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Date: Wed, 28 Oct 1998 17:43:00 -0500 (EST)
From:
Subject: Fwd: Forwarding Two Think Pieces
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From:
Return-path:
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Subject: Forwarding Two Think Pieces
Date: Wed, 28 Oct 1998 16:56:40 EST
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Jim, I wrote these two pieces for the West Point Forum, which is a List Server
open to USMA graduates and is used for this kind of exchanges. I was asked
what I thought about our experience in Vietnam and where we went wrong...

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Think Piece One (Jim you have heard much of this before; sorry about that):

I will first tell the Forum where I am coming from with regard to Vietnam.
Please forgive the length.

In 1963-64 I had been senior advisor to the 21st Infantry Division in southernmost Vietnam. In this mostly paddy-land region the size of Connecticut, two rival governments were contesting for the loyalty of 1,500,000 inhabitants. One government was the Republic of Vietnam, with its
province, district, and village chiefs, and with its armed forces, from hamlet

militia to district and province contingents to the 21st Infantry Division.
The other government was that of the communist Viet Cong, with its own province, district, and village chiefs and with main force guerrilla units
that roamed the countryside while local platoons and squads operated down
through hamlet level. Each government had its tax collectors, schools,
information cadres. Each had its military/civil program for expanding its
control of the land and its people.

In an article for Army magazine, March 1966, "Pacification Concepts Developed
in the Field by the RVN 21st Infantry Division," I described how our advisory
team and the Vietnamese division and province authorities had developed
together and had begun to put into practice an effective program for the step-
by-step extension of government control of the countryside. In the spring and
summer of 1964, using a huge roll of charts that I had brought home with me, I
briefed many authorities in Washington and elsewhere on our "recipe" for
pacification. I emphasized that U.S. troops should not be introduced into the
countryside; unable to tell friend from foe, they would do more harm than
good.

By the end of 1964, while a student at the National War College, I had arrived
at my judgment of what to do in Vietnam. In my NWC student paper, I proposed
a "winning strategy." It had two components:

(1) Inside the country, organize and mount a massive, U.S. supported but
Vietnamese executed, pacification effort along the lines of what we had begun
in the 21st Infantry Division.

(2) Outside the country, employ U.S. and allied air/land forces -- in a
combination of modern conventional technology, infantry battalions

using guerrilla and counter-guerrilla tactics, supported by air mobility, artillery, air reconnaissance, air fire support, air logistics, mines, demolitions, defoliation, and whatever other means were useful and available -- to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail.

I wrote that "The deployment of the international force... would be described as an action of restraint in the use of force, taken with the cooperation of the Government of Laos, with the sole purpose of ensuring compliance with... the Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos, which a representative of the North Vietnam regime had signed at Geneva on July 23, 1962." In that declaration each signatory nation pledged that "...they will not introduce into the Kingdom of Laos foreign troops or military personnel in any form whatsoever (and) will not use the territory of the Kingdom of Laos for interference in the internal affairs of other countries." North Vietnam had been flagrantly violating that pledge ever since.

My paper, "External Support of the Viet Cong: An Analysis and a Proposal," now unclassified and available in the NWC Library, describes my proposal in detail.

In the winter and spring of 1964-65 I took my message around the Pentagon, but nothing came of it, either then or later, not even in the Army or Marine Corps who had the most to lose by a strategy of attrition and the most to gain by a decisive war-winning stroke.

On July 28, 1965, without calling up the reserves (which in the planning he had committed himself to do), the President announced his commitment of U.S. ground forces into Vietnam. They were to be used in a fruitless

strategy of
attrition.

Bob Sorley's book on Army Chief of Staff Harold K. Johnson (pp 210-215) and
H.R. McMasters' book "Dereliction of Duty" (Chapter 15, "Five Silent Men")
describe how President Johnson manipulated the Joint Chiefs of Staff into
going along with this expansion of the Vietnam War without calling up the
reserves.

Monday, July 26, 1965, two days after hearing that the President would not
call up the reserves, and two days before he spoke to the nation, was when the
Joint Chiefs of Staff should all have resigned their posts. Above all, it was
incumbent on General Johnson to have resigned inasmuch as the Army, more than
the other Services, relied on reserves for an extended war.

In the May 1996 U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings Lt Gen Charles Cooper, USMC
Ret, describes an Oval Office eruption by President Lyndon B. Johnson. It was
November 1965. The U.S. ground forces that the President had ordered into the
Vietnam countryside were now fighting there. Gen Cooper, who as a major was
there holding the map, had just heard Gen Earle G. Wheeler, JCS Chairman,
propose to President Johnson for all the Chiefs, who had asked for the
meeting, a "bold course of action designed to avoid the threat of protracted
land warfare."

The Joint Chiefs' advice to the President was: use our principal strengths,
air and naval power, to punish the North Vietnamese; isolate the major port of
Haiphong through naval mining; blockade the rest of the North Vietnamese
coastline; and begin a B-52 bombing offensive on Hanoi.

Gen Cooper tells of the President's reaction. He "screamed obscenities...

called (the Joint Chiefs) filthy names... (and) accused them of trying to pass the buck for World War III..." Notwithstanding, Cooper says, Army Gen Harold K. Johnson, the Navy's Adm David L. McDonald, Gen Curtis LeMay of the Air Force, and Marine Gen Wallace M. Greene "supported General Wheeler and his rationale. (The meeting) ended when (the President) ordered (the Joint Chiefs) to 'get the hell out of my office.'"

The day after that browbeating was another proper occasion for the Joint Chiefs of Staff to have submitted their resignations. As in July, that they did not can be attributed to the consumate manipulative skills of the volcanic President, to whom they would not stand up.

By the time August 1967 came around, the Chiefs were beaten men. But they still should have resigned, even then.

In 1968 I commanded a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division fighting during Tet and its aftermath from around Hue to Quang Tri. We had spectacular success with encirclement operations that drove the NVA from our area, destroying on one occasion the full 8th Battalion of the 90th NVA Regiment, taking 107 prisoners and all the battalion's radios. On returning to Vietnam less than two years later, I learned that that battalion had been reconstituted through the Ho Chi Minh trail and was back in the division enemy order of battle. How could our side prevail under such circumstances?

So, when after Tet 1968 and into 1972, pacification began to work inside the country notwithstanding continued massive infiltration, the cost of an attrition strategy became too much for the American people to bear. By early 1973 the U.S. withdrew its forces. Two years later the Congress denied further U.S. support to Vietnam, and it fell.

In his "The Swordbearers," the British historian Correlli Barnett

writes that
"War is the great auditor of institutions." In the Vietnam War's merciless
audit, the U.S. military's senior officers were found wanting, both in insight
and in resolution.

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Think Piece Two:

Date: Thursday, October 8, 1998 9:56:10 PM
From:
Subj: wp-forum: What Would I Have Done?
To:

In a message dated 10/6/98 8:14:18 PM, Re: wp-forum: Bin Laden Bombing, Paul
Werner '83 wrote: "Out of curiosity LTG Cushman, if you were CJCS in 1964-65
and you were calling the shots (from the military point of view), how would
you have handled the whole affair given the nature of both LBJ and McNamara
and how they 'handled' the joint chiefs? Given the political environment,
would this have been worth falling on the sword?"

This will take a litle longer than my October 6th post.

In 1964-65 I was a 43-year-old lieutenant colonel student at the National War
College, waiting my turn on the list to be promoted to colonel. If by some
magic I were to have slipped inside General Wheeler's skin as Chairman, JCS,
retaining my own personality and ideas (a fantasy that I never indulged in
then but do now), I assume that I would have brought to bear the insights I
had developed and the resolution that I had manifested to that time.

It would be late, perhaps already too late, in the game. In 1963 President
Kennedy's team had orchestrated the tragic fall of Ngo Dinh Diem, President of
the Republic of Vietnam, and the situation had then gone from bad to worse.

(An aside. If, in early 1961, President Kennedy had followed his instincts and, over the objections of Secretary of State Rusk and some in the Pentagon, had appointed Brig Gen Edward Lansdale, USAF, ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam. as he had wanted to do, the course of the Vietnam War would have been fundamentally different, with a far greater chance of success. Kennedy had appointed Lansdale as Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and had a high regard for him. A CIA operative and key figure in Ramon Magsaysay's defeat of the communist insurgents in the Philippines, Lansdale had moved to Vietnam in the mid-fifties. There he had established a remarkable rapport with Diem. He was determined that the revolution that was then taking place in Vietnam not be allowed to become the monopoly of the Viet Cong. He knew how to take hold of that revolution and he had the total trust and confidence of Ngo Dinh Diem. Diem's relationships with his brothers would have made his task more difficult, but Lansdale knew how to deal with Diem's relatives. Shunted aside in 1961, after the Diem coup Lansdale never regained his former influence.)

One insight of mine had to do with the moral, as distinguished from the statutory, authority of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On 1 November 1960, in a small think-group in the Office of the Army Chief of Staff, I had completed a paper called "The Question of Defense Organization." This paper came to the attention of Cyrus Vance, who with John Kennedy's 1960 election and Robert McNamara's designation as the new Secretary of Defense, was to be General Counsel of the Department of Defense and McNamara's point man for reorganizing the Pentagon, one key McNamara objective. Joining a

field grade officer from the Navy and one from the Air Force, I became a member of an "organization study group" to assist Vance's efforts.

In those days, long before Goldwater-Nichols, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were suffering from their structure-induced inability to produce clear, timely, papers reflecting sound professional joint judgment; their papers were all too often compromises too late to be useful, and muddled as well. This defect became grievous when McNamara arrived with his fast-moving "whiz kids." My paper had urged, "Set it up so that the Secretary of Defense can get on each issue the crisp, hard, timely statement of joint military advice that he must have...; acknowledge the primacy of the Chairman, as first among equals, within the Joint Chiefs of Staff...; reinforce the line of staff supervision from the Chairman, through the Director of the Joint Staff, to the Joint Staff itself...; (and) establish it as normal procedure that in every action presented to the Secretary of Defense, the recommendation of the Joint Staff, as as approved by the Director of the Joint Staff and the Chairman, should be made available to the Secretary of Defense..." (providing that a Service Chief could submit a nonconcurring opinion without censure).

Fully within the broad statutory authority of the Secretary of Defense to institute, these procedures would achieve some of the effect of Goldwater-Nichols, without writing a new law.

In General Wheeler's shoes, using tactics that minimized as much as possible any uproar in the Services, I would have asked that the Secretary of Defense, in his own interest of achieving timely, clear, and well-reasoned professional joint military advice, support such changes in procedures.

As to Vietnam and following my insights on that situation, I would

have led
the Joint Staff, and hopefully the Service Chiefs and their staffs, in developing two alternative plans for decisive action to secure the independence and freedom to develop in its own way of the Republic of Vietnam.

Both these plans would entail a massive, US-supported but Vietnamese-managed,
pacification effort along the lines described in my posting of October 6th. I
knew in 1964 all that a JCS Chairman needed to know to put such a effort into
place. Unfortunately, it would be 1967 before that was done, under the hard-
driving Robert Komer, operating first in the White House and then in Saigon as
Ambassador and Deputy Commander, MACV, for CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development). Instrumental in assisting Komer in 1965-67 in
developing his plan were Bob Montague, first in his Class of 1947, now deceased, who had been my indispensable deputy senior advisor in the ARVN 21st
Infantry Division in 1963-64, and Richard Holbrooke of later fame, who in his
first Foreign Service assigment was in 1963-64 a US Aid member of our advisory
team and most helpful in developing our thinking. CORDS 1967 was a powerful
enactment of the basic ideas that the 21st Infantry Division had pioneered in
1963-64.

One Vietnam alternative would have been essentially that outlined by General
Wheeler and his colleagues in the Oval office in November 1965 and described
in my October 6th posting, namely... "use our principal strengths, air and
naval power, to punish the North Vietnamese; isolate the major port of Haiphong through naval mining; blockade the rest of the North Vietnamese
coastline; and begin a B-52 bombing offensive on Hanoi" counting on that line
of action to make the North Vietnamese call off their effort to conquer the
South through the methods of "revolutionary warfare," including completely
halting infiltration. It would probably have called for limited entry

of US
ground forces into South Vietnam.

The other alternative would be to do as I wrote in my National War College
paper, namely... (1) as already mentioned, inside the country, organize and
mount a massive, U.S. supported but Vietnamese executed, pacification effort
along the lines of what we had begun in the 21st Infantry Division, and (2)
outside the country, employ U.S. and allied air/land forces to cut the Ho Chi
Minh trail -- entailing a fully developed feasibility study and workable plan
of multinational action to enforce, through action on the ground, the 1962
Geneva accords on Laos. It would no doubt have called for some bombing of the
North and supply lines.

Both plans would have required a callup of reserve forces.

I would present these two options to the President as each having a reasonable
likelihood, if followed with determination, of bringing about a satisfactory
(e.g., Korea-like) conclusion to the war and a free South Vietnam. I would
say that I preferred the second option in that, although more costly in
manpower and concomitant casualites, it would decisively deny the North the
ability to subvert the South through infiltration, while the first alternative
would not. I would say that partial implementtion of either, or both, would
be unsuccessful, and would ask the President to make his choice. I would hope
that the logic of my/our presentation would be self-evident and ungainsayable.
I would hope to persuade Secrtery McNamara to see it my/our way. I would tell
the Secretary and the President that in the event they did not choose to go
through with either plan wholeheartedly, the United States should seek a
negotiated settlement.

Paul Werner asked how to cope with "the nature of both LBJ and McNamara and how they 'handled' the joint chiefs." LBJ was a master of this art, of cajoling, or threatening, or nibbling off a piece at a time.

Here is where resolution comes in. The senior military official, in the dock, must patiently explain his rationale. He must cite the strategic, operational, and tactical realities, and describe the effects of suggested actions, in convincing professional terms. While he must be subservient, he must stand his ground. I am reminded of General Eisenhower who, when he was told that the UK-based strategic air forces would not be under his control in the critical days before and after D-Day, told General Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, that he could not continue to command the invasion force under those circumstances -- and he won his point.

If, after I had made my case, the President saw fit to decide the matter contrary to my deeply held convictions -- for example, if he decided on a massive pacification effort and a major deployment of US troops into the countryside, with neither a powerful bombing offensive that would lead to a halt in infiltration, nor an air/land operation to sever the Ho Chi Minh trail -- I would ask to be relieved of my position as Chairman, presuming that retirement would ensue.

Yes, Paul, it would have been worth falling on my sword.

So endeth my fantasy. It was pleasurable while it lasted.

Jack Cushman, '44.

(End of Think Pieces)

Best wishes, Jim...

Jack Cushman