

TOWARD VICTORY IN VIETNAM

It has been obvious to many observers that the crucial gap on our side in Vietnam is the absence of authentic political activity (non-Viet Cong) in the countryside, with notable exceptions in such places as An Giang. We have before us a clear example of victory and defeat when we compare An Giang, with a local, authentic power group pre-empting the area so as to deny it to the Viet Cong, and much of the rest of the country where no effective political activity exists, and the people are therefore defenseless against VC infiltration whenever Free World military or police forces are not actually on the spot. It seems clear that, even after as many military victories as one would wish to count, our side could not withdraw from Vietnam without immediately delivering the country into the hands of the Viet Cong for the simple reason the Viet Cong (NLF) are the only nationwide political force organized and staffed to take over.

The great defect in the present GVN picture, however good its administrative services become, however well its military forces fight, and however progressive its program, is that there is no party structure to carry out government policy at the level of the people, or to mobilize the popular will in its own interests at the local level. Professional government officials and programs are no complete answer to this problem, including RD workers and their activities.

Obviously, if groups like the Hoa Hao in An Giang flourished in all parts of Vietnam, taking over provincial areas and defending them against all comers, the mere addition of military screening forces to prevent the enemy from conquering the people of Vietnam by force would be sufficient to assure victory to our side. Unfortunately, such groups, and particularly effective ones, are so rare as to be almost non-existent. In such groups as Dai Viets, VNQDD and others, internal factionalism is so rife as to cripple the movement. The Buddhists are split. The Catholics represent a strong group capable of dominating certain areas, but they are in the minority and are in no position to control politically the larger portions of Vietnam.

What appears to be clearly needed is a new "Government party." A model for such party might be found in the Destourian Socialist Party in Tunisia. General Thieu has already opted for a multi-party system, although it is arguable that a single national front party would have been better equipped to compete with the NLF.

What is proposed, in any case, is that the U.S. encourage the new GVN, after it has gotten its feet on the ground, to start the creation of a Government Coalition Bloc under some appropriate name, regardless of what other non-joining parties may also do. This Bloc should avoid the error of the Diem regime, when a fanatical degree of orthodoxy and personal loyalty to Diem was made the basis for acceptance into the Government party. Whereas Diem constantly narrowed his political base, the new Party should strive continually to broaden its base.

As in the Destour party in Tunisia, active and genuine policy debate should be permitted and encouraged even at the lowest levels of the party, with the prevailing sentiment reported upward to the party leadership at the center, and only then, in many cases, would the party leadership formulate official policy binding on all local units. In other words, a real "democratic centralism"--and not in the cynical Soviet sense--should prevail. Once a Government Bloc party has been effectively mounted, its system of rewards and punishments, its pork-barrels, and providing of an outlet for legitimate local political sentiment in Vietnam will all contribute towards the giving of a stake to local people in the defense of their local interests. Ultimately, we would have legitimate political groups at the grass-roots level to compete with those of the Viet Cong. Such groups would be aided by the official GVN police power, as well as by screens of military forces, and could hope in due course to become politically predominant in the countryside. Once this happened, the war in South Vietnam would be won for all practical purposes, given a continuing military screen to prevent invasion from the North.

I would like to add one specific suggestion. The GVN should send a delegation informally to Tunisia to study the organization and techniques of the Destourian Socialist Party. Tunisia is also an ex-French colony. Its basic administrative procedures would be familiar to Vietnamese. The Destourian Socialist Party is perhaps the best example available anywhere in the world of how to organize the population in an underdeveloped country in the aftermath of French colonialism. Tunisia has largely solved a basic problem that Vietnam is trying to solve, namely how to preserve a balance between progressive social reform and social discipline, and could be a model for Vietnam. Tunisia is also basically friendly to South Vietnam. I make this suggestion very seriously. The fact that Vietnam is at war, and Tunisia is not, affects but does not destroy the validity of this suggestion.

The role of the United States in this would be to stimulate GVN thinking, and indirectly through its aid programs assist in providing the resources which the GVN would use to finance the organization of a Government Bloc party until such time as it acquired Party revenue sources of its own.

After a Government Bloc party was mounted, we should also encourage the formation of related citizen groups such as are not new in Vietnam but which in the past, as particularly under Diem, were viewed with hostility and suspicion. This time the Government Bloc party, while not encouraging opposition groups, would provide a wide and legitimate latitude for the functioning of affiliated farmers associations, labor unions, student unions, women's groups, commercial associations and the like.

In any case one thing seems quite clear: The political organization of the countryside is the key to victory in Vietnam. It

therefore should be the highest concern of U.S. policy, rather than the multiplicity of activities now grouped under pacification which have only partial relevance to our main objective here. The intent of this paper is merely to plead that the focus of priority attention be directed to the main target, that we not allow ourselves to become elated or depressed by the success or failure of any of the multitude of partial solutions--such as the RD Program, or Chieu Hoi, or ICEX--all of which help but none of which will provide the magic solution which Washington desperately and periodically clutches to its bosom.

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