

VIET-NAM: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

This paper has been prepared by several Americans current in their knowledge of most of the important aspects of the Viet-Nam dilemma and draws upon a collective experience of over 25 years of service in Viet-Nam at varying levels of the U. S. effort there.

We have not addressed all facets of the problem but have concentrated on those we regard as the central issues.

We present this paper united in the convictions that:

- the solution in Viet-Nam will be essentially political in nature and will depend ultimately upon what strength the South Vietnamese nationalists can muster in direct political confrontation with the Communists;
- to be honorable our policy in Viet-Nam must make clear and credible to all involved the terms on which the U. S. will continue to support South Viet-Nam and reassert our right to reexamine our commitments if performance is not forthcoming in specified areas;
- our concentration on conventional military strategies and tactics in Viet-Nam has clouded our understanding of the Vietnamese people, the enemy and the nature of the conflict itself;
- there exists a vast potential for the building of a politically viable South Viet-Nam only if sensitive and timely U. S. actions can help cultivate it;
- actions taken in Viet-Nam in the months ahead must have a demonstrable payoff in the short run if there is to be any chance of an outcome at all consistent with the purposes for which we acted initially.

December 4, 1968

INTRODUCTION

The hour is late for talk of ideal solutions in Viet-Nam -- the situation is far too urgent both there and here at home.

- We cannot win a military victory in Viet-Nam without unacceptable escalation. Both political parties have called for the "de-Americanization" of the war and President Johnson made clear in his speech of March 31 that the South Vietnamese themselves must carry "the main burden of preserving their freedom." But the sad fact is that South Viet-Nam is not yet a politically viable nation.
- We are on the threshold of negotiations with North Viet-Nam which ultimately must address the political question of who controls South Viet-Nam. But our dialogue with the Government of Viet-Nam (GVN) is uneven and we are without a unified non-Communist political force in the South that can either sustain the pressures of such negotiations or prevail in a political confrontation with the Communists.
- We have paid a heavy price in Viet-Nam: over 28,000 Americans killed and another 94,000 hospitalized; about \$30 billion a year; over 550,000 men deployed to Viet-Nam; and accompanying inflation and balance of payment problems.
- We are confronted with a confused and impatient public opinion--ever more aware of the costs of the war, of our apparent inability to find an honorable way out of the Viet-Nam dilemma, and of our reduced inability to attack urgent domestic problems as a united nation.
- We have a new President who will not have long to demonstrate that he represents something new and hopeful. The American people will grant him unusual latitude in the early months, but if signs of an honorable peace are not soon forthcoming his Presidency will be measurable immobilized.

CURRENT SITUATION

The situation in Viet-Nam remains critical on many fronts.

Military Situation

There are three essential facts that stand out in an assessment of the military situation.

(1) The enemy has paid a heavy price.

- The enemy has suffered over 25,000 killed since mid-August. Losses sustained by the Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) in 1968--estimated at about 162,000--have been unprecedented and are almost two and a half times the 1967 rate.
- The enemy's offensive plans have been disrupted by Allied operations. His logistical system has been hurt as he has lost weapons and munitions at about twice the 1967 rate.
- Whereas in past years the enemy force was made up of at least 70% ethnic South Vietnamese, we now face a force that is over 70% NVA personnel. There has also been a significant decline in the quality of the enemy soldier as compared to the hard core VC and NVA regulars of the past.

(2) The South Vietnamese are assuming an increasing share of the burden but their performance is still far from adequate.

- The South Vietnamese armed forces--regular and paramilitary--are one of the largest in the world relative to population size. Currently about 810,000 South Vietnamese are in the military forces and another 200,000 in the paramilitary forces. This represents about 85% of the physically fit males and about 6.3% of the total population.

- The consensus is that Republic of Viet-Nam Armed Forces (RVNAF) performance has improved but is not up to the standards required if the military effort is to be de-Americanized. The South Vietnamese have shown both a willingness and capability to assume a greater share of the fighting--particularly in the last six months. For example, they have increased the strength of their armed forces by more than 25% since the first of the year. Their forces are being equipped with M-16 rifles, other light weapons, radios, armored personnel carriers, armored cars, more modern aircraft, additional artillery, and more modern equipment.
- The Vietnamese forces, particularly the Army (ARVN), continue to be largely a defensive, daytime conventional force incapable of fighting without U.S. support. The GVN has failed to make ARVN a part of the people and significant numbers still loot and steal. MACV is working to improve RVNAF performance in tactical operations and in disposition toward the local population, but, without strong support--in word and deed--from the Vietnamese military and political leadership and the U.S. advisory effort, real improvement will be slow in coming.

(3) The enemy retains the military initiative in South Viet-Nam.

- Despite some troop withdrawals, the enemy retains essentially the same military capability he has had for the past two years. Total enemy military strength is about 220-240,000 troops organized in 184 main force battalions. The forces drawn back into border sanctuaries--about 50 battalions--are capable of moving back in a short period of time.
- Even prior to the halt of our intensified bombing of supply routes from North to South, the enemy was able to infiltrate sufficient men and materiel to cause substantial casualties to friendly forces. While the quality of enemy forces has suffered,

North Viet-Nam retains the capability of providing troops to South Viet-Nam at a rate exceeding their 1967-1968 loss rate and could continue to do so for an indefinite period--even with our bombing of the North.

- The enemy possesses the military initiative in South Viet-Nam--contact occurring primarily when he chooses. About 88% of all incidents of contact in 1968 were at the enemy's initiative. He can thus control his casualty levels more easily than we tend to think.

In sum, we have been unable to defeat the enemy militarily and while we have undoubtedly hurt him, his military capabilities remain undiminished.

Political Situation

The political situation in South Viet-Nam remains perhaps more critical than the military. While the human resources of a politically viable South Viet-Nam do exist, they have yet to be effectively mobilized to the task of preparing for the political confrontation with the Communists that must ultimately come.

- (1) On the positive side, a constitutional framework for government has been established to which most non-Communist elements subscribe.

- A constitution was drafted by a popularly elected constituent assembly and promulgated as the law of the land. Its main institutions--the Presidency, the National Assembly, the Courts and the Village and Municipal Councils--have been established and are beginning to function.
- Support for the Constitution has been forthcoming from the leadership of most non-Communist elements.

- (2) The VC/NLF control or at least influence a substantial majority of the total population of South Viet-Nam.

- MACV reports 69.8% of the people living in

relatively secure areas, with a gradual increase of about one percent per month since March and of about three percent in October alone.

- However, roughly 48% live in contested areas or hamlets in which a VC infrastructure still exists. Adding this 48% to the 17% living in VC controlled areas gives an overall figure of 65% of the total population subject to some VC control. This represents about 80% of the rural population.
- Recent reports indicate intensified efforts by the VC/NLF to consolidate their hold on the rural population through the formation and election of "liberation" committees, the training of local guerrillas to be policemen, and the disruptive harassment of various GVN organizations throughout the countryside.

(3) South Viet-Nam's leadership remains divided and uninspiring.

- Although a constitutional framework exists in South Viet-Nam, a sense of unity and urgency on the part of the Vietnamese leadership is still missing. Only recently has the leadership begun to comprehend the short fuse created by developments in Paris and in American public opinion.
- President Thieu has not emerged as a strong, symbolic leader--either to the political elite or to the people. While he has consolidated his power base, he has done so more on the basis of personal relationships than an open appeal to the wholehearted participation of other nationalist leaders in a cooperative effort to achieve national unity. Thieu's entourage and his power base contain corrupt elements which vitiate his effectiveness. And it remains unclear whether he possesses the leadership qualities required to build a national union.
- The political elite is isolated from the people and appears unable to relate to them and their concerns.

(4) Nationalist political organization is inadequate to the confrontation that lies ahead.

- The Vietnamese nationalists have no national political organization to match the 100,000 cadres of the Communist Peoples Revolutionary Party (PRP) in South Viet-Nam. Elements of a broadly based nationalist political organization exist among some of the political, religious and ethnic groups, but the necessary unity at the top does not.
- Without effective political organization, the lower level and local nationalist leadership is vulnerable to disintegration if the tide should appear to be moving in favor of the Communists. The Government's civil and military channels of authority and command are weak--as is the overall discipline of both the civil service and the armed forces.
- A start toward unified political organization was made with the "Lien Minh" which was established as a broad political front having the backing of President Thieu, Vice President Ky and most nationalist groups. However, it has so far proven ineffective and even its potential may be far short of the mark.

(5) The relationship between the U. S. and the Vietnamese nationalists has been marred by consistent misunderstandings on both sides.

- The credibility of the U. S. commitment is now sharply in doubt. Gradual de-Americanization of the war may be possible without inducing panic or mistrust--but only if a mutual basis for understanding can be reestablished.
- Whether such an understanding is attained will depend more on U. S. leadership than on the Vietnamese whose flexibility is limited by the simple fact that their survival is at stake. Given the existence of a strong Vietnamese feeling that the elevation of the NLF to de facto equal status at Paris is an irretrievable step towards coalition government and the sure loss of their country, the breakdown in US-GVN communications may be the most serious vulnerability in the present situation.

Mood of the American Public

American public opinion is currently confused, tired, ambivalent and in many ways quite volatile. A review of recent public opinion survey findings indicates public feeling about Viet-Nam is characterized by:

- A marked shift in opinion in the direction of deescalation--particularly since March 31.
- A reluctance to disengage from Viet-Nam if it would likely lead to a Communist take-over.
- Lack of an adequate understanding of what we are trying to achieve.
- An expectation of some form of compromise political settlement--but only on honorable terms.
- Support for whatever bombing policy the President judges to be in the best interests of peace.
- Cynicism about the likely outcome of the Paris talks and about Hanoi's intentions there.
- Little confidence in the ability of the South Vietnamese to defend and govern themselves.

This volatile state of public feeling has several dangers inherent in it:

(1) Psychological let down following a honeymoon period.

The American people will expect something new from a new President. There will no doubt be a "honeymoon" period in which the public will allow the new incumbent considerable latitude and watch expectantly for changes.

- How long this period will last is problematical, but it is certain that in the face of continuing difficulties it will be followed by some sort of psychological let down.
- This let down could be compounded if some major new tack has been attempted and failed.

(2) Little basis for consensus.

There remains some doubt about how much of a "silent center" of support for our Viet-Nam policy exists among the American people. Recent surveys have shown that roughly three-quarters of the public favors a change by either increasing or decreasing the level of our involvement. This leaves only one in four that endorses the thrust of our current policy--precious little with which to build a consensus.

(3) Susceptibility to extreme solutions.

The public's cynicism about dealing with Hanoi has no doubt tempered expectations about what might follow the bombing cessation.

Nonetheless, as frustration over the lack of progress in South Viet-Nam and Paris merges with an increased awareness of the many costs of the war, there is danger that a confused and impatient public opinion will become susceptible to accepting one or another extreme alternative that seems promising and that could ultimately overshadow the larger objectives for which we became involved.

Further the American people probably have an unrealistic view of what we are up against in Viet-Nam. Tet was a major blow here at home--demonstrating how far we had to go. Thus without an adequate understanding of the nature of the conflict and the dimensions of the problem, opinion will remain volatile and dangerously reactive to events.

(4) False sense of conclusion.

Should some form of political settlement in Viet-Nam be forthcoming in the short term, people may acquire a false sense of conclusion to our role in dealing with the problems of insurgency in Southeast Asia and an unwarranted sense of relief that our burden in the Pacific has been lessened.

NEED FOR A POLITICAL STRATEGY

Looking at the military and political situation together and coupling them with the urgent constraints of time here at home, it is difficult to accept the widely held view that the enemy is losing the war, that he cannot sustain the losses we are inflicting upon him and that it is he who is in the weaker position in Paris.

Quite the contrary, the facts summarized above seem to indicate that we may be in the inferior position in Paris, that the South Vietnamese have a long way to go before they will be able to confront the Communists politically and that even if a military victory were possible it would not necessarily lead to a favorable political settlement.

Meaningful Outcome

If this is indeed the state of affairs, some serious thought must be given to just what it is we are after in concrete and operational terms--what it is we would consider a "meaningful outcome."

Over the past seven years we have learned the hard way that the use of our vast array of material power has not been adequately responsive to a complex and subtle revolutionary situation. We have come to the painful realization that our concepts of victory and defeat must be modified if the loss of thousands of American and Vietnamese lives and the devastation of a faraway land are to be vindicated.

Today we find ourselves in Viet-Nam in an almost impossible nation-building exercise--one in which all the processes of political development must begin to take hold in but a few years and against the backdrop of war. The tragedy is that it is only now, as the imminence of a political confrontation with the enemy arouses anxiety, that we begin to place primary emphasis on the political dimensions of the conflict.

What kind of an outcome would be "meaningful"? It would include a South Viet-Nam which is:

- reasonably independent, relatively stable, fighting its own war and meeting the needs of its people;
- not taken over, overtly or covertly, by the Communists in the next few years;

- led by a government which effectively represents the majority of the South Vietnamese people;
- moving forward sufficiently to allow a reduction in U. S. presence which would both assuage an uneasy American public and serve as catalyst in the nation-building process.

If such an outcome is obtained, some of our larger objectives also will have been realized:

- Our credibility as an ally will have been reasserted.
- Clear indication will have been given that the U. S. has learned how to combat this type of threat by using those non-military instruments most effective in discouraging the purveyors of "liberation" wars.
- A climate of confidence in Asia--and elsewhere in the developing world--will have been further nurtured by our stand in Viet-Nam; but at the same time a sense of realism will have been injected as we demonstrate greater selectivity in the situations in which we will become involved.

Options

The U. S. has basically four alternative courses of action in Viet-Nam:

- (1) To continue relying principally on military pressure in South Viet-Nam to provide leverage in influencing the course of the Paris talks;
- (2) To step up the level of military activity;
- (3) To decrease our military operations and force levels unilaterally with or without an acceptable political settlement and a corresponding reduction in enemy activity and force levels;
- (4) To pursue a political strategy, coupled with appropriate military actions, designed to build a political base for the Paris talks and prepare the GVN for the ultimate political confrontation with the NLF while gradually phasing down U. S. visible presence in Viet-Nam.

The first alternative--continue our present efforts--is not practicable for three reasons.

- It is now evident that, despite some weakening of the other side, a military victory is not possible without further escalation.
- Even if a military victory were possible, it would not necessarily strengthen the nationalist political position for the upcoming confrontation.
- The American people will not accept "more of the same" for long, nor will they tolerate a peace in Paris that later proves to have been an abandonment of South Viet-Nam.

The second alternative--step up the level of military activity--raises the ante in a variety of ways.

- Most importantly it would risk enlarging the direct involvement of the Soviet Union and/or China.
- It would further strain our strategic posture and capability of dealing with trouble spots elsewhere in the world.
- It would probably require the deployment of more U. S. forces to Viet-Nam and neither the American public nor Congress are likely to find this acceptable.
- As with the first alternative, an escalation strategy would probably lead us no closer to assuring a favorable political outcome.

The third and fourth alternatives involve a fundamental reorientation of our strategy toward the political aspects of the struggle.

- The third alternative--decrease our effort regardless of what the other side does--argues that if the raw materials of a politically viable South Viet-Nam do not exist, the heavy costs of the war are not justifiable on moral or political grounds and the best we can do is minimize our losses.

- The fourth alternative-- a political strategy coupled with a gradual phasing down of U. S. presence--rests on the contention that a politically viable South Viet-Nam is possible if the appropriate actions are taken to unlock this potential.

It is the basic proposition of this paper that the raw materials for a politically viable South Viet-Nam do exist but that U. S. policies and actions in the past have simply not tapped these resources. While there is no guarantee that the Vietnamese will be able to make the necessary changes in their political and military systems or that the U. S. will be able to transact effectively with the Vietnamese, there is little if any possibility of a favorable political settlement unless a political strategy is at least attempted.

Possibility of a Politically Viable South Viet-Nam

Essentially in South Viet-Nam today there exists a fragile insecure wartime government elected by less than one-third of the population and still operating through a bureaucratic facade developed under the French. There are signs of democratic political life in the National Assembly, but the constitutional framework that now exists has been operative for only two years.

Beyond these general factors there are three major weaknesses in the political fabric of South Viet-Nam:

- The inability or unwillingness of many of the elite to relate to a large majority of the population;
- The inability or unwillingness of Vietnamese nationalists to coalesce into a single group capable of expressing the needs of the people and unifying the country;
- The inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the Vietnamese bureaucratic system.

Within the time frame available to the U. S. in Viet-Nam, rapid progress must be made in providing at least partial solutions to these three major weaknesses. There is not time to restructure the entire bureaucratic system. Nor is there time to develop "new" leadership. To obtain results within the short span of time available we must go with what exists and build on it or modify it in ways that give some chance of success.

At present several factors indicate that a reasonably politically viable South Viet-Nam can be obtained IF sensitive U. S. support is given to the right kind of actions taken by the Vietnamese themselves.

- The South Vietnamese have indicated clearly that they do not consider the VC/NLF/PRP a desirable alternative to the GVN.

The Communists have been unable to make significant inroads into the urban areas or into South Viet-Nam's diverse religious, ethnic, labor and regional groups. During the Tet, May and August offensives there was no evidence of popular support for the VC/NLF. There was, however, no groundswell of support for the GVN.

- The South Vietnamese people have indicated--particularly since Tet--that they are willing to commit themselves to their own defense.

From January through October of this year, more than 220,000 Vietnamese have volunteered for service in RVNAF. Further nearly 300,000 Vietnamese have received training in self-defense and over 80,000 of these have been armed. On June 15 a mobilization law was signed, making all male citizens between 16 and 50 years of age subject to service in either the armed forces or self-defense

- The GVN administrative structure--central and regional--has been established and is functioning.

The executive structure from Saigon to district is well established, if not fully effective, throughout South Viet-Nam. Recent province chief changes have been reported as improvements. A Supreme Court has been established which along with the Inspectorate provides some movement toward the rule of law and the checking of corruption.

- Representative institutions at the national and local level are now taking hold.

The electoral processes of the Lower House in the National Assembly identify the Deputies (representatives) with particular constituencies. This gives potential meaning to the concepts of

representative government and a shared national identity. Popularly elected municipal, hamlet and village councils have been elected and are beginning to function as local organs of government responsive to local interests and needs.

- The South Vietnamese armed forces and paramilitary and police forces comprise a large operating national organization that is reasonably integrated and effective.

There are over one million men under arms in South Viet-Nam today--deployed in every province and district. Of all South Vietnamese institutions the armed forces have the widest representation and possibly the best chance of acting as a unifying and nation-building force.

- There are several fairly large religious and ethnic groups in South Viet-Nam which have demonstrated some cohesiveness and capability for unified action.

The Catholics, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Montagnards and Chinese--totalling over 7,000,000--have been able in varying degrees to build effective local organizations, cultivate the loyalty of the people, and present a fairly unified front to the NLF/PRP. The possibility exists of welding these groups into a coalition with the GVN which would provide a significant base for effective action at the local level in key areas.

- "True" Vietnamese nationalism remains a strong motivating force among the South Vietnamese.

There is a large segment of the South Vietnamese population which has committed itself to opposing the Communists. While this commitment does not necessarily imply wholehearted endorsement of the present Saigon regime, it does indicate active support for the constitutional system. Representative of this segment are ex-Viet Minh, young intellectuals from Districts 6, 7 and 8 in Saigon, organized labor, many junior officers of the armed forces, a number of southern intellectuals and most of the religious groups (even the militant Buddhists). It may be possible to mobilize these groups in support of the GVN behind the rallying cry of Vietnamese nationalism.

- President Thieu has consolidated his position of power and seems to be accepted by those with power sufficient to threaten him.

The Thieu-Ky split remains and is unlikely to be healed over completely, but Ky has given fairly clear indication that he intends to cooperate with Thieu and not make any play for power himself. This fact coupled with the acceptance of the Constitution as a framework for political development provides reasonable stability to the present government. However, Thieu has yet to establish himself on a nationwide basis or to inspire the widespread respect so necessary to cement national unity.

Each of these factors could be exploited to advantage, but in themselves they represent only a potential. U. S. supporting actions are required which are tailored to the Vietnamese milieu and politically oriented and which are executed by Americans sensitized to Viet-Nam and capable of effective communications with the South Vietnamese.

A "meaningful outcome" cannot be achieved either by an unilateral abandonment of South Viet-Nam nor by a military strategy of further escalation. At this point in time, we can obtain something meaningful only through a carefully integrated and executed civil-military policy which focuses on the essential political nature of the war. It is not yet too late to attempt a politically oriented strategy in Viet-Nam.

Minimum Requirements

In order for the U. S. to help the Vietnamese maximize whatever assets remain, there are several minimum requirements which must be met:

- (1) A political base here at home for U. S. policy.

The debate here at home will resume with the convening of Congress. Its two essential roots will again furnish sustenance to all sides. These are the facts that we have not been able to "win" this war. Yet, when it comes to the matter of committing American lives in major battle, the judgment of the people must--and will--sooner or later prevail.

For the incoming President inheriting a confused public opinion and an impatient Congress, the task of building a political base for U. S. policy will not be easy. Two things need to be done.

- An effective dialogue with the American people must be reestablished.
- Politically relevant groups must be given a sense of participation in the making of our Viet-Nam policy.

(2) A political frame of reference for our relations with the GVN.

Since the terms of any meaningful outcome in Viet-Nam will be primarily political in nature, it is essential that the U. S. develop with the Saigon regime an understanding which rests on a commonly agreed upon political and moral foundation.

- We must first clarify and make credible the terms on which the U. S. will continue to support the GVN.

We should state plainly to the Saigon leadership that we will make no outside deals with Hanoi, but that if performance is not forthcoming in specified areas we will feel free to reexamine our commitments. These specified areas should all be related to the larger framework of the Vietnamese Constitution which the Saigon leadership has sworn to uphold. We should make our continued support conditional upon their doing their utmost to live up to the ideals and precepts contained in their own Constitution. This would provide a basis for support here at home and make clear that the critical actions to be taken in the months ahead must be taken by the South Vietnamese themselves. Such a stance on our part would place our support on a new moral and political foundation.

Some of the areas in which performance should be required are:

- positive steps by Thieu and other national leaders to demonstrate a serious attempt to unify their nation rather than build personal cliques;
 - demonstration that Saigon is urgently moving to meet the needs of the Vietnamese people;
 - clear indication of a serious effort to eradicate the endemic problems of corruption and leadership inadequacies in the Government and Armed Forces;
 - definite evidence that the GVN has focused its efforts on providing territorial security and establishing its presence in the countryside.
- We must simultaneously establish an effective dialogue with the Saigon leadership.

The recent spate of diplomatic misunderstandings between the U. S. and the GVN is obviously injurious to our mutual interests. Such contretemps can be avoided in the future if real communication is established between all levels of the U. S. political-military effort and the South Vietnamese counterparts. This requires the cultivation of better relationships and the exercise of greater sensitivity to Vietnamese values, perceptions and ways of doing things.

(3) Exploitation of negotiation opportunities

While the state of negotiations on January 20 is hard to predict, it is well to remember the maxim of Communist thought that negotiations are not an end but a means. Thus in our negotiating posture we should:

- buy time in which the GVN can further consolidate a cohesive national political base;
- communicate a sense of urgency to the nationalist leaders to get on with the tasks at hand;

- preserve the sovereignty of South Viet-Nam by focusing on the crucial issue of political control of the rural areas;
- link any settlement in Viet-Nam to an overall pattern of peace for Southeast Asia;
- make our position clear and credible to Hanoi;
- work toward the lessening of hostilities and reduction of force levels.

In pursuing these objectives great care must be taken in the leverage our stance in Paris exerts on the Saigon regime. As with a many-legged stool, we must allow the GVN to ready itself before a prop is taken out from under it and to reestablish enough equilibrium to remain standing when the next prop is removed.

(4) Provision of flexibility, responsiveness and coordination in U. S. bureaucratic structure

Without some alteration in the current pattern of the performance of the U. S. bureaucratic structure--both in Washington and Saigon--there is little chance the U. S. will be able to carry out the sensitive and timely actions that will be required to bring about a settlement which the American people can accept as worth their many sacrifices.

Two steps seem essential:

- improvement of the interface between the U. S. Mission in Viet-Nam and the GVN/RVNAF through the institution of a small network of specially qualified advisors as special assistants to key South Vietnamese leaders;
- formation of a special group in the White House to:
 - keep the President accurately informed on all significant aspects of the Viet-Nam situation;
 - assist the President and his national security advisor in the formulation and evaluation of policy options and initiatives;

- assist in the coordination of multi-agency programs and insure their responsiveness to an overall Presidential perspective.

It is increasingly clear that attention to the above requirements may be the only way the U. S. will be able to develop enough room for maneuver to prevent an unfavorable political outcome.

Indeed, unless steps are taken along these lines, the situation in Viet-Nam probably cannot be salvaged. However, it is the firm conviction of this paper that if such steps are taken, the U. S. may be able to reduce its presence and eventually disengage from Viet-Nam on honorable terms.

CONCLUSION

We are overcome with a sense of *deja vu*--that uncomfortable feeling that somehow we have been here before. While some hope is offered by developments in Paris, the agenda of problems confronting us in Viet-Nam has changed little over the years. A glance back at the Taylor-Rostow Report of 1961 makes unhappy reading with its listing of problems that remain as urgent today as they were then.

The U. S. has had little difficulty in uncovering the problems we face in Viet-Nam. It has, however, been tragically unable to devise effective ways of addressing these problems imaginatively and resourcefully.

Papers on Viet-Nam characteristically catalogue a long list of actions that must be taken--actions which appear as the only logical and rational things to do. Yet equally characteristically, those actions once taken prove inadequate and basically unresponsive to the challenges faced.

Why this has been so will fill the histories yet to be written of this period, but one point is sure to stand out. That is that the "must" actions that have been advocated over the years have been "logical" and "rational" only from our own point of view. Again and again we have tried to effect changes in Viet-Nam in either ignorance or disregard of Vietnamese values, feelings, perceptions and ways of doing things.

The essence of the Viet-Nam dilemma is to be found in three relatively indisputable propositions:

- (1) A politically viable South Viet-Nam does not yet exist.
- (2) North Viet-Nam retains the military initiative and an imposing military capability.
- (3) The American people are tiring quickly of the war.

A mere listing of specific recommendations would not be sufficient to answer the challenges imposed in these propositions. What is required is the establishment of an overall context for our policies and actions. This context will certainly include factors far beyond the competence of this paper, but at a minimum it must acknowledge several basic facts:

- Our sensitivities to the Vietnamese milieu have been hopelessly inadequate and must be sharpened.
- We must establish the political terms of reference for our future dealings with the GVN.
- The burden of building a politically viable South Viet-Nam must rest with the Vietnamese themselves.
- A military victory in Viet-Nam is clearly impossible without risky escalation and would not necessarily lead to a favorable political settlement.

It is admittedly late to begin formulating an overall context for action in Viet-Nam. Four power negotiations are nearly upon us and we have yet little evidence of a unified political base in South Viet-Nam--the necessary foundation for a meaningful outcome.

We believe it is not too late, however--the human resources do exist in South Viet-Nam if only U. S. actions can unlock their potential.

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In the pages that follow, specific recommendations are offered. They fall under four headings:

- (1) Reestablishing a dialogue with the American people
- (2) Building a politically viable South Viet-Nam
- (3) Strengthening South Viet-Nam militarily
- (4) Organizing for political warfare