Vietnam, as well as on neighboring Laos and Cambodia. Despite the failure of the resulting long war to achieve the Politburo's goal, the nine surviving members and two alternates of the Politburo haven't changed their major aim. A cease-fire will find it intact, but unfulfilled. The postwar era will only require less visible tactics for the Politburo to pursue this aim.

We can be sure that the Politburo's postwar tactics will be skillful. Hanoi's political hierarchy has been toughened by experiencing more than a quarter-century of struggle. It has a widespread organization of rigidly disciplined underlings who understand political action and how to practice it. No other group on the postwar scene will have these qualities.

We will be deluding ourselves if we expect the Politburo members to adopt willingly the behavior of politicians of Western democracies as their postwar style. Instead, they should be expected to behave in the manner they have learned over their lifetimes. Although they will continue to pose as spokesmen for the people, their evident distrust of the people will cause them to favor only elections that are as competently rigged as the few they have held in North Vietnam. Further, it is rational to predict that they will try

to weed out those who they fear will oppose them, just as they have in the past in North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, as well as in South Vietnam. It is an integral part of a strategy that the Politburo believes is necessary for its political success.

The Politburo, of course, needn't resort to a bloodbath to weed out the opposition. As an alternative, it could stampede these people out of the country, just as the million refugees fled from North Vietnam in 1954. Only, this time, there would be more. The people of South Vietnam are well aware of the categories used to make up the lists of victims in the massive political liquidations undertaken by the Politburo in Hue in 1968 and in Binh Dinh in 1972.

Millions of people in South Vietnam are in those exact same categories and have cause to fear for their lives. If they see any evidence of a bloodbath about to start, they are going to have the urge to flee. Yet, what running room will be left? It is all too likely that they would turn to us Americans and plead for a way out. What would we do then? Set up refugee camps for maybe five million or so people in Southern California or the Black Hills or Cape Cod? They would make fine citizens in our melting pot, but neither they nor we desire such a hegira to satisfy the Politburo's supposed need.

Americans who think that our morality will permit us to isolate ourselves from postwar Vietnam, or who think that generous United States economic programs for postwar rehabilitation and development will buy political solutions, are being unrealistic. What is required, instead, is for Americans to borrow the Politburo's warmaking strategy and employ it for making peace.

As Le Duan explained it, the Politburo's strategy has been "exploiting the contradictions in the enemy camp." We could use this honorably. The most vulnerable contradiction in the Politburo camp is its claim to act in the name of the people while keeping its actions secret from the people. If we designed all of our postwar programs and moves with an eye toward making Vietnam as open a society as possible, we would be going a long way toward frustrating the instigation of bloodbaths and other political tragedies.

Americans did magnificently in creating open societies in Germany and Japan after World War II. Surely we could find the sensitive skills required to bring similar benefits to the people of postwar Vietnam. Much could be done by a simple change in emphasis. We could start giving the leaders in Hanoi the same public exposure as we've given those in Saigon. We could pressure leaders in both North and South Vietnam to start honoring the Jeffersonian precepts in their own written constitutions. We could aid and encourage the growth of institutions that give the people a voice in their affairs.

We even could strengthen the peace by the way we give postwar economic aid, by the manner in which we internationalize it, as we have offered to do. Instead of turning to outsiders, the work could be done by teams of draft-age youth drawn from the nations which sent troops or munitions to the war—including both Vietnams, Laos, Cambodia, the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Czechoslovakia, Australia, Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand. The experience could be salutary.

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*Maj. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale, Ret., who served in diplomatic and intelligence posts in Vietnam, is author of "In the Midst of Wars."*

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1945: OSS officers with Ho and Giap at Vietminh headquarters

