

The State of the War

As I write, the news comes that the Viet Cong (the Army of National Liberation of South Vietnam) has won its mightiest victory of the war. After suddenly, simultaneously, and successfully invading seven of the leading cities of South Vietnam (and the cities are the last strongholds of pro-U.S. forces), the V.C. have invaded Saigon itself, even unto the heart of the American embassy.

This crucial incident highlights an important fact of the war which until now has been carefully kept from the American people by their rulers in Washington. The U.S. has been in the Vietnam war in force since the spring of 1965. In Vietnam there is a wet season, stretching from about May to November, and a dry season, from November to May. Typically, all the great U.S. offensives have taken place upon the beginning of each dry season, as the U.S. forces have launched Operation This, That, and the Other, with various plans to establish interior forts, coastal enclaves, to “hold and clear,” or to “search and destroy.” At the beginning of every dry season, the U.S. has launched these offensives with a great deal of fanfare, claiming that now indeed the war is almost won, that now the tide has turned, etc.

There has been good reason for the Americans to exult as each dry season was reached, for the dry season alone permits the U.S. to use its spheres of advantage to the uttermost. In the wet season the U.S. planes

cannot fly, and the U.S. tanks and heavy armored equipment sink into the mud.

Such was the pattern at the start of the dry seasons of 1965–66 and 1966–67, followed eventually by a petering out of the offensive, and the renewal of hope and promise the following year. But now, in this dry season, the pattern is very, very different. For with the coming of the dry season of 1967–68, the Viet Cong, for the first time, totally and irreversibly has the strategic and the tactical initiative. Now it is the V.C. that does the attacking, and the American forces that supply the heroic defense. The dramatic raids and invasions of the major cities by the V.C. are only the climactic demonstration of the vital fact that the war has indeed turned and turned completely.

For what this means is that the Viet Cong have the permanent initiative in the war. It means that the United States, despite its almost 600,000 troops in Vietnam (the vast bulk of its army) and despite the 700,000 and more Saigon puppet troops, has inevitably and ineluctably, lost the war. Short of destroying the country altogether, we cannot win. And now we are steadily losing, and losing with little more than 50,000 North Vietnamese troops in the country to aid their brethren of the South. If we commit the supreme folly of a land invasion of North Vietnam, we will have on our hands not only the current forces that are whipping us, but also 400,000 more men of the crack North Korean army, plus North Korean guerrillas, to say nothing of the Chinese.

Perhaps those who are not convinced of the immorality of the war in Vietnam will now be convinced of its total folly.