

Oggie,

Returning your paper w/thanks. It has been circulated to the select few. Those with whom I have discussed it all agree completely with your well expressed views.

Thanks very much, & please put me on the distribution of any future such studies.

Cheers,

Bob.

August 28, 1963

The Present Situation

The crisis now going on presents several real dangers. Opposition to the Diem regime has been latent, with sporadic outbreaks, for years. The Buddhist problem has merely crystallized it. In the past the US has gone along with the status quo, largely because of inertia, partly because it was the easier thing to do and less demanding on our moral courage, and partly because certain virtues of the President were recognized, these primarily being an anti-Communist orientation and considerable stubbornness under fire.

This time opposition has become very deep-seated, and has spread to segments of the population that formerly were merely apathetic. Although the US has spent more than one billion dollars and provided considerable military and technical assistance to prop up the existing regime, now it is too late for even the most optimistic to hope that this waffle can be re-heated and made palatable to the Vietnamese people. The question used to be asked: "Can we win with Diem?" As of now, the question hardly arises, so clear is it that this regime has lost its political credit rating.

Instead we are now faced with the denouement of our laissez-faire US policy in Vietnam and of our failure to use US power to influence favorably a situation in which our massive inputs of aid made us inevitably an influence either for good or ill. At this time, Diem can never be made affirmatively popular again, even if Ngo dinh Nhu and wife are removed from the scene. If only for psychological reasons, Vietnam needs a new look, a chance to break up congealed frustrations, new stimuli to action. Above all it needs a new government in which, this time, the people can feel that it is genuinely their government, and not just the government. A new sense of direction - a genuine one, this time - must be given to the youth who are going into the army and into the professions.

Continuation of the present situation can lead to more and more people considering the VC as their only alternative. One shudders to think how many recruits the VC have won over in the past months. There is a second danger that people will lose patience with the Americans and direct their hostility towards us, accusing us either of connivance in a state of affairs which is in fact contrary to American ideals, or of a spinelessness which amounts to the same thing. Certainly they will think that in the past six years we have been, in the last analysis, much more solicitous of the sensitivities of the Ngo family than we have of the common people of Vietnam. The recent VOA broadcast did us more good in Vietnam than have a long line of official pronouncements about how we supported Ngo dinh Diem. Surprisingly, if one had taken a poll among Americans at any time since 1957 - and I mean Americans working in and for Vietnam - one would never have found a large percentage of the rank and file who were affirmatively pro-Diem. Diem's closest supporters - men like Wes Fishel and Wolf Ladejinsky - have with few exceptions turned away in sadness or anger, and reported their reasons.

In short, it seems quite clear that we must look for alternatives, must encourage such alternatives when we find them, and must affirmatively stand for our own American principles, instead of relying on an expediency that has not turned out to be expedient, or seeking the path of least resistance which has turned out to be the path of most resistance. The alternatives already exist and we already know something about them. They may need to be encouraged. They will listen to our advice. We must now creatively mold the future, not just wait for it to happen. for if we do, it will, and we may not like it.

O.W.