

DRAFT

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## CROSSROADS IN VIETNAM

We have reached a crossroads in Vietnam. Despite the decision of President Johnson in late November 1964 to carry on the war effort as it has been fought to date, it is apparent that this is a losing position. The pros and cons of withdrawal and a neutralist solution versus extending the war to the North have been debated in the press and among private citizens and government officials alike. What has largely escaped this debate is any mention of winning in South Vietnam by changing our approach, organization and leadership there. ~~Unfortunately most Americans are unaware of the constructive and effective role played by a few Americans in the dramatic defeat of the Communists in the Philippines in 1949-1953, the fact that this same approach was applied to the chaotic situation in Vietnam in 1954-1955 and worked, and finally that almost none of the people involved or the knowledge gained during these significant "wins" is being applied today in South Vietnam.~~

~~In this article, the author proposes to outline from his own first hand experience what the problems are and how we can win in Vietnam if we have the determination and intelligence to do so. The analysis and ideas presented are not the unique property of the author but represent a consensus of thinking among those who know Vietnam and Communist revolutionary warfare intimately and who <sup>will</sup> ~~ful~~ a deep commitment to the cause of Vietnamese freedom.~~

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Our State in Vietnam.

The crossroads in Vietnam is also a crossroads for the United States and the Free World. More than most of us realize, freedom is on trial there and so are we as its principal defenders. Three American Presidents have publically pledged that we shall help the Vietnamese to defend their freedom. A failure to defend that freedom, no matter how much we seek to excuse ourselves by blaming the Vietnamese, means to the rest of the world that no other people can rely on our help to combat a similar Communist insurgency when it comes to their country. Make no mistake, in what they call a "War of National Liberation" the Communists have directly challenged us in Vietnam to respond to a strategy which they now proclaim as the sure road to world conquest in an era of nuclear stalemate. Measured in terms of our verbal committments to the Vietnamese people as well as in our aid, we have chosen to meet this challenge. ~~Lest we think~~ that meeting it elsewhere at a later date will be easier for us if we can only get out of Vietnam, the author would like to point out, based on seven years spent in Southeast Asia since 1954, that Vietnam has at present a larger percentage of its population who are basically anti-communist because they know and therefore detest Communism than any other country in that area, The Philippines excepted. We must understand that even in the eyes of Asians friendly to us, an abandonment of

South Vietnam would be final and irrevocable evidence of American inability or unwillingness to defend freedom. To this point, Vincente Villamin, a Filipino newspaper analyst has <sup>recently</sup> written that such an abandonment <sup>←</sup> "would be an indelible blemish on America's honor. It would reduce America in the estimation of mankind to a dismal third-rate power despite her wealth, her culture and her nuclear arsenal. It would make every American ashamed of his government and make every individual American distrusted everywhere on earth"

Vietnam is a kind of Cold War "Pearl Harbor" for the United States, but a "Pearl Harbor" which cannot be overcome by the same methods by which we won World War II. It is a <sup>subtler</sup> ~~sharp~~ challenge <sup>a blow</sup> which goes to the roots of the ideals upon which our country was founded and which challenges our ability and even our right to uphold these ideals wherever they may be threatened.

In this light our problem in Vietnam becomes not "Can we win" but "How must we win". If we understand this, perhaps all of us together can develop the determination to win which will in turn make it possible for our Government to undertake the unconventional actions and make the radical changes required to win.

The Choices Open to Us.

There are four basic choices open to us in Vietnam:

- 1) To negotiate <sup>a truce</sup> ~~settlement~~ which would result in a "neutralist" government and an American withdrawal.
- 2) To extend the war to the North mainly by bombing raids.
- 3) To intervene by landing U.S. ground forces in Vietnam.
- 4) To defeat the Communist guerrilla movement in the South by a positive, politically oriented program.

*choice, a negotiated truce,*  
The first <sup>choice, a negotiated truce,</sup> would result in a quick Communist takeover once the Americans withdrew. There is insufficient unity within the nationalist non-communist politicians or in the Vietnamese Army to withstand the psychological and political as well as military pressures which the Communist Vietcong would bring to bear. No one who knows South Vietnam well believes that such a solution would result in anything but a Communist takeover.

*The second choice, an*

*The extension of the war to the North, has been proposed in order to interdict supply routes and to force the North Vietnamese to call off the war in the South. There is no reason to believe that interdiction by*

bombing would be anymore successful in Vietnam than it was in Korea where it failed to stop the Chinese from resupplying their troops. The most likely effect of bombing industrial plants and other installations, in the North would be to strengthen the <sup>regime</sup> ~~require~~ there by unifying its people behind it. Neither the continuance of the war in the South, which is mainly locally supported and supplied, nor the ability of the regime in the North to maintain itself in power, depends on the existence of these installations. What is most likely to happen is that when ~~it becomes~~ <sup>fails to</sup> ~~apparent~~ bombing ~~has not stopped~~ the war, Communist charges of Americans murdering fellow Vietnamese will receive a sympathetic hearing in <sup>Saigon</sup> ~~South Vietnam~~ and we will have generated the right atmosphere for a "neutralist" coup, whether we like it or not.

The third choice, <sup>carried out</sup>  
Intervention by American ground forces, if effected as a last desperate measure, could prevent a complete collapse of the Vietnamese war effort. It seems likely, however, that it would <sup>result in</sup> ~~turn out to be~~ a much more costly stalemate than Korea. With the U. S. having lent so much credence to ~~the~~ Communist charges of imperialism, ~~that~~ the myth of a "liberation struggle" <sup>might</sup> begin to take on reality and make it impossible for any subsequent Vietnamese government to develop the morale and ~~acquire~~ <sup>replace</sup> ~~win~~ the popular support necessary to ~~take over from~~ <sup>for fighting</sup> the Americans. We must not forget that the basic cause, on both sides ~~of the war~~ in Vietnam

is nationalism, albeit a deformed and misguided nationalism in Communist hands.

#### *The fourth choice*

~~What is left~~, and what seems the only worthwhile course of action is to make our effort to defeat the Communist insurgency in the South effective. To understand how this can be done we must first understand why we are not winning now.

#### Why Arn't We Winning.

The war in Vietnam is a war for the people. From the Communist point of view it is a war to control the people, and from what must be our point of view if we are to win, it is a war to win the loyalty and support of the people. The late President Magsaysay of the Philippines gave this concept real meaning in the successful campaign against the Communist Huk<sup>s</sup> by making the Philippine Army a dedicated servant of the people. Each soldier was given as his major mission, not killing Communists, but "Serving as a personal Ambassador of good will for the Government to the people". This did not mean that combat operations were neglected. On the contrary, they were ~~constant~~<sup>intensive</sup> and effective, ~~in large part because of the high morale of the Army~~<sup>by</sup> generated mainly by its popularity with the people, and because of the

information about Communist movements voluntarily supplied by the people. When the very people whom the Vietnamese Army is supposed to protect are killed by bombs and artillery fire delivered by that same Army, the war is being lost and this is what has been happening all too often in Vietnam.

Father Nguyen Loc Hoa is a Vietnamese priest of Chinese origin who has successfully defended for over four years against superior Communist forces an area of freedom, called the Hai Yen Special District, at the southernmost tip of Vietnam. On the occasion of his receiving the Ramon Magsaysay Foundation Award for public service in September 1964, he was asked why we were losing in Vietnam. He had this to say:

"Why are we not winning in Vietnam. My answer is simple. The misplacement of the order of importance. The Magsaysay way is winning the people first, winning the war second. I'm afraid that in Vietnam today the order is reversed.

Weapons are important. Fighting is necessary in order to protect the people from being physically normal by the armed communists. But arms are useful only for defensive purposes. Our offense is to rely solely on winning the people because as soon as the people understand what communism means and as soon

as they have faith in our ability to protect them and as soon as they have confidence in our integrity, the battle is won.

When fought as a a conventional war, we really have no chance to win. How can we explain to a mother when her child is burned by napalm, and how can we expect a young man to fight for us when his aged father was killed by artillery fire.

Indeed, how can we claim to be with the people when we burn their homes / simply because those houses happen to be in Communist controlled territory.

You may say that it is easy for me as a Priest to think of love above war, but facts have proved that love is the only way for us to win. It is the only way for us to survive."

The foregoing concern's the ~~conduct of the war~~ effort itself. Beyond our failure to properly advise on a proper conduct of the war, we have also failed to provide the advice and assistance which the Vietnamese need and desperately want in developing a stable but dynamic Government capable of executing the proper approach. This, to many seems not properly our business because it implies a deep involvement in Vietnamese internal affairs. We forget or perhaps we do not understand that in a country dominated by a colonial regime for a hundred years, by continuous war for twenty, and by a history of treachery,

capped by the ~~betrayal~~<sup>a</sup> of the Vietnamese nationalist cause by the Communists themselves, that in the resultant atmosphere of mutual suspicion and distrust it is impossible for the Vietnamese to unite without the help of disinterested but committed friends. Instead of remembering that

our stake in Vietnam's demands that we provide whatever is required to win, we lapse into placing the blame on the Vietnamese for their

~~failure to unite, which is like blaming a temporarily crippled man for not having escaped from a burning house when all we did to help was to indicate where the door was and give him a set of unusable crutches.~~

Even among many strong supporters of our Vietnam policy the feeling is that we have given everything the Vietnamese could possibly need or want. As one U.S. Senator ~~put it~~<sup>replied</sup> to a prominent Vietnamese visitor who was pleading for something more than men, money and material:

"Do you mean to say that something more is wanted from us in Vietnam. We are already giving more than enough of our blood and treasure. How can you ask us to give more."

That Vietnamese was trying to ask that Americans be sent to Vietnam who had the confidence of the Vietnamese, who understood Vietnam and the nature of the war there and who could help the Vietnamese de-

velops a Government and articulate a cause worth fighting for. He was asking us to play a role in his country which Tom Paine and others played in the early, and no less perilous and divided, days of our own.

Or as another Vietnamese patriot, Dr. Dan Van Sung, put it in July.

"In short, in its aid to the under-developed world in the midst of a revolution for emancipation, the US has never yet fought against the Communists with ideas of Freedom and of Justice but, at least until now, only with bombs and dollars. Instead of assuming the role of a leader, it has confined itself to that of a mere purveyor or means."

"With regard to the anti-Communist fight in general, the political solution consists of reinvigorating the Vietnamese anti-Communist movement, of a re-organization and a development of the Nationalists, and of reinforcing the anti-Communist motivation by an efficient national renovation based on democracy. By ignoring our revolution and the intranational aspect of our anti-Communist fight, the US has jeopardized such a solution instead of helping work for it. As a high-ranking American official put it, 'the anti-Communist fight in Vietnam is seventy-five percent political and twenty-five percent military'. Yet, everything American

is directed to the twenty-five percent and nothing to the seventy-five percent."

" The way out, to our mind, is not by an abandonment but, on the contrary, by going deep into every local revolutionary problem and helping solve them using principles of justice and freedom, and perhaps in fusing them with the revolutionary spirit of 1776 from which the United States herself was born and developed."

The truth is that neither our vast organization in Vietnam nor the *high-level* U.S. leaders we have sent there have proven capable of responding to the primary Vietnamese need for political advice and assistance. We have at present in Vietnam over 20,000 military advisors, several hundred economic *aid* ~~and~~ advisors, a number of political and diplomatic reporters in the Embassy, but not one single political advisor. We have approached Vietnam as if it were a logistical problem left over from World War II to be solved by number of men, money, munitions and machines. The result ~~has been~~ <sup>is</sup> that we have created a vast bureaucratic apparatus, a replica of Washington, D.C. in Saigon, an apparatus which is almost totally insensitive and unresponsive to true Vietnamese needs and which spends most of its time in "coordinating" itself. We

should ask ourselves what would have happened to our own Revolution had France insisted as a condition for its aid that a ~~replica of the~~  
~~transplanted to Valley Forge~~  
~~the Court of Versailles be set~~ to advise General Washington.

But our problems in Vietnam are not only organization~~al~~. They mainly concern people. We are dealing with an Asian revolution in Vietnam and we are combatting Communist revolutionary warfare as developed by Mao Tse Tung. It is not reasonable to expect that those of our leading soldiers, diplomats and administrators whose experience has been confined solely to formal warfare or formal diplomacy primarily in Europe should be able to understand and cope with what is needed ~~and instead are~~ this kind of warfare. Should we not seek out instead those Americans who have already had experience in this type of warfare and who have been successful in combatting it, even though they may not have achieved prominence or high rank in other fields of endeavor which are not pertinent to ~~the Vietnamese~~ <sup>Vietnam</sup> problem. (This is not a plea for a particular person or even for a group of persons but rather the writing of a specification in the belief that such a man or group of men must and can be found).

#### A Program to Win.

The hour for us to change our approach in Vietnam is late. These recommendations are written in the hope that it is not too late and that

they may assist in ~~guiding~~ <sup>promoting</sup> constructive action. ~~There is no absolutely~~  
~~sure-fire formula for success in a situation so complicated. What is~~  
~~set forth below is conceived as the necessary minimum actions to be~~  
~~taken if we are to have even a chance of winning.~~

First, we must articulate ~~a~~ more <sup>clearly</sup> ~~meaningful sense of our own~~  
~~defending~~ <sup>we must help</sup> purpose in <sup>1</sup> Vietnam and ~~in~~ Southeast Asia and <sup>1</sup> assist the Vietnamese  
~~in~~ developing <sup>to</sup> more fully a cause of their own worth fighting for as  
well as proper actions to win the people. This means ~~that~~ we must:

- a) ~~intensify our policies in Southeast Asia to give greater~~  
~~meaning and clearer purpose to our presence there~~ <sup>in Southeast Asia</sup> ~~by making a long-~~  
term commitment to the development and freedom of the area as a  
whole. A worthy recommendation recently put forth by the American  
~~Friends for Vietnam is that the U.S. announce~~ <sup>through United Nations</sup> ~~its com-~~  
mittment to and support for a Mekong Basin Development Program  
~~which would involve~~ <sup>involving</sup> the four countries surrounding the Mekong Basin,  
Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, and which would give a new  
sense of unity and purpose to that area. This ~~could~~ <sup>might</sup> be called the  
Johnson Plan for Mekong Basin Freedom. It would be difficult for  
the Communists to oppose such a program without undercutting their  
own political goals and our stature would rise as we <sup>a</sup> ~~become~~ considered

more as builders than bombers and our long-term commitment  
to the freedom of the area has made clear.

b) Declare unequivocally that we are determined to see Vietnam become a unified, independent and peaceful nation with a government based on the consent of the people and responsive to the will of the people.

c) Having thus aligned our goals closer to Vietnamese aspirations, we must direct our advisory efforts primarily toward the development of Vietnamese "cause" worth fighting for and of a framework for the growth of democratic government. The Vietnamese themselves must formulate these goals and devise the methods of achieving them. But we must intelligently help and encourage this process.

d) Convert the war into a war to win the people by changing the orientation and operations of the Vietnamese Army and of our own ~~advisory~~ support efforts. Rediscover ~~the~~ "Magsaysay Way" and apply it.

Second, in order to properly carry out ~~most of~~ the above actions, we must tailor our aid and advice to Vietnamese needs, ~~not try to~~ <sup>and stop trying</sup> fit their revolution into our bureaucratic and military framework. This means we must:

a) Send to Vietnam to work under an understanding Ambassador,  
but with full authority from Washington, a small "catalept" <sup>a</sup> team of  
individuals of proven competence in this form of warfare. This team  
would coordinate the U.S effort and informally advise the Vietnamese.

*Eliminate as quickly as feasible*

b) Dismantle and remove large portions of the bureaucratic  
framework we have established there, particularly on the military  
side. Put <sup>our</sup> military advisory effort on a "volunteer" basis with a  
two year minimum period of service so that advisors are not constantly  
rotated at the end of one year just as they have become effective, which  
is (the current practice), and concentrate the advisors in the  
provinces rather than in Saigon.

*(non-profit, semi-private)*

c) Develop a way, perhaps through a "Freedom Company", to  
permit volunteers dedicated to the cause of freedom from all nations  
to participate in the war as advisors, technicians and assistants thus  
providing our Vietnamese allies with greater "heart" for the struggle  
as well as effective assistance <sup>inherent</sup> rid of the handicaps of the U.S.  
bureaucracy. This volunteer effort could in time take over much of  
the massive logistical, combat, and advisory effort now being assumed  
by the U.S. official Americans.

d) Revitalize the American rural aid organization, called USOM *de-centralized* Rural Affairs, and give it more <sup>1</sup> flexibility in the use of funds and *in the provinces*, materials to support the "people" fight. <sup>1</sup> This organization and the rural aid effort, ~~which is~~ one of the few American operations recognized as having achieved some success, is currently being *downgraded* and *reorganized* <sup>"normalizing"</sup> dismantled in the interests of "*regularizing*" the AID Mission and its operations,

Third, we must devise a way for many more Americans to participate in this struggle and thus *under* our understanding of what is at stake in Vietnam, <sup>increase</sup> ~~and acquire a personal commitment as individuals to the cause of freedom there.~~ One American town, Newburyport, Mass., has already adopted and has been assisting Father Hoa's

village of Bink Hung in the Hai Yen Special District. <sup>a)</sup> ~~Other~~ <sup>Other</sup> Bereaguered towns and hamlets could be adopted by U.S. communities <sup>who would extend</sup> and a hand of <sup>the people</sup> assistance and hope ~~extended~~ to let ~~other~~ Vietnamese know that they are not alone in their fight. <sup>1</sup> This would be a people-to-people program

<sup>6) Exchange more</sup> ~~in the finest sense of the phrase. We could also exchange for more~~ ~~through American universities and press, medical and other pro-~~ ~~students, journalists and professional personnel with the Vietnam~~ <sup>associations</sup>

By-products of this might be the development of a more responsible

press in Vietnam and of a larger number of students volunteering to

serve their country rather than rioting in the streets, <sup>as well as</sup> ~~as well as~~ greater American understanding of Vietnam,

Finally, and above all in whatever we do we ~~must~~ use in Vietnam those non-material strengths of our heritage, those basic American ideals which have made our own country great, ~~and~~ not primarily our technical or material superiority. The essential ingredients of success in Vietnam are intangibles, the determination and courage of patriots and the excitation and constructive use of human *We Must* emotions and abilities. ~~May we rediscover the right answers from~~  
our own revolutionary heritage before it is too late.