

Letters to the Editor

To Aid South Vietnam

To the Editor:

At the end of my first tour in Vietnam, I doubted the effectiveness of a massive U.S. commitment there. Many soldiers had similar doubts. Our commitment increased threefold in 1963-64. It was already too late to turn back despite official pronouncements to the contrary. Once our country was committed, the doubters joined with the others to create a South Vietnam that could stand alone.

The Vietnamese were awed by our power, methods and determination. They adopted tactics based on U.S. technology and wealth, without question. Their military ranks swelled—hardly a family would escape participation. Together we uprooted the people and erased their hamlets for the better employment of U.S. tactics. We knew our wealth would return the people to the land and restore their hamlets. The Vietnamese shared our confidence.

The social consequences of our operations, largely lost on a computer-oriented bureaucracy, eventually led to our disengagement. But disengagement was not possible for those Vietnamese whose faith in our resolve had caused them to support the Government of Vietnam. No "Peace" or "Americanization" program would extricate them from their commitment. It was their country and their war.

After years of U.S. assistance, South Vietnam's only defense is cast in our image. The country is now tied inexorably to U.S. tactics, but, minus wealth, remains our dependent. Its

economy is a shambles; agricultural plenty is a memory. Its manpower must defend everything, every place, all the time. Vietnamization indeed! The very heart of that program was American.

We left, a repentant seducer, promising everything, but the enemy remained, ruthless, persistent and well-supplied. He now strikes South Vietnam from unmolested sanctuaries. No moral code, no national border inhibit his attack. He is not expected to provide a free and open society. His objective is dominance; his tactics terror. It is folly to imagine a compassionate peace at his hands.

Some can wrap the South Vietnamese in the cloth of corruption, or include them all in an image called Thieu. We who know, better cannot.

All South Vietnamese are not corrupt. Thieu is not South Vietnam. They are all with their Government because we put them there. Thieu's punishment could be exile; for millions of others it could be disgrace, enslavement or death.

It's late, perhaps too late. We cannot turn back the clock—God, that we could! But we can keep our promises, provide the aid and pray that God and history will forgive our blunders and credit our intentions.

Fail the aid now, and we are damned by a final, willful act of destroying those whose only crime was trusting us. ROBERT C. JARVIS

Lieutenant Colonel, U.S.A.
North Pownal, Vt., Feb. 24, 1975