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U.S. POLICY AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM

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Summary

The military coup provides a second chance for the United States to assist in the development of a democratic political order in South Vietnam. On the Vietnamese side, this will require concentration on achieving political stability and creating, step by step, a responsible, representative government, as an integral part of the military effort against the Vietcong. On the United States side, it will require a concerted drive of the government including the enlistment of support from private individuals and organizations. A firm schedule for elections at graduated levels -- culminating in national elections in thirty months -- must be laid down. New government institutions and practices must be established. Political parties must be nurtured, and the effort of youth in national construction should be channeled through a Patriotic Corps, embodying the idealistic voluntary principle of the Peace Corps, with democratic indoctrination and adequate financial compensation. Returning exiles should participate in the effort.

Discussion

The Political Factor

Western authorities on guerrilla warfare are fond of citing Eastern expert Mao on the vital ingredient in unconventional warfare: "guerrillas must be like fish in water" or "the political factor is as important as the military factor." In applying communist theory to non-communist operations, however, almost all of them have confused the political factor with social and economic reform, such as modernizing land tenure, building huts and instituting welfare projects.

While it is obvious that such reforms are essential, the manner in which they are achieved and consolidated is the function of politics. A hut without a vote means a leaky roof at best -- as the American migrant worker knows.

In part, politics is the business of obtaining and exerting power and influence. In a non-totalitarian society this involves a two-way system of communications: the needs, the aspirations and veto power of the ruled are transmitted (usually by vote) to the rulers, who, in turn, attempt to establish a consensus, seek to resolve problems and respond with guidance and help for the ruled.

A system of one-way political communication (or controls) leads inevitably to disaster or self-destruction. In South Vietnam this system at peak efficiency resulted in the creation of two new guerrillas for every one taken out of action.

The Problem of Political Development

The problem seems to be understood by Dang Duc Khoi who recently observed:

The war in Viet Nam is essentially a political war. The support of the people is absolutely necessary, even more necessary than guns... there was no purpose in enduring more hardship and misery without some promise of achieving freedom and dignity.

Similarly, a statement by the victorious rebel generals proclaimed:

The armed forces are not aiming at setting up a dictatorship because they are well aware that the best weapon to fight communism is democracy and liberty... it is necessary to apply a form of democracy within discipline at war.

A New York Times editorial also correctly identifies the problem and the new opportunity in Vietnam:

If the new regime succeeds in identifying itself with the aspirations of the people, it will have taken a long step toward repulsing further Communist inroads throughout Southeast Asia.

Stated in another way, the political problem is to develop means of accurately determining the needs and aspirations of the Vietnamese people. In the short-term, the need is for emergency mechanisms of effective political consultation. The long-term need is for a concerted program of political development, leading to national political activity in twenty-four months and an election in thirty -- with precise dates and guarantees set by the provisional government in the very near future.

The Underdeveloped and Democratic Development

The need to pursue the war against the Vietcong and the required administrative reorganization following the coup are persuasive reasons for not attempting to hold national elections immediately in South Vietnam. The promise of national elections, the actual holding of elections on the village level and the introduction of civil government in the provinces where the communists are not a serious threat should help to convince Vietnamese democrats that the new government's promises will be kept. The most convincing act to Vietnamese and others, however, would be a GVN request to the free world to assist South Vietnam in democratic political development so that when elections are held in thirty months they will be an example to communist and non-communist states alike.

While there is reason to believe that the urge to freedom is found in all men, democratic ideals, ideas and practices do not develop any more spontaneously than do communist ones. Democracy is not achieved through mental free enterprise, motivated by human greed or narrow self-interest. It is the result of persistent and calculated effort. Those who argue that Vietnam is not ready to learn democracy merely support the communist contention that all countries will eventually embrace communism.

The recent experiment with "instant democracy" in the Dominican Republic was astonishingly successful despite the overthrow of Bosch: the least that could be said in his favor is that in a constitutional framework he governed more effectively and judiciously than did Trujillo.

There is no reason to believe that the Vietnamese people are more corrupt or less sophisticated than the people of the Dominican Republic. If the latter learned in a few months to elect an honest leader in Latin America's

most honest election, the Vietnamese can at least learn to do the same in thirty months.

Moreover, this developmental process should go beyond the mechanics of holding an honest election. It should involve an educational effort: literacy, history, democratic political theory and practice -- worked out in cooperation with Vietnamese scholars, and adapted to the historical and cultural factors peculiar to this nation.

Western political thought is not strange or offensive to Vietnam. Shortly after the formation of the previous regime an American scholar, Guy Pauker, lectured Vietnamese military, civic and student groups on the subject of Anglo-Saxon political theory and practice. His vast audiences, their attentiveness and enthusiasm, were such that the Diem regime became alarmed and made Pauker aware that he and his ideas were no longer welcome.

Scholars like Pauker and experienced politicians from the U.S. and other nations, should be invited to help establish democratic institutions in South Vietnam. Preferably this coordinated effort should be handled by private non-governmental groups such as the International Study Group on Democratic Development which is already cooperating with democratic specialists here and abroad.

As it becomes a laboratory experiment in democratic development, this national effort will focus world attention on the nature of the process itself, deriving valuable lessons for other areas. At home, it will convince Vietnamese peasants and students that they will be able to determine their own futures -- that there is a desirable alternative to local authoritarianism and alien totalitarianism.

Recommendations

Short Term

In the short term U.S. policy should attempt the following:

1. Make clear to world opinion that the Saigon coup is not to be paralleled with the recent coups in Latin America or to the military coup in South Korea. This was the overthrow of an unconstitutional authority based on rigged elections and police controls. The U.S. consistently favors legitimate constitutional governments.

2. Press for the inclusion in the provisional government (of National Unity) of individuals who represent the various sectors of national life, e.g., labor leader Tran Quoc Buu, a dean of a law faculty, a member of the Chamber of Commerce, a farm or peasant organization leader, in addition to members of the military establishment.

3. Have the new government announce that elections will be held in exactly thirty months and specify the long-term political program outlined below.

4. Aid in establishing a Vietnamese Patriotic Corps, recruited primarily from youth, embodying the idealistic voluntary principle of the Peace Corps with democratic indoctrination, to engage in work of national construction with adequate financial compensation.

5. Urge that non-communist exiles be welcomed back to South Vietnam. But, in order to prevent political anarchy and as a means of testing their patriotism, it should be made clear to them that they are expected to devote a year to national service, either with the military or with the Patriotic Corps. Their talents are most needed in the non-political arena.

6. Urge the new government to announce that all strategic hamlets and other villages will elect their own mayors and village councils in thirty days, with the honesty of these elections guaranteed by the military.

7. Urge the government to announce that all peasants who engaged in forced labor during strategic hamlet construction will be compensated fairly within sixty days.

8. Advise the government to establish a Civil Inspectorate General, staffed with military and civil servants of the highest integrity and dedication, operating in every province, to receive and obtain fast action on peasant grievances. This mechanism would operate in a manner similar to the Ombudsman office in Scandinavia. It should also achieve similar results to Magsaysay's very effective procedure of allowing peasants to telegraph collect to the War Department their grievances during the Huk campaign. Such mechanisms are a vote-substitute and, properly employed, eliminate graft and inefficiency, help to create a climate of justice and convince the peasantry of the central government's concern for their welfare. Only by such measures can the loyalty of the peasantry be strengthened and regained where it has been lost.

9. Insist that the previous absurd austerity measures be replaced with those appropriate for a nation at war: excess profit taxes, price controls on mass consumer items, etc. While beer has a morale value, the import of luxury items should be forbidden. All citizens should be made to feel that they are contributing to the war effort. A thorough U.S.-Vietnamese review of the economic and technical assistance programs should be undertaken.

10. Advise the government to announce that all qualified students who are unable to afford secondary and university education can obtain government scholarships after they have given a year of their time to the Patriotic Corps. With the help of returning exiles at least one new university and one technological institute, can be established. These should help to insure the loyalty and contribution of youth.

Long Term

U.S. policy should attempt the following:

1. Have the new government acknowledge that in view of the war, the political machinations of the previous regime, the prolonged absence of many citizens in exile and the resulting weakness in South Vietnam's political substructure:

- a. National elections will be held on May 2, 1966.
- b. Political activity will be permitted after November 2, 1965.
- c. Military members of the provisional government will exclude themselves from elective office after May 1966.

2. Have the new government proclaim its dedication to freedom, democracy and constitutionalism and, in order to enhance its credibility and permit the creation of stable and orderly democracy:

- a. Invite free world scholars and politicians to help South Vietnam in its democratic political development.
- b. Prescribe the theory and practice of democracy as subjects of study in all schools.
- c. Spell out the civil liberties to be guaranteed during the interim period.

3. Have the new government express confidence that an all-out effort to defeat or win over the Vietcong will achieve success by 1966 and:

- a. Announce its intention to request a UN referendum in late 1966 for North and South Vietnam in order to determine if a unified Vietnam shall be a communist or a free one.
- b. If North Vietnam will not accede to a UN supervised referendum, South Vietnam will invite and welcome to settle on its territory all in North Vietnam who choose to do so. Transportation will be supplied outside the three-mile limit.
- c. North Vietnam will be invited to refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of South Vietnam. This will be an imprecise warning, as the GVN airforce is expanded to the size of the Indonesian one.