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Nguyen Cao Ky & 1965

Editorial Note: The following letter is written in response to Dr. Geoffrey Shaw’s article, NGUYEN CAO KY & VIETNAM 1965, which was published in Vietnam Veterans For Factual History: INDOCHINA IN THE YEAR OF THE SNAKE—1965. 2015: 121-142.

English translation by SACEI.

Van Nguyen Duong

Dr. Shaw’s lengthy paper about General Ky like a betrayal, raises evidence of weaknesses of the State of South Vietnam rather than those of Nguyen Cao Ky or his cabinet in 1965. In reality, South Vietnam’s weaknesses at the time were the making of the White House war makers as evidenced by the following:

- On the political field, the U.S. supported the coup against and murder of President Ngo Dinh Diem and his assistant Ngo Dinh Nhu without planning ahead for a replacement. This led to a political void that resulted in leadership and social instabilities, repeated military coups, and divisions within the military. The U.S. Ambassador in Saigon, General Maxwell Taylor, was a military man unskilled in politics, who despised South Vietnamese generals instead of uniting them for the common purpose of stabilizing the army. Although this fact has been documented by many U.S. historians and politicians, Dr. Shaw never mentioned it.
- On the military side, the 1962 neutralization of Laos, by abandoning the southeastern corridor of Laos, allowed communist North Vietnam to exploit the Ho Chi Minh Trail and to rush six divisions to South Vietnam, especially to A Chau, A Luoi areas, National Route 14 in the central highlands, the northwestern section of Saigon. The new arrivals caused many of the military conflicts cited in Shaw’s paper. Shaw in turn laid the blame of these conflicts on Ky’s weaknesses. The main responsibility must rest on the bureaucrats at the White House rather than on the incompetence of Thieu or Ky. This important factor was never discussed by Shaw.
- The National Police and the People’s Self Defense Forces (PSDF), as well as the main military army were under the control of the U.S. as far as organization and budget were concerned. What could Thieu and Ky do in this situation to lay the blame on them?

Back to the period in history that concerns us, one should also mention some facts known to all.

The U.S. bought the Buddhist Struggle Movement and some ARVN generals

The U.S. bought the Buddhist Movement, especially Monk Thich Tri Quang, to use it as a tool against the Diem government. Once the generals succeeded in their coup to topple Diem, Quang only became more important to the U.S. in their goal of disrupting and manipulating the military junta. Thich Tri Quang’s first request was to bring back Colonel Nguyen Chanh Thi, the leader of the coup against Diem in 1961. Unfortunately, he failed, escaped and went in exile in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. He was then brought back to help Tri Quang to deal with the generals.

Besides Thich Tri Quang and a number of Buddhist leaders who were bought by the U.S., were two officers who worked for the CIA: Tran Thien Khiem and Nguyen Chanh Thi. In his memoir Colonel Pham Ba Hoa, who was General Khiem’s chief of secretarial staff, disclosed that General Khiem himself was the main liaison person with the U.S. concerning the November 1, 1963 coup. Later, General Khiem plotted with General Nguyen Khanh to topple Duong Van Minh allowing Khanh emerge. After taking over the reins of the government, Khanh by elevating a number of young colonels to generals widened the ranks

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of the armed forces. They included: Chung Tan Cang, Navy commander, Nguyen Cao Ky, Air Force commander, Le Nguyen Khang, Marines commander, Nguyen Chanh Thi, Vinh Loc, Ngo Dzu, Dang Van Quang, Lu Lan, Albert Cao (major class 4 of Dalat Military Academy), Nguyen Duc Thang and Nguyen Bao Tri. Nguyen Chanh Thi was the first 3-star general in early 1965 and commander of the I Region and Corps while Chung Tan Cang and Nguyen Cao Ky were only 2-star generals. Hue and Danang were the ideal milieu for the couple Nguyen Chanh Thi and Thich Tri Quang (TTQ), the darlings of Washington, who wielded political and military power over the I Corps. Although Shaw knew about this, he did not mention it probably because Thich Tri Quang whom he highly praised was wielding power and actively serving the U.S.

The U.S. actively reformed the Vietnamese Army

The U.S. plan was to take down all the pro-French military leadership and replace them with a young pro-U.S. military leadership (the Young Turks).

Thich Tri Quang having controlled Nguyen Chanh Thi and using him as a bargaining chip against Khanh forced the latter to let him know all the decisions, political, administrative, and military, before putting them in action. In compensation, Khanh would receive the support of the TTQ's An Quang Buddhist group, that is to say, U.S. support for everyone knew at that time that TTQ was an active U.S. agent, more than any other Vietnamese general or political figure.

Once Nguyen Chanh Thi returned from exile from Cambodia, he recovered his rank of Colonel and was promoted deputy commander to Nguyen Khanh at the I Corps. When Nguyen Khanh and Tran Thien Khiem organized the coup against Duong Van Minh in order to take power, he was helped by Nguyen Chanh Thi. Khanh elevated Thi to one-star General in May 1964 and commander of the First Infantry Division of the ARVN (1st Div/ARVN). After Thi supported the Vung Tau Constitution, Khanh elevated him to 2-star general in August 1964. Relationship between the two looked good although shortly thereafter, Thi betrayed Khanh.

When Khanh took power, he made two crucial decisions.

First, he used and supported young generals from northern (Ky, Khang, Tri, Thang) or central Vietnam (Thi, Loc, Du, Lan) while discarding well known and experienced generals (Don, Kim, Xuan, Dinh, Vy) on the pretext they embraced neutrality. He jailed the latter in Dalat while at the same time eliminated Dr. Nguyen Ton Hoan, a revered revolutionary and President of the Dai Viet party from all government positions. Khanh also suppressed high Dai Viet ranking officers and did not use southern generals, although he was himself from the South. The only exception was General Albert Nguyen Van Cao, his chief of staff.

Second, having risen to the top, but without talent and lacking organizational skills and loyal supporters, he did not remain on top very long. Because he was suspicious of southern generals, he suppressed well-known southern colonels and dismissed Dr. Nguyen Ton Hoan, disbanded the junta triumvirate actively forcing Duong Van Minh to go into exile and sending Tran Thien Khiem to serve as Ambassador in the U.S. The first coup against him occurred on September 13, 1964. Led by General Duong Van Duc and Colonel Huynh Van Ton, Dai Viet party member, the latter brought troops from his 7th Division from the Mekong delta to Saigon to subvert and control many key government and military offices. He attempted to get hold of General Khanh at the military headquarters of the Tran Hung Dao camp, but the latter escaped. Khanh gave Thi command of some military units. Thi along with Ky and his Air Force unit counterattacked the rebels forcing General Duc and Colonel Ton to withdraw. The latter were caught, jailed, and forced to resign from the army. Thi and Ky began fighting for position. Political unrest in Saigon gave the communists the chance to get into action, especially in the Central Highlands where infiltration of communist troops reached its peak.

Nguyen Khanh, although safe from the coup, was hounded by Buddhists and students who continued to demonstrate against his government and to ask for a new Constitution as well as the formation of a civilian government. From the end of 1963 after taking down the Diem regime, the Buddhist movement began to split up, compete, and fight against each other to the point that U.S. Ambassador Cabot Lodge had to intervene and create the "Reunified Buddhist Leadership." But in reality, the Buddhists were still divided into two groups: the An Quang faction led by Thich Tri Quang and the Vinh Nghiem faction by Thich Thien Minh who also administered the Vien Hoa Dao.

Under pressure from various sides, the Buddhists, the political parties as well as some generals, Khanh backed out. The military junta formed the National Supreme Council comprised of nine erudite civilians and a seasoned revolutionary and an engineer, Phan Khac Suu; it elected the latter as the leader of the Supreme Council and President of the State. It chose Professor Tran Van Huong as Prime Minister, a selection that made both the U.S. and TTQ unhappy. The U.S. wanted Mr. Tran Quoc Buu, the leader of the Workers Union to be the Prime Minister. Only a month later, General Khanh ordered PM Tran Van Huong jailed at Vung Tau and sent four Supreme Council members to jail in Pleiku. This led to a constant dispute be-

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tween General Khanh and Ambassador Taylor, a strong signal of U.S. disapproval toward Khanh.

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On January 27, 1965, the military junta met and chose Dr. Phan Huy Quat to replace Huong as prime minister. The move neither satisfied the U.S. nor the Buddhists because they could no longer expect to influence Phan Khac Suu or Phan Huy Quat although the latter did not have any true power.

The U.S. landed ground forces into South Vietnam and actively engaged in the war

From January 1964 onward, President Johnson not only had to face social and political unrest in the U.S. after the November 1963 Kennedy assassination, but also had to deal with communist expansion in Southeast Asia. The tacit war in Laos and the open war in South Vietnam were both instigated by the communists. The link between the two wars was the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the result of the 1962 neutralization of Laos thanks to the superficial idea of Averell Harriman. The trail was the corridor through which hundreds of thousands of communist soldiers used to infiltrate into South Vietnam in the years to come. The Vietnam War was inevitable from then on. Although the decision was fatal to South Vietnam, Dr. Shaw failed to recognize it. He instead blamed it on the incompetence of the South Vietnamese army forcing Johnson to continue Kennedy's policy of landing ground troops into Vietnam and leading the war in Vietnam.

In March 1964, President Johnson sent Defense Secretary McNamara to look at the war progress in Vietnam. On his return, he reported to Johnson that from the political standpoint, the policy of neutralization of South Vietnam proposed by France should be stopped; on the military standpoint, South Vietnam should entertain total mobilization, build up and modernize its army. Johnson called for a meeting of his National Security Council, in front of which McNamara stressed that South Vietnam could collapse if the U.S. did not take action. He ordered the Air Force to stand ready to implement the 37-63 strategic plan allowing it to bomb North Vietnam as well as the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which had been suspended following the signing of the 1962 neutralization of Laos. At the same time, U.S. troops could land in South Vietnam and peaceful solution with North Vietnam would be started.

Naturally, President Johnson must have understood that the Kennedy administration by allowing the take down and murder of the Ngos made a strategic mistake because veteran Vietnamese generals like Minh, Don, Kim, Xuan, Vy being trained by the French were deeply pro-French at a time when De Gaulle proposed the neutralization of South Vietnam. Since the U.S. believing in the domino theory could not trust the military junta, it decided to use the Tran Thien Khiem card to reverse the situation. It also proposed Nguyen Khanh to serve as head of the State because the latter had saved President Diem from the 1961 coup and had exhibited good military leadership. The U.S. was thus able to sideline the pro-French faction and elevate the pro-American Young Turks thanks to Khanh. The U.S. strategy at the time was designed to achieve two goals: war and peace.

First, the U.S. asked Canadian James Blair Seaborn, a member of the International Control Committee of the 1954 Geneva Treaty, who already in Vietnam planned to travel to Hanoi to meet with Premier Phan Van Dong of North Vietnam. The purpose of the trip was to give to the latter a peace proposal with attached economic and social incentives for North Vietnam. Dong rejected all the propositions and told Seaborn to communicate to the U.S. that it first had to get out of South Vietnam, that South Vietnam should be neutralized, and that North Vietnam was ready for war. When Seaborn returned to Hanoi in August 1964, Dong reiterated his objections to the proposal and stated that Hanoi was opposed to the U.S. until the end. Seaborn relayed the message to the U.S. while Hanoi ordered its people to build bunkers and dig tunnels in preparation for war right in the city. Washington knew that the "carrot and stick" strategy did not work and prepared for war.

Then the USS destroyer Maddox was attacked by North Vietnamese speedboats when it patrolled in the Gulf of Tonkin in international water on August 2, 1964. President Johnson ordered USS C. Turner Joy to support the Maddox in its work. Two days later on August 4, Washington received news that the two destroyers were again attacked by North Vietnamese boats. The NSC suggested President Johnson to retaliate.

The following day on August 5, 1964, the 37-63 strategic plan was immediately implemented. At 10:30 Johnson announced that because North Vietnam had attacked U.S. destroyers, it had started war against the U.S., which would retaliate. At 11:00, 64 fighter jets from the 7th Fleet bombed the town of Vinh in North Vietnam. On August 7, the U.S. legislative body voted on the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution with 416-0 in the House of Representatives and 88-2 in the Senate giving the president full power to retaliate against any armed force that attacked U.S. forces in Southeast Asia and to use the army to support the South East Asia Treaty Organization. This was a war declaration against North Vietnam.

The "Maddox" drama was set up by the hawks from the Kennedy administration who were still trusted by Johnson and who attempted to use a new strategy in Southeast Asia and Vietnam. These bureaucrats had always intended to land U.S. troops in Vietnam and experimented the counter-insurgency strategy designed by President Kennedy. In reality, communist aggression was a total and permanent "revolutionary war" which was subdivided in many stages, of which guerilla and insurgency formed the beginning phase. When they infiltrated troops into South Vietnam, they had moved into the war of movement stage. The U.S. Joint Chief of Staff and General Westmoreland, MACV commander knew about the situation and alerted the White House

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Nguyen Cao Ky & 1965... about the war shifting position. As expected, battlefields became active along the highland frontier. CIDG camps and People's forces trained and led by the U.S. Special Forces were attacked; many camps were overrun and casualties were noted in Shaw's paper. Many battles were fought at the regimental level.

However, Shaw never mentioned about the violent attacks or shelling against U.S. Air Force (USAF) installations in South Vietnam that led to major losses. On November 1, 1964, the USAF base in Bien Hoa was shelled causing 4 casualties and the destruction of 5 US-57 aircraft. On February 7, 1965, communist forces attacked a unit at the USAF base in Pleiku causing 9 casualties and 76 wounded. These two attacks although limited in scope forced Washington to order air strikes under the Rolling Thunder program on harbors, communication systems, railroads, military training camps in Dong Hoi and Vinh.

In one of these airstrikes on North Vietnam, the hero Nguyen Cao Ky leading South Vietnamese fighter planes accompanied by USAF planes appeared for the first time in his self-designed black-flying suit and black cap. He wore a neck scarf, long sleeves, two silver stars and insignia of VNAF (South Vietnamese Air Force) on his chest and a pair of pearl-handled revolvers that Shaw criticized. It was unusual to see an Air Force commander participate in an air strike without training, but that action proved the courage and determination of a person who later became President of the South Vietnamese Executive branch and Prime Minister of a country. I will show later that Shaw erred when he criticized Ky.

High Profile Defensive Strategy and Search and Destroy Tactics

After two rounds of airstrikes in North Vietnam, the U.S. Joint Chief of Staff (JCS), the CIA, and General Westmoreland concluded that the Rolling Thunder strategy did not work: it only made North Vietnam more eager to defeat the U.S. The more the U.S. bombed North Vietnam, the more the latter would rush its troops through Laos into South Vietnam: the end result was a bloodier conflict. The U.S., therefore, had to land ground troops into Vietnam. Ambassador Taylor and Secretary of Defense McNamara, however, continued to support the air strike strategy. The NSA, on the other hand, supported both approaches: air strike and troop landing.

Two Marine battalions landed in Danang on March 8, 1965 followed by four more later. According to South Vietnamese Ambassador Bui Diem to Washington, in the following six weeks, the U.S. had landed 82,000 troops. The number rose to 120,000 in the first four months, 184,000 for 1965, 300,000 by mid-1966, and 500,000 by early 1967. Besides, General Westmoreland also received 60,000 troops from SEATO members (Australia, New Zealand, and Thailand), the Filipino Peace Corps group, and two South Korean combat divisions. The South Vietnamese army was also increased to 500,000 troops. (1)

Before the U.S. bombed North Vietnam, General Khanh stated that victory would not be possible without an invasion of North Vietnam. He requested 10,000 U.S. ground troops for this project, a rather small number. But no one could figure out why with one million troops under its control, the U.S. never dared to invade North Vietnam. Worse than that, throughout the whole Vietnam War, the U.S. never had a formula for victory; especially, when it became fully engaged under the Johnson administration with a strong military force supported by one of the most sophisticated war machineries in the world. This huge army was only used to defend South Vietnam, a strategy that U.S. historians dubbed as "high profile strategy." History has shown that the U.S. by holding South Vietnam as a bastion for Freedom just considered it as a private property in Southeast Asia ready to trade it with China or the Soviet Union. And that happened in 1973 when the U.S. had to deal with the economic recession after OPEC countries boycotted the U.S. for protecting Israel. In order to save Israel and the U.S. economy, the U.S. sold out South Vietnam to the Soviet Union and China through the Paris Agreement (January 23, 1973). That was how historians explained the lack of victory strategy espoused by the U.S.

Back to 1965 Vietnam--the period during which Dr. Shaw used to blacken South Vietnam and criticize General Nguyen Cao Ky, the policy of "defensive strategy"--should be explored further. With a huge army in his hands, General Westmoreland proposed to expand the war into southern Laos rather than fight the communists inside South Vietnam. He proposed to repair Route 9 from Gio Linh, province of Quang Tri to Khe Sanh then to send troops to southern Laos to repair Route 9 all the way to Tchepone, then Savannakhet on the border of the Mekong River. Therefore, by using 60,000 troops to guard the route from Khe Sanh to the border of Laos-Thailand, the U.S. would have blocked off the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which served as the infiltration route into Cambodia and South Vietnam. The war would have been located along Route 9 and victory would have been assured because the U.S. had a strong air force. Besides, on the political field, northern communists would be viewed as invaders and the label of "people against US invaders to save the country" would have been dispelled.

Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, replacing General Taylor, supported Westmoreland's proposal. Sadly, the bureaucrats, nicknamed "The Lunch Bunch Powers" or the President's Johnson's war cabinet overruled Westmoreland's proposal of cutting off the Ho Chi Minh Trail and of attacking North Vietnam. They argued that expanding the war into North Vietnam or Laos would cause China to jump in; the Chinese People's Liberation Army would invade North Vietnam and the U.S. would face a

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major war like the one in Korea in 1950-1953. They were so afraid of widening the war that when Admiral Grant Sharp, commander of the Seventh Fleet presented a list of 94 important targets in North Vietnam that needed to be destroyed, including bombing the Nankin-Hanoi and Kunming-Hanoi railroad tracks and mining the Hai Phong Harbor to prevent the Soviet Union and China to supply armaments to North Vietnam, the White House coldly rejected them all. Westmoreland finally had to fall back on the "Search and Destroy" strategy inside South Vietnam.

Therefore, if one continued to battle along the borders and inside South Vietnam, there would never be a victory if the trail and other communication routes were not destroyed. Thus, the U.S. had used half a million troops in a long, costly, and hopeless war. Only U.S. and South Vietnamese troops, and the Vietnamese people had to suffer from this senseless war that was primarily designed the Washington bureaucrats. Although "Search and Destroy" strategy was initially successful in pushing communist troops to the borders, the latter reacted by building safe camps to house troops and logistics in Cambodia along the borders from Khe Sanh to Mo Vet area in Tay Ninh Province from which they could launch attacks anytime into South Vietnam.

Significant social changes

Worse than the war, the presence of half-a-million U.S. and allied troops caused dramatic social changes: decaying morality, disrespect/disregard of local customs. The value of the dollar became the rule of law and morality as money could buy anything. Bars, girls, brothels popped up everywhere to service the GIs; U.S. products from PX flooded the market from cities to towns and villages. Any law abiding citizen could immediately spot all these social changes. A sad and sarcastic phrase was used to describe all these changes: "First prostitute, second monk, third priest, fourth general." Has Dr. Shaw understood the social changes caused by this influx of foreigners? Probably not, that is why he denigrates South Vietnam.

In this situation, the civilian government and the military junta could not do anything better because from the fall of 1964, any political, military and even economical problem was decided by the U.S. The civilian government and the military junta appeared like vague figures in the whole spectrum of the war until the second Republic was inaugurated. President Phan Khac Suu and Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat under pressure from many sides were not able to devise many constructive plans for workers, businessmen, and farmers in order to reform the society and secure security in the cities. The supreme military leader, General Khanh, who did not have a thorough understanding of the complex situation often made unilateral decisions and ignored the National Supreme Council and the executive branch. This in turn generated a grave mistrust from many groups, especially the Mekong Delta military group.

The second military coup against General Khanh was led by General Lam Van Phat, Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, and Colonel Bui Dzinh on February 19, 1965. They brought troops to the Central Command housing complexes to try to catch Khanh. The latter escaped to Tan Son Nhat AFB where Ky flew him to Vung Tau then Dalat. Once again, Thi and Ky were given orders to quell the rebellion. In his memoir, "*Buddha Child: My Struggle to Save Vietnam*" Ky recounted that after transporting Khanh to Vung Tau, he returned to Bien Hoa AFB where he advised Lam Van Phat and Pham Ngoc Thao to withdraw their troops before 06:00 am of February 20, 2015, otherwise they would be bombed. Ky received a phone call from General Robert Rowland, adviser to the VNAF (South Vietnamese Air Force), who suggested him to support the revolution. Ky refused and reiterated his threat. Phat and Thao withdrew their troops during the night. Phat and his officers were sentenced according to the severity of their actions in the coup. As to Thao, he attempted to escape but was killed in the military jail. Although it was not clear what General Thi wrote in his memoir, but it was recounted that he asked President Phan Khac Suu to dismiss General Khanh. The latter, however, was not dismissed by the civilian government but by the military junta who sent him abroad as a "roving ambassador."

On February 26, 1965, General Khanh left Vietnam taking with him a handful of Vietnamese soil. As Ky had suggested, the fact that General Rowland advised Ky and Thi to support the rebels suggested that Washington wanted Khanh to remain in power. The military junta thus had no choice but to force him out. As to Nguyen Chanh Thi who was made a two-star general, commander of the I Corps and Military Region and Representative of the government for the Central Region, everyone thought he would be happy with all his titles, but apparently he was not.

The political power, after Khanh left, did not rest on Phan Khac Suu or Phan Huy Quat, but in the hands of the Young Turks and General Nguyen Van Thieu, their elected representative. As a matter of fact, the junta was divided into four groups led by: 1) General Thieu; 2) General Nguyen Huu Co; 3) General Thi; 4) and General Ky. All the pro-French generals had been discarded by the Johnson government after the murder of President Diem. Nguyen Chanh Thi wanted to control the junta and Thich Tri Quang the civilian government of Phan Huy Quat, while the fighting went on along the highland border. Who had created these political and military problems? Dr. Shaw should have realized that the U.S. wanted this instability to persist to justify the

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landing of more ground troops into Vietnam. The weaknesses of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) could only help the U.S. pursue its strategy of having troops on the ground and controlling the war in Vietnam according to the precepts stated above. The U.S. might have wanted Vietnam to be stable politically, but realized that any civilian government would be ineffective.

Among the four groups within the junta, General Thi supported by Monk Thich Tri Quang was very active and wanted to take down the civilian government. The other three groups fought back against the Thi group.

The Ky government suppressed Buddhist crisis in central Vietnam

On June 12, 1965, President Phan Khac Suu and Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat resigned from office and returned the power to the Armed Forces Council. The Supreme National Council disbanded itself. On June 19, the Armed Forces Council created two new institutions: the National Leadership Committee (NLC) and the Central Executive Committee (CEC). General Thieu was selected as leader of the NLC, akin to President of the State while General Ky led the CEC, akin to Prime Minister in charge of forming the cabinet. The Armed Forces Council chose June 6, 1965 as the Armed Forces Day and renamed the South Vietnamese Army as the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (ARVN).

Maybe General Thi would like General Ky's position, but he was neutralized by the three other groups in the Armed Forces Council. He returned to his former post as Commander of the I Corps in Danang upset at the Armed Forces Council and jealous of General Ky. Thich Tri Quang who was also displeased about the political outcome could no longer hope to influence the Nguyen Cao Ky's government. From the time of the downfall of the first Republic, Thich Tri Quang had considered himself as the head of state hiding in the shadow behind his Buddhist monk outfit. With Ky in control, he felt he had been stripped off his role of "head of state." The Buddhist Struggle Movement in central Vietnam, which had always rebelled at the Saigon government, had the chance to flourish under the Diem regime, despite the fact that the Buddhist Vinh Nghiem faction and the Vien Hoa Dao of Thich Tam Chau never condoned the violent opposition actions of the Buddhist Struggle Movement. While Thich Tri Quang waited for his moment, Nguyen Chanh Thi criticized the government as impotent, authoritarian, and corrupt on the air waves in Hue and Danang and acted as if he wanted to secede from the central government. That was during the time when Dr. Shaw criticized General Ky of being impotent from the end of June 1965 onward.

During that time, Prime Minister Ky frequently appeared in many places in Saigon in his black pilot outfit, sports cap emblazoned with golden rice stalks under two golden stars--like during his bombing mission in Vinh, North Vietnam, during his meeting with General Thieu, the Armed Forces Council, and his cabinet members, or when he toured army units. His supporters viewed him as a strong statesman and a decisive, intelligent, and sharp officer. Those who did not belong to any political group like me would also mention his unpredictability. The U.S. called him an "unguided missile." Ky acted often in the spurt of the moment as if spontaneously. But based on my judgment, that spontaneity only reflected the sharp and intelligent reaction of a skilled leader. For full disclosure, I am a southerner who worked in the intelligence field, had never met General Ky. I was not one of his buddies or supporters; had not received any favor from him; but was simply an attentive observer of his political and military life for over half a century.

Overall, if one put aside his womanizing conduct, one has to admit he was a man of talent who was able to earn more respect from his colleagues and subordinates than any other RVNAF (Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces) officer. One could look at his flashy demeanor to assess his leadership skill like in the following situations.

First of all, he was energetic and dedicated to his job and his superior who was General Nguyen Khanh at the time. On the other end, he also owed his military rise to Khanh who supported him, made him commander of the RVNAF, and promoted him to one- then two-star general. Ky in return saved Khanh twice in the two coups promoted by the Mekong delta generals. He refused to cooperate with the rebel group Phat-Thao, which was supported by General Rowland, chief adviser of the RVNAF. This refusal demonstrated his courage and energy in dutifully executing his assigned duty as an officer in the face of adverse events. Throughout his career, he was not tainted by rumors or evidence of corruption like other officers and did not place his personal interest over that of his friends or country. Ky was respectful of his superiors and kind toward his inferiors, but was not complacent when he needed to deal with them harshly.

He applied laws strictly and forcefully. As the head of the Central Executive Committee, he ordered a corrupt businessman shot to death for hoarding rice, which caused severe rippling effects on the economy. From that time onward, South Vietnam did not lack of rice.

On March 1966, while officially touring central Vietnam, he noticed that General Thi disparaged the Central Executive Committee and wanted to secede from the central government and to establish a separate political entity in Central Vietnam. As the President of the Central Executive Committee, he ordered General Thi relieved of his command and made General Nguyen Van Chuan his replacement. General Nguyen Huu Co, deputy Chief of the Central Executive Committee arrested

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and transferred Thi to Saigon.

On March 12, 1966, Thich Tri Quang moved on the offensive. For unknown reason, Quang was able to recruit General Chuan, some military units and Buddhist civilians from Danang, Hue, and other cities in central Vietnam. He then mobilized them to demonstrate against the central government in Saigon. Demonstrations occurred almost daily with demands to release and reestablish Thi as I Corps commander; to dismiss General Ky; and to hold election for a civilian government. The Central Executive Committee designated General Huynh Van Cao then Ton That Dinh, both of them from central Vietnam to consecutively lead the I Corps. Both failed because Quang was a skilled politician who used stratagems to buy off local officials, military personnel, and Buddhist civilians. Demonstration kept spreading and became violent with time. Many people took with them guns, sharp staves and even brought altars on the streets to block communication inside Hue and Danang.

In the face of violent demonstrations, the U.S. Ambassador called for the release of Nguyen Chanh Thi who then escaped to Danang. At that time, in Saigon on March 19, the Venerable Thich Tam Chau of the Vinh Nghiem and Vien Hoa Dao Buddhist branches proclaimed his support for generals Thieu and Ky. By then, the demonstrations in Hue and Danang had already lasted two months.

On May 15, 1966, General Ky summoned General Cao Van Vien, Chief of Staff, Joint General Staff and General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, Chief of the Central Intelligence Service and the National Police and ordered the two generals to take 4,000 Marines along with tanks to Danang and Hue. The goal was to suppress the insurrection in central Vietnam and to take General Thi and the mayor of Danang prisoners. General Vien took the troops to Hue, controlled the communication routes to and from the city, although he did not initiate any direct fight against units controlled by Thich Tri Quang and General Phan Xuan Nhuan, commander of the 1st Infantry Division. Two days later, Quang and Nhuan surrendered. The insurrection in central Vietnam was controlled without bloodshed. This action exemplified the leadership and courage of Ky who fulfilled the difficult mission of suppressing a wild insurrection that no other general would accept. One also has to point out the tactical skill and intelligence of General Cao Van Vien who masterfully surrounded the rebellious troops instead of violently suppress them, thereby avoiding bloodshed.

Thich Tri Quang was brought back to Saigon to Dr. Nguyen Duy Tai's clinic for care. Generals Thi, Dinh, Cao, Chuan, Nhuan were hauled to military tribunals. The majority were discharged from the army. As for General Thi, he was sponsored by the U.S. to come to America where he received a retirement stipend of \$600 a month like any three-star U.S. general.

The "Buddha Child" Nguyen Cao Ky who made so many monks and Buddhist leaders-- bought to take down the government--and generals tumble, stepped aside from May 1966 to 1975. I could argue that during that decade, had he been Vice president or Prime minister, these same politicians would not dare move their fingers or demonstrate...because besides being involved in numerous amorous liaisons, which were his worst drawback, Ky was straight and did not look for power. Despite being pushed out of politics, people always mentioned that Ky would lead a coup because he was strongly supported by the Air Force. But the general would not be that stupid to do such a thing.

The reactivated FULRO--a Khmer, Cham, Thuong armed entity--fought for statehood

I do not know whether Dr. Shaw knew enough about the long story of the FULRO

Organization to blame it on the incompetence of the Nguyen Cao Ky government. That organization had destabilized the central highlands in the years 1964-1967. I'll summarize it here.

It started when the CIA and the U.S. Special Forces transformed the FULRO into a dangerous armed entity. The first organization to unite the various tribes in the central highlands was BARAJAKA, which was led by tribal intellectuals like E Bham Enoul, Y Dhon, Paul Nur as well as officers of the French Army in the Central Highlands. The word BARAJAKA derived from the shortening of the names of the four important tribes Banar, Djarai, Rhade, and Kaho. In the beginning, they were lightly armed and did not fight against Ngo Dinh Diem or Bao Dai, except for Colonel Y-Bloc from the Hre tribe who took a regiment of 600 people to rally to the North.

In 1961 when Kennedy organized the Special Forces to prepare for the war in Vietnam, the CIA created the Buon E-Nao project in the province of Darlac. It was a village of armed highlanders who were connected by a system of communication to a strike force unit that was capable of defending a village as well as attacking the enemy. The project later expanded to more than 200 buon units. Officers, warrant officers, specialists, including CIA agents were rushed to the highlands to train the highlanders to fight the communists. The size and number of strike force units depended on the population of each buon or village. About 150,000 of the 700,000 highlanders were trained to fight the communists. And the number of strike force personnel could be as high as 10,000 people. Therefore the U.S. had trained and equipped almost one infantry division of armed men, except for artillery.

When South Vietnamese President's advisor Ngo Dinh Nhu visited Buon E-nao early in 1962, he was elated about the result

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and wanted to apply the concept to all the highland region. He promoted leaders of BARAJAKA, Y Bham Enoul to deputy province chief of Darlac and Paul Nur to deputy province chief

to Kon Tum.

However, when the neutralization of Laos opened the door of eastern Laos, the communists widened the Ho Chi Minh Trail to allow their forces to move and settle in the highlands. Their primary target was to recruit the highlanders. In 1962, Regiment 120 of Colonel Y-Bloc returned from North Vietnam, invaded the tristate border area expanding all the way to Duc Lap, province of Darlac (Ban Me Thuot). They destroyed the buon created by the Americans. A number of frightened buon surrendered to Y-Bloc. In August 1962, Mr. Nhu ordered the cancellation of the rest of the fighting buon. The strike force was assimilated to the People's Forces. The project Buon Enao became bankrupt. However, the civilian fighting spirit was used by the CIA and Special Forces to create the Civilian Indigenous Defense Groups (CIDG) or Mike Force. The smallest unit was the A detachment or company-size. Two or three A units formed a B unit of battalion size; higher a C unit has many B units. Leading an A detachment were 12 officers and warrant officers from the Special Forces. Each A detachment has from 60 to 230 highlanders, many of whom belonged to the previous strike forces of the buon or trained by the South Vietnamese Special Forces.

Toward the end of November 1962, the U.S. had formed 26 A detachments, 3 B detachments and only 1 C detachment. All the A detachments were located in well-entrenched camps from Dak Pak, Dak Suk, Dak To, Vo Dinh on National Route 14 north of Kontum, Duc Co on National Route 19 close to the border, to Pleime, Buon Brieng, Ban Don, Duc Lap in Ban Me Thuot and other camps in Quang Duc, Phuoc Long, Binh Long provinces in III Corps. After the demise of the First Republic, in early 1964 many CIDG camps along the western border fell to the invading northern communists: troops either withdrew or suffered heavy casualties.

In 1964, after Nguyen Khanh overthrew Duong Van Minh, the highlands sustained heavy pressure from the communists. Y Bham Enoul refused to cooperate with Saigon. Under the support of the U.S., Y Bham Enoul and Y Dhon Adrong cooperated with intellectuals leaning toward the restoration of the Cham and Khmer Krom empires and changed their name from BARAJAKA to FLHP (Front of Liberation of the Highlands). Y Bham wanted to wait until he could gather enough forces. Y Dhon, on the other hand, decided to act while South Vietnam was embroiled in political turmoil. In May 1964, Y Dhon escaped to Cambodia and received protection in the French Camp Le Rolland in Mondulkiri Province about 15 kilometers from the border and Duc Co. Y Bham Enoul also came to this camp. Under the protection of Sihanouk, the FLHP gathered Chams and Cambodians to form FULRO (the United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races).

The term FULRO originated from the King of Cambodia Sihanouk who by dreaming of recovering the Mekong delta from the Vietnamese pushed the Chams to demand the return of the southern provinces of Central Vietnam and the highlands to establish a separate country in the highlands. FULRO, therefore, had smaller organizations taking care of separate regions:

- The main force established at the Rolland Camp dealt with the liberation of the highlands. Also known as the "Front of the Liberation of the Highlands," or FULRO Highland, it was led by Y Bham Enoul, who was the President of FULRO.
- The Champa group (Ninh Thuan) also known as the Front for the Liberation of Champa was led by Lieutenant colonel Les Kosem, a Cham native, from the Royal Cambodian Armed Force.
- The Mekong Delta group also known as the "Front of the Liberation of Kampuchea Krom" was led by Monk Chau Dara, a Cambodian who left his flock to fight for the liberation.
- The lower Laos group, known as the Front of Liberation of Kampuchea North was led by Y Dhon Adrong.

On September 30, 1964, all the FULRO battlefields exploded in the highlands, especially in the province of Darlac (Ban Me Thuot) with the rebellion of two U.S. trained and established CIDG camps: Buon Sar Pa in Duc Lap Province and Bu Dang Camp at Quang Duc. The civilian highlanders killed more than 30 South Vietnamese soldiers, took the province chief of Duc Lap prisoner, controlled the radio station and proclaimed the liberation of the highland. In the same night, a number of other CIDG camps in Darlac were attacked like Buon Mi Ga, Ban Don, and Buon Rieng. The attackers, although claiming Y Bham Enoul as the leader were in fact led by two Cambodian Lieutenant Colonels: Les Kosem and Y Buon Sur. General Nguyen Huu Co brought the 23rd Infantry division and surrounded the CIDG camp of Buon Sar Pa. Colonel John F. Freund, adviser to General Co transported Y Bham Enoul to Buon Enao to meet with General Co. The meeting settled peacefully.

In my view, the FULRO tragedy began with the desire of self-government by highland tribes, which only grew worse when the U.S. wanted to use by them to fight against the communists by outfitting them with guns and training them. Because of lack of control, the U.S. let the movement go awry. The highlanders were then bought by Cambodian intelligence officers who gave them safe havens in Cambodia after they infiltrated into South Vietnam. When weak, they collaborated with Saigon, when strong, they fought against the South Vietnamese according to the policy of the Cambodian government.

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This fact was well known by the CIA, which used FULRO when needed like in the Buon Eno project.

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After September 1964, General Vinh Loc replacing General Co had to deal with a few rebellious CIDG camps, but each time the ARVN planned to destroy them, each time the Embassy or U.S. advisers called for negotiations. On September 15, 1965, the FULRO movement brought 500 of its soldiers Buon Buoc, Ban Me Thuot to surrender. On another occasion, General Vinh Loc sent Lieutenant Colonel Y Em to attack Camp Rolland, to take Y Bham and Y Dhon prisoners and to bring them back to Ban Me Thuot. They signed a peace agreement before escaping back to Cambodia.

Generals Thieu and Ky met for the last time with some FULRO leaders at the Convention of Highland Tribes on December 11, 1967 and agreed to create a department of highland tribes within the government. On December 11, 1968, the government accepted the decision to nominate a highlander to province chief or deputy province chief in a region with a high proportion of highlanders and to officers in any military unit with a high concentration of highlanders.

On September 1, 1969, Saigon signed an agreement with minority leaders Paul Nur and Y Dhon Adrong. Paul Nur was nominated as Minister of the Highland tribes. Y Dhon was not mentioned while Y Bham Enoul remained in Cambodia, was arrested by Lieutenant Colonel Les Kosem and killed by Pol Pot when Cambodia fell under the Khmer Rouge. After the Minister of Highland Tribes was nominated, there were less revolts in the southern highlands.

The FULRO movement after South Vietnam fell to the communists continued until 1992. From 1976 onward, they continued to attack the highlands at the regimental level. These attacks were much worse than those during the second Republic.

In summary, what Dr. Shaw mentioned as incompetence of the Nguyen Cao Ky government was not correct and he is not knowledgeable about the FULRO movement. (2)

Notes

This paper is written based on excerpts from the author's work "The Tragedy of the Vietnam War. Van Nguyen Duong. 2008, chapters V to VIII, McFarland Co.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Front_for_the_Liberation_of_Oppressed_Races

Ta Phong Tan, After 4 Years in Communist Jails



**Trước và sau 4 năm
Trong LAO TÙ CỘNG SẢN**

Ta Phong Tan, a Viet blogger was released from communist jails after 4 years of incarceration for blogging about the Vietnamese communist government. As a prisoner of conscience, she was allowed to immigrate to the U.S. on September 19, 2015, of course, after intercession by Washington.

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Ta Phong Tan...

California State Senator Janet Nguyen greeted Ta Phong Tan at the Los Angeles airport.



Vietnamese-Americans Killed in the Middle East War

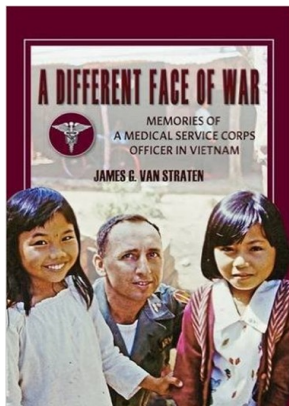
As U.S. citizens, more and more Vietnamese-Americans have served in the U.S. Armed Forces and been killed in faraway lands like the Middle East. So far 12 of them have been honored for their sacrifice by being allowed to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia. A visit to their resting places at the Arlington National Cemetery has been arranged by the Vietnamese community in Virginia on October 17, 2015.

Visit to Arlington National Cemetery
11:00 AM Saturday, October 17, 2015
 Please come and join us to remember
12 Vietnamese Americans sacrificed in the Middle East
Our ARVN Brothers-In-Arms during the Vietnam War

Arlington National Cemetery
 Military cemetery with notable monuments

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A Different Face of War: Memories of a Medical Service Corps Officer in VN



This compelling book was written by a U.S. Army officer who served as an advisor to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam in 1966-67. His duties and responsibilities required that he travel extensively throughout the five northern provinces of the country (Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, Quang Tin and Quang Ngai), interacting with people from all segments of Vietnamese society. Historians who have read the book believe that the author has touched upon the values, traditions and culture of the Vietnamese people to a greater degree than practically all of the books written by American military officers and non-commissioned officers. The author gained tremendous respect for the resilience of the Vietnamese people as a result of his year at war.

Available on Amazon

<http://www.amazon.com/Different-Face-War-Memories-Biography/dp/1574416170/>

Vietnamerica

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0lnZSSYdm4>

A Vietnamese-American film has been recently released. It follows Master Hoa back to Southeast Asia to search for the graves of his wife and two children. Having escaped Vietnam in 1982 on a boat with his family and friends, Hoa is the only survivor. Retracing the footprints of the expatriate Vietnamese, the film begins with the Fall of Saigon, which marks the collapse of Saigon and the South Vietnamese government. About 130,000 Vietnamese were lucky to escape on April 30, 1975. The end of the war ushered in an era of communist control and persecution of anyone associated with the U.S. or former South Vietnamese government.

- 1 million were sent to reeducation camps
- 1 million had their properties confiscated
- 100,000 were executed without trial.

Between 1975 and 1995 over 2 million Vietnamese fled the country to escape communist persecution.

- 1.2 million fled by boat
- 800,000 arrived safely to another country,
- 200-400,000 died at sea.

They form the largest political refugee group in the U.S. today:

- 1.8 million in the U.S.
- 600,000 in Cambodia
- 300,000 in France
- 300,000 in Taiwan
- 200,000 in Australia
- 160,000 in Canada

