

Unfortunately, the caution voiced in early 1963 proved to be well founded. Late in 1963, the Communists stepped up their efforts and the military situation began to deteriorate. The Diem government came under increasing internal pressure and in November it was overthrown. A year ago last February, I had to tell this committee that:

The Vietcong was quick to take advantage of the growing opposition to the Diem government and the period of uncertainty following its overthrow. Vietcong activities were already increasing in September and continued to increase at an accelerated rate in October and November particularly in the Delta area. And I must report that they have made considerable progress since the coup.

Following the coup, the lack of stability in the central government and the rapid turnover of key personnel, particularly senior military commanders, began to be reflected in combat operations and throughout the entire fabric of the political and economic structure. And, in 1964 the Communists greatly increased the scope and tempo of their subversive efforts. Larger scale attacks became more frequent and the flow of men and supplies from the North expanded. The incidence of terrorism and sabotage rose rapidly and the pressure on the civilian population was intensified. The deteriorating military situation was clearly reflected in the statistics. South Vietnamese combat deaths rose from 5,650 in 1963 to 7,450 in 1964 and the number of weapons lost from 8,250 to 14,100. In contrast, Vietcong combat deaths dropped from 20,600 to 16,800 and, considering the stepped-up tempo of activity, they experienced only a very modest rise in the rate of weapons lost (from 5,400 to 5,900).

At various times in recent months, I have called attention to the continued buildup of Communist forces in South Vietnam. I pointed out that although these forces had not been committed to combat in any significant degree, they probably would be after the start of the monsoon season. It is now clear that these forces are being committed in increasing numbers and that the Communists have decided to make an all-out attempt to bring down the Government of South Vietnam. The entire economic and social structure is under attack. Bridges, railroads, and highways are being destroyed and interdicted. Agricultural products are being barred from the cities. Electric powerplants and communication lines are being sabotaged. Whole villages are being burned and their population driven away, increasing the refugee burden on the South Vietnamese Government.

As I mentioned, in addition to the continued infiltration of increasing numbers of individuals and the acceleration of the flow of modern equipment and supplies, organized units of the North Vietnamese army have been identified in South Vietnam. We now estimate the hard-core Vietcong strength at some 70,000 men, including a recently reported increase in the number of combat battalions. In addition, they have some 90,000 to 100,000 irregulars and some 30,000 in their political cadres, i.e., tax collectors, propagandists, etc. We have also identified at least three battalions of the regular North Vietnamese Army, and there are probably considerably more. At the same time the Government of South Vietnam has found it increasingly difficult to make a commensurate increase in the size of its own forces, which now stand at about 545,000 men, including the regional and local defense forces but excluding the national police.

Combat deaths on both sides have been mounting—for the South Vietnamese from an average of 143 men a week in 1964 to about 270