

Date: Thu, 14 Apr 1994 16:57:56 PST8PDT
From: James Michael Craven
Reply to: Southeast Asia Discussion List

Blog 45

To: Multiple recipients of list SEASIA-L

Newsgroups: bit.listserv.seasia-1
Subject: Reasons Why--A Response to Historical Revisionism

AMR

From: Larry Engelmann
Subject: Reasons Why
To: Multiple recipients of list SEASIA-L

The following article appeared in Vietnam Magazine, April, 1993

PEACEMAKER:

PHILIP HABIB'S LAST REFLECTIONS ON THE VIETNAM WAR

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

The Gospel According to St. Matthew

by

LARRY ENGELMANN
February 21, 1993

"War is just an expression of failure of diplomacy and the failure of foreign policy and the failure of national effort, Mr. Habib told me shortly before his death. . "We ought to be able to be better than that and to not have to go to war. "

COMMENT: Unfortunately, it is not that simple. Certain forces are by their very nature, imperatives and intentions, immutable to reason or resolution of conflict through negotiation and "diplomacy". For example, for the purposes of logic, for the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto, "diplomacy" with the Nazis was never an option. The Nazis were bent on their total destruction and any "diplomacy" by the Nazi's (e.g. "just get in these trains where we will send you to a relocation center and a 'new life'...") was solely for the purpose of achieving total destruction of Jews while giving the appearance of being "reasonable" and hiding true intentions and imperatives as perceived by the Nazis. The same was true in Vietnam: "diplomacy" was a means of buying time on the battlefield not a serious mechanism for conflict resolution--until the end was a fait accompli. The Nazis wanted peace also--they wanted Jews to "peacefully" walk into gas chambers and they wanted various nations to "peacefully" let the

nazis walk all over them.

His warnings and his advice are worth remembering in a world where the Cold War and the threat of national extinction has given way only to other kinds of wars --to civil wars and wars against ethnic minorities. For the countless victims of war today, of course, there is little comfort in the fact that the great powers no longer stand poised to use atomic weapons. The events of the past year have shown conclusively that conventional weapons(supplied, unfortunately, from the stockpiles of former Cold War enemies) in the hands of petty parochial fanatics obsessed with ethnic cleansing or irredentism can do as much damage in Iraq or Bosnia or Cambodia or a hundred other places, in the name of ethnic cleansing or unification, as they did in other places in ideological and geopolitical Cold War brushfire wars.

COMMENT: "...weapons supplied, unfortunately, from the stockpiles of former Cold War enemies)... This could be taken as a way of sanitizing somewhat the role of the U.S. Government as the world's number 1 arms supplier to all sorts of thugs, psychopaths, dictators, fascists etc whose only credential for receiving arms was their self-professed anti-Communism and their willingness to create environments that were highly profitable for U.S. multinationals (free of unions, collective bargaining, freedom of speech etc. Who was it that supplied arms to BOTH sides of the Iraq-Iran War--an eight year war that led to over 1 million deaths in a region geopolitically vital to the global economy?

After nearly a lifetime of service to the American people, Habib retired to his family home in Belmont.

COMMENT: As recent and past events on the Korean Peninsula have shown clearly, supporting the dictatorship of Park Chung Hee (as Ambassador to South Korea) was not even in the service of the American people, over even the LONG-TERM interests of U.S. multinationals and was certainly not in the interests of the people of Korea. We have seen over and over that service to the Government of the United States, or service to the "intelligence" agencies of the U.S., or service to the multinationals of the U.S., or service to the Bilderbergs and the Trilateral Commission, is hardly synonymous with service to the American "PEOPLE"--particularly those who are forced to go and die or get wounded in wars caused by myopic and short-term-oriented policies and machinations.

"Let me begin with the end -- the collapse of South Vietnam in the spring of 1975. The story of the collapse of South Vietnam is simple, really. In the end, the North Vietnamese did exactly what they intended to do all along and what they always promised they would do. They invaded the South, defeated it's army, occupied the region and then united the North and the South. For years that that's what they proclaimed they would do and in 1975 they did it. Very simple. South Vietnam collapsed

because it was invaded and defeated by a stronger military force.

COMMENT: Again a lot of the mystifications, myths and bogus assumptions that were instrumental in U.S. defeat in Vietnam: The myth of a separate, democratic, sovereign and self-sustainable entity known as "The Republic of South Vietnam"; The myth of the minor role of the NLF in the Vietnam War; The myth of a "foreign aggressor" invading the "sovereign soil" of a separate "sovereign nation"; The myth of the "collapse" of "South" Vietnam due to external "foreign" forces rather than internal corruption, weakness, dictatorial regimes, puppet regimes with no popular support except largely through coercion, organized mass kleptocracy etc.

By 1975 North Vietnam had the intent and the capacity to invade South Vietnam irrespective of any international agreements they might have signed prior to that time to restrain or prevent such an action. And so in disregard of the agreements they had signed, they invaded the South. There was no popular uprising in the South, no call for liberation or anything like that. What the North did, very simply, was to launch a full-force, full-scale offensive with a fifteen divisions of a regular army. That is what won the war.

COMMENT: For openers, check out "Slow Burn" by Orrin De Forrest who was instrumental in revamping and running the Phoenix program in Vietnam. How many accounts have been written by pro-U.S. types documenting phony body counts, phony orders-of-battle on the NLF, vast areas of NLF strength and activities where ARVN and few Americans dared to go etc. This is nothing but the highly selective and I must say totally disingenuous "memories" and blanket assertions--not sustainable with basic facts--of someone who was part of the whole establishment that was instrumental in the U.S. defeat in Vietnam. Cognitive dissonance strikes again.

They did it while we were cutting back on our aid to South Vietnam. With [Richard] Nixon out of the White House after Watergate there was no way for us to enforce the Paris Agreement of 1973. Nixon had promised [South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van] Thieu, of course, that if the Paris Agreement was ever violated then we'd at the very least resume the bombing and that we would punish North Vietnam and make them suffer.

COMMENT: The ICC noted far more violations of the Paris Agreement by U.S. and ARVN forces than ever occurred by NLF and NVA forces. Further, there were many decisive actions and "victories"--in their terms--as U.S. aid and actions were increasing. When Saigon "fell" or Ho Chi Minh City "rose"--depending upon your perspective--there were three NVA divisions surrounding Saigon with orders not to go in until the Americans had escaped--leaving their former allies (except the very prominent and wealthy ones) like garbage to face the rath of the new order--so that they could save whatever "face" might be left. There were numerous cases where NLF/NVA forces pulled back to enhance diplomatic processes rather than advance. The U.S. NEVER stopped trying military actions even during the so-called ceasefire. What

prevented military successes by the U.S. was a number of factors including: increasing morale problems by U.S. forces, ARVN disarray, intelligence reports and numbers falsified to put on a happy face, increasing misappropriation and theft of critically-needed war supplies by ARVN and U.S. Kleptocrats, increasingly tough and determined actions by NLF and NVA forces, willingness to endure extreme hardship, sacrifice for strategic goals by NLF/NVA etc.

"Graham Martin was really part of the problem in Vietnam in the end. For a good part of the time in 1974 and the spring of 1975, Graham Martin was in Washington. He stayed in Washington. He just stayed and he stayed, on the argument that he had to convince Congress to provide more aid, that was always his argument, until finally, some of us got very upset and we got [Henry] Kissinger, in effect, to tell him to get back to his post.

COMMENT: Those who appointed and promoted Martin were a bigger part of the problem. Extended forays away from the sights, sounds, smells and consequences of war was routine for the "Saigon Warriors" including high-level military, CIA, "diplomats" etc. Nothing here is said about the whole myopic CONCEPTS of war, victory, battlefield "Success", short-term vs long-term gains, "acceptable losses and costs" etc upon which US and ARVN forces operated routinely. This is merely disingenuously finding a few scapegoats for the failure of a whole system and myopic weltanschauung.

"Martin was selected as Ambassador to Vietnam, you know, because Nixon knew him well. That is why he was selected.

COMMENT: Cronyism (another major factor in the U.S. loss in Vietnam) was rampant all over Vietnam and the U.S. military in terms of appointments and promotions. First-rate people hire first-rate people as an element of being "first-rate" is being able to spot and not be threatened by other first-rate people; second-rate people hire third and fourth-rate so that they will look good; and third and fourth-rate go on to hire fifth and sixth-rate so that THEY will look good--so mediocrity metastasizes like any cancer.

"I accompanied the delegation to Cambodia then. It was obviously lost. When we landed in Phnom Penh, enemy artillery was already landing on the other end of the air field. The Ambassador was sitting in a bunker next to the airfield, to greet our plane as we parked next to the bunker. That's how bad it was. Cambodia was finished. Everybody knew that. The only question was, how soon is it going to happen? How soon are the going to come across the airfield and into the town? They did soon after we left.

"It was all very simple what had happened in Cambodia. Very simple. The North Vietnamese had just decided to put the pressure on, to sweep into Cambodia and take it over. And they did. Very simple.

COMMENT: Again some selective and highly disingenuous memory. No mention of a highly corrupt kleptocracy and brutal dictatorship under Lon Nol; a dictatorship that like in "South Vietnam" never had any real grassroots support and what support it had was from the elites who benefited or through coercion of various elements of the populace. No mention of mass indiscriminate bombing hadly conducive to winning "hearts and minds". Without Lon Nol would there have been a Khmer Rouge or the rath and atrocities? I don't know but it is interesting to contemplate.

"The whole thing -- Vietnam and Cambodia and Laos -- was tragic. It was a tragic episode. Millions of people lost their lives for nothing. In the end. In the end, now. It wasn't for nothing at the time. People who want to criticize the war in Vietnam forget the purposes that led us into it in the first place, which were not unusual in the American foreign policy scheme of things for that period -- and they were certainly justifiable in those terms. After all, why was it that the war was supported for so long in Congress? Because it was expressed in terms that were justifiable in those days, in the mid-1960s.

COMMENT: The "Pentagon Papers" and other released classified documents made it clear that the REAL reasons for U.S. machinations in Vietnam were far different from the publicly-stated reasons for being in Vietnam and those documents reveal further, that the elements of the higher levels of the U.S. government never believed their own lies--they knew full-well what they were doing. Further, Just as there is no need for abortion when there is widespread contraception, so there is no need for formal thought control (abortion) when there is widespread thought contraception--certain ideas are simply not contemplated or allowed to be openly discussed in any "acceptable" forums. That is one reason why Congressional "support" lasted so long until certain ideas that had been the subject of thought contraception and presented only in "alternate" media, began to creep into "acceptable" forums.

The disillusionment didn't come until the whole country turned sour on the war because of the ineffectiveness of what we were doing. It went on too long, we weren't winning, and we had this television horror show night after night after night on the news.

COMMENT: The forms of disillusionment taken notice of by a largely compliant press and elements of the upper levels of the political/military establishment planning and running the Vietnam War developed after the ineffectiveness of U.S. and ARVN forces became the stuff of many stories, but various forms of disillusionment by elements of the U.S. public, U.S. forces and ARVN forces were developing long before they were "noticed" by the powers that be. This was part of the problem: policy makers living in dream worlds insulated by compliant sycophants who gave them the "news", public opinion and "body count" figures that they wanted and needed to hear.

I went to Vietnam for the first time in 1965, when the first

troops arrived, and I was occupied with Vietnam, except for a period of three years, constantly during the next decade, even when I was in Korea, I was still preoccupied with Vietnam. I met with lots of newsmen out there in that period of time. The guys that I knew well were Johnny Apple and Neal Sheehan, Keyes Beech, Bob Shaplen. Those were the real pros. Barry Zorthian[Public Affairs Officer in Saigon] used to bring some of them around and some of us would sit and talk with them. Some of them got to know us pretty well, and if you trusted a guy you would talk to him. You trusted that the guy would not distort what you would give him.

COMMENT: Here we are back again to the question of "truth and idea contraception" (therefore no need for as much formal thought control) and the imperatives of the press. Journalists like "Johnny" Apple have special access not only because of their name recognition, but also they have in the past demonstrated awareness of which questions NOT to ask as much as because of the questions they have been able to ask. Those who are "trusted" by the powers that be are given continued special access which leads to even bigger "scoops" which leads to even more exposure, which leads to even more name recognition which leads to even more special access and... The Tet Offensive had as one of its many consequences, the effect of raming a big story down the throats of a compliant press that simply could not ignore or put MACV spin on such a story without compromising serious "scoops". See the following:

"But when I turned on the television to watch the news it was never myself I would see -- I would always just see pictures of the war. Never analysis or explanation. I was never the guy who appeared on tv every day. There were times I would appear on television, but not often. Usually that was when I was testifying, I would walk out in the hall and they would catch me, but normally I wasn't on television.

"As for the media-- television-- all of us at the time, I think, felt that the guys in the field were looking for the sensational, and when the mood of the country turned anti-war, particularly about 67-68, even 65-66, there was a certain uneasiness with the war, but in 67-68 it really turned, and then those guys really began feeding that sentiment with negative reporting because this was the kind of story that got them in the news and on the news. That gets you your 5 minutes and your \$500 bonus. In 65-66, the bonz burning days, why did a photographer prop up a burned bonz and restart the fire so that he could get another picture of it? That happened. That's a famous story. The photographer arrived late and the thing had already happened, so they propped him up again and poured some more gas on him so the photographer could get some pictures of the flames around him. Ask somebody about that story. He re-lit him so they could get a picture of the flames. That is not a apocryphal story! That's a true story! Why did the press do things like that? That's sanctioned. That gets you your time on the air. So what you look for is you look for the aberrations. You report rumors because the rumors fit the concept of what is wanted. And it gets to be a snowball. The press had a herd instinct out there. They got caught up in momentum of the reporting, negative reporting, say about the Vietnamese government. There was a tremendous almsot irresistible momentum to that.

COMMENT: On the imperatives, "herd instincts" etc of the press, see above. I rest my case.

"The whole political process in Vietnam was never well reported. And yet there was a major effort to try to get popular participation in the decision making process in the government, to democratize. At the same time there was the constant willingness to put the negative rather than the positive on the air when it became popular to report the negative. You see what I mean? There was a snowball effect involved.

"[President of South Vietnam] Nguyen Van Thieu was just a staff man. But I don't think you could question his intention or his desire to maintain an independent South Vietnam. He wasn't particularly effective. But he also wasn't totally corrupt, as he was often made out to be in the press. He was astute, intelligent and a very thoughtful man, and hard working, up early, worked late, very very hard working. But the American press was down on him. You know he had some disadvantages with the press. He didn't speak English very well, he wasn't at ease with the guys with the foreign press and I could see why he wasn't and I could see why the press was down on him. The war was being lost. They had to blame someone.

COMMENT: How much does one have to steal to be considered "totally corrupt"? Nguyen Van Thieu managed to loot an estimated \$200 million in Vietnamese art treasures before fleeing and leaving others to take the rap. This really shows how thoroughly disingenuous, Habib was and how thoroughly historically revisionistic his selective "memories" were. The problems that the press, the U.S. public, certain elements of the U.S. establishment had with Ky and Thieu went far beyond Ky's flamboyant "jump suits" and Thieu's problems with English. The disturbing effects of cognitive dissonance are quite obvious in this self-serving distortion of the nature of the various regimes of "South" Vietnam and why some elements were hostile to them.

You have to realize, we were not gonna win the war! Remember that! It wasn't like Korea. In Korea you defeated the enemy. In South Vietnam you couldn't defeat the enemy. North Korea

COMMENT: In the context of the largely conventional warfare in Korea and in the context of the massive armed force of the U.S. arrayed against North Korea and the Chinese, a negotiated stalemate was in essence a military loss--it most certainly was not a victory

"In order to win the war in Vietnam you had to do things that the American people were not prepared to do. And public opinion turned against the war. And in the final analysis foreign policy in the US has to have the support of public opinion or it doesn't succeed. We cannot have a foreign policy that's contrary to public opinion.

COMMENT: And it is hard to build public support on the basis of lies, deception secret wars, phony incidents, lack of Congressional mandate

etc. More important than the support of the American people was the support of the Vietnamese People for the entities being supported by the U.S. in their name. Orrin De Forrest noted that when he arrived in Vietnam the second time to restructure the Phoenix program in III Corps area, their estimates of "body count" through the Phoenix Program or by the Provincial Chiefs, was an average of 7000 per year for the past five years. This meant that every "estimated" NLF member had been wiped out at least twice. Not only was the "enemy" grossly underestimated, also the "support" (actual hearts and minds won over as opposed to intimidated) for the ARVN and Government of South Vietnam was grossly overestimated. What followed is history...

"Now Kissinger went both ways on this.

COMMENT: Kissinger was capable of going even more than two ways. Basically anything that enhanced his "image in history" and of course of his narcissistic self was fair game. Giving Kissinger a Nobel Price for Peace or an "Humanitarian Award" is like giving Goebbels a Bnai Brith Award--totally disgusting. The U.S. and the allies quite properly hanged individuals at Nuremburg for far less than the innocent blood on Kissinger's hands.

"Martin had to fulfill obligations to people he'd been working with and a lot of people got left behind. Ordinarily, we would have just gotten out, but we had all these obligations.

"And the whole idea of the South Vietnamese suddenly turning on us -- as some people predicted they would -- that was just bullshit. Did they? I never believed that, not for a minute. I know the Vietnamese. Graham Martin never knew the Vietnamese. He never talked to the Vietnamese. He didn't know them. He didn't know five Vietnamese. He never talked to them. Never saw them. Talk to his staff. Ask them how many Vietnamese he knew, how many he talked to? Where did he ever travel in Vietnam and who did he meet? He didn't know anything about Vietnam. He was a man who worked with paper and sat on his ass in his office. He worked with paper. He was a strange man. A strange, strange man. A brilliant mind, but a strange man.

COMMENT: This was generally true of the whole of the upper echelons of MACV, the planners in Washington D.C etc and a very large percentage of U.S. forces who served in Vietnam. By the way, did Habib speak fluent Vietnamese? Did he travel in the rural areas without U.S. forces or ARVN escorts? Did he ever speak personally with captured NLF or NVA forces? Did he ever LIVE for a few days even in the jungles and rural areas? Where did he eat in Saigon or outside of Saigon? What literature about Vietnamese history or Vietnamese literature did he read? Assertions and claims are easy--doing the deeds is another thing.

"I think, in conclusion, Vietnam was a noble cause. We did a great deal for South Vietnam. I don't know if we did the best we could, but we did a great deal, we did all that could be expected of us --let me put it that way.

COMMENT: Among those who have a hard time appreciating all the wonderful things the U.S Government did for Vietnam are genetically-deformed babies resulting from mass dropping of defoliants; large numbers of widows and orphans left destitute; large numbers of AmeriAsian children left like garbage in orphanages; large numbers of farmers whose land has been left infertile from defoliants or still dangerous from remaining ordnance; large numbers of women who were used in ugly ways and then discarded; former U.S. allies who were left like garbage while a few prominent ones were taken out along with their loot; wounded Vietnamese on all sides left to recover and develop skills with meagre resources...

"I think we learned a great deal in Vietnam. We learned that if you're not prepared to go all the way you shouldn't go at all.

COMMENT: During the Gulf War, Bush noted that "The Vietnam Syndrome is over" and "America is once again standing tall". What "we" learned in Vietnam had to do with better and more effective mechanisms for stage-managing news, for effectively demonizing the "enemy", about coalition building etc. Little has been learned in terms of the long-term consequences of reckless and arrogant projection of power, on the basis of myopic perspectives and short-term thinking versus long-run consequences, on so many who have nothing to do with the type of government under which they live; little has been learned in terms of realization that the spirit and determination of people is more decisive than high-tech weaponry etc; little was learned in terms of building popular support for a given action on the basis of an honest discussion of what national and humanitarian interests are truly involved as opposed to building "managed consent" through lies, manipulation, deception, demonization of the "enemy" etc.

"In Vietnam we won all the battles. But we didn't win the war. The war was more than the battles. War is always more than battles. After all the North lost battle after battle after battle. And look what happened. Look what happened!"

COMMENT: Again mystification, rationalization and cognitive dissonance resolution. The U.S> lost the war because the American people were not prepared to support it any more. Nothing is said about the tough determination and willingness to endure extreme hardship and sacrifice. Nothing is said about the corruption and general lack of popular support for the so-called Governments of Vietnam; Nothing is said about the betrayal of former allies dumped like garbage. Nothing is said about the fact that the U.S> concept of "victory" along with the tactics and weaponry employed, simply did not fit the unconventional contexts within which they were applied. Nothing is said about imperial overreach and inherently contradictory power projection. Nothing is said about the abject arrogance of so many of the U.S. and ARVN forces who treated the people like pawns or slaves or disposable items in some grand geopolitical game.

It is all nothing but the self-deception, historical revisionism and cognitive dissonance resolution of an old man who even at the twilight of his life, could never come to admit the horrible damage to Vietnam--and the U.S.--that he and his kind did. As they say in the villages in Kerala India: "If the crow takes a bath, can it

become a swan?" The answer is no, absolutely not or ever.

Jim Craven

```
*-----*
* James Craven * "The great paradox [contradiction] of *
* Dept of Economics * a global consumer democracy is that *
* Clark College * the right to pleasure and happiness, *
* 1800 E. McLoughlin Blvd. * the right to choice in the present, *
* Vancouver, Wa. 98663 * may well be a toxic elixir we are *
* (206) 699-0283 * forcing our children to drink. If man, *
* cravjm@ooi.clark.edu * the marginal parasite, turns the *
* * earth into a dead artifact, the dream *
* * of material pleasure will have *
* * murdered life itself. In order to *
* * survive the triumph of our ideals, we *
* * need a new definition of the sacred." *
* * (Jacques Attali, "Millenium") *
* *
* MY EMPLOYER HAS NO ASSOCIATION WITH MY PRIVATE/PROTECTED OPINIONS *
```