

A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF VIETNAM

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FOREWORD

Since the overthrow of the Ngo Dinh Diem government in South Vietnam on 1 November 1963, five successive governments, badly shaken and sometimes radically reorganized as the result of eleven major crises, have unsuccessfully sought answers to the problems which proved insoluble for their predecessors.

Each political crisis produced an attempted coup d'etat. None led to a clear-cut change, such as in the November Revolution, but each effected a change in the relationships among the personalities seeking power. Each successive leader, proclaiming himself more righteous than his predecessors, sought to stabilize the government and consolidate national power -- but only upon his own terms.

Meanwhile the military situation took a more decisive turn with the notable battles of Binh Gia (Ihuoc Tuy), Ba-Gia (Quang Ngai), An Lao (Binh Dinh), Hill 159 (Quang Tin), Dong Xoai (Darlac) and the like. The Viet Cong also launched mortar attacks upon American bases at Bien Hoa, Pleiku and Danang. The rapid sequence of these events appeared to constitute an open challenge to a powerless and disunited government.

No one seriously questions that capable leadership is required if South Vietnam is to solve its problems effectively. Public opinion within the country, however, as well as abroad, tends to assume that the problems now apparent stem from a lack of qualified leaders whose talents, virtues and political backgrounds would ensure the support of the people. This assumption arises from a confusion of symptom with cause: the real disease afflicting the Vietnamese body politic is not lack of leaders, but lack of a solid ideological background supporting a political and military policy capable of defeating Communism.

In an atomic era preoccupied with intercontinental missiles and artificial satellites, the Communists continue, overtly and efficiently, to carry on an all-out, protracted, permanent and unconventional revolutionary war throughout the Afro-Asian and Latin American countries.

While the Communists naturally expect and receive support from their sponsors in the Soviet Union and Red China, in South Vietnam an unfortunate tendency is growing to look to the Free World for more and more assistance. Although the necessity for such support from friendly countries is inescapable, now more than ever before, aid to South Vietnam will achieve real significance in the worldwide struggle against Communist domination of underdeveloped countries only when the Vietnamese people stand up to assume their own full responsibilities before the bar of history.

The first requisite for victory in Vietnam is the development of a truly Vietnamese political and military policy so clear and well defined as to provide the foundation for a new national ideology capable of defeating Communism in this land and denying the enemy a foothold in other underdeveloped nations.

In a situation of ever-increasing complexity and confusion the task of determining the precise nature of our problems and their solutions is not an easy one. Encouraged by Charles T. R. Bohannon, who has long studied our common problems, and with the valued assistance of my friends Le Van Thuc and Vo Nhu Vong, I have undertaken in this book to present the facts as I have seen them, and to suggest certain courses of action.

If this work contributes to clearer understanding or more effective action on the part of those who may read this book, its aim will have been achieved.

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Twenty years of war experience against the Communists in Vietnam have proved that the outcome of that kind of war which the Communists call a Revolutionary War, or a National Liberation War, or a clash between the classes, cannot be decided solely by the open competition of two armies upon a battlefield. Rather, the outcome depends upon the employment of the total fighting force in political, social, economic and psychological fields. Hence, the military aspect of such a war is only a political tool appropriately employed during successive phases of a general war plan.

In accepting the concept that war is only a means to a political end, the Communists follow a very ancient axiom in the great struggles between men and men, between factions, and between nations. Recognizing that wars are fought to resolve major political conflicts, the Communists never lose sight of their real objective -- the minds of men. To control the minds of men the Communists seek always to motivate the whole population, to exploit the internal conflicts of their opponents, and to produce the crisis situations in which men's minds will be most receptive to the demagogic approach.

When the Japanese dream of "Great Asia" collapsed in the summer of 1945 under the impact of a pair of atomic bombs, many in the Free World assumed that old rules and old methods had succumbed to the absolute power of modern weaponry. Modern war strategy, they concluded, had shifted to a new stage: Communist notions about the decisive character of the struggle for men's minds were now outmoded. Despite this supposed entry into a new era of push-button warfare, however, the past twenty years have seen supposedly "old-fashioned" warfare continuing unabated -- especially in the underdeveloped and newly independent nations. Such wars are still being decided -- even in the shadow of a possible thermonuclear holocaust -- in the hearts and minds of men. As such wars drag endlessly on, the minds of men still constitute the true objective, the actual battleground, and the ultimate weapon.

During this twenty-year period the Communists defeated the French, although the French had absolute superiority in military strength and equipment. The Communists defeated Chiang Kai-shek and his army -- then considered the fifth largest in the world -- despite Chiang's successful eight years of resistance against the Japanese and his abundant American aid. Both French and Chinese were defeated, not by superior military force, but by superior strategy -- perhaps, more correctly, by superior political strategy.

Had the Free World been less subjective in its assurance that atomic superiority had made political warfare obsolete, or had it been less ready to despise an enemy of such obvious technical inferiority, the results might have been quite different, and our present situation in Vietnam far less dramatic.

For the Communists, the mobilization of the whole people is an accepted essential factor in their overall plan. The objectives of the war are not left to the military to achieve unaided, but are considered inseparable from the political struggle, where the organization of an effective local Communist Party can be a decisive plus factor. So long as the West ignores the real basis for Communist warfare -- the preparation of a suitable political situation through attention to all the social, cultural, economic, psychological and military aspects -- and recognizes only the military facet of the struggle, the Communists are left free to concentrate their strength upon their chosen targets.

Classic military theory holds that the objectives of warfare are threefold: to find and destroy the enemy's military forces; to break the enemy's will to resist; and to occupy the enemy's territory. In wars against Communism, our objectives -- largely ignored to date -- must be to win the support of the people and to break the Communist cadres' will to fight.

The support of the population for one side or the other will decide the outcome of the war in South Vietnam. We must recognize that this war is being fought among our own population and that conventional military tactics employed here without regard for the lives and property of the population are not only usually ineffective against the Communists, but have often proved profitable to the enemy. Because the Communists have successfully propagandized and indoctrinated the local population to a point where they can take refuge among the people when faced by superior conventional military forces, they have often been able to make common cause with the population as joint victims of military operations against them. Even if our past conventional military operations had enjoyed apparent complete success, we might still have lost, without realizing it, the real basis for strategic superiority in a political war -- the support of the population.

The Western view, in general, has tended to overemphasize military power and modern technology while largely ignoring the importance of the Communist concept of total warfare, in which every man's capabilities are exploited to the utmost in support of the overall plan. Especially in areas long under Communist domination and occupation, such exploitation has been undertaken with patience and care. Explanations of Communist objectives, assurances of the certainty of eventual victory, and detailed, individual efforts to enlist the full cooperation of each individual by a variety of methods have paid off for the Communists. Exploitation of the total capabilities of the population has served as a remarkably successful substitute for modern technology in many instances and has reduced the effectiveness of military superiority on our side.

It has often been suggested that the poverty of Asia provides fertile soil for Communism, and that the obvious solution is to counter with economic aid. But economic aid is not enough alone, appealing as such a solution must be by virtue of its very simplicity. The gains of Communism in Asia have not come through promises of a bigger rice bowl for the peasant, but through the careful exploitation of specific grievances, through appeals to feelings of nationalism and patriotism, through attacks upon social injustices in a corrupt and feudal milieu, through capitalizing upon local desires for a voice in their own affairs, and through the canalization of purely local sentiments or resentments.

CHAPTER ONE

If the West bases its aid upon an assumption that the patriotic spirit and culture of Asia equates with the low level of its economic status in underdeveloped countries, such aid will reflect a racial superiority complex certain to produce the conflicts made to order for Communist exploitation under the guise of promoting democracy and freedom. If aid to Asian peoples is to be effective, it must recognize Asian sensitivities and aim at the development, not of economic improvements alone, but of national patriotic spirit and just and democratic governments.

A second basic Communist concept holds that revolutionary wars are protracted wars, wars in which time and space are not absolutes, but inter-related factors in a total picture. Ready to learn from their mistakes, failures and delays, Communists stand able and willing to trade space for time, time for the organization of popular support, manpower for machinery, and politics for industrialization. Communists coolly accept the thesis that protracted wars will never end except with the annihilation of the enemy. Holding that the West, torn by its own internal contradictions, must ever try for quick victories and quick decisions, Communist theory concludes that the West, despite its ever-changing strategies aimed at a quick decision, is really capable only of fighting a kind of conventional war which ignores the political basis of the conflict. By Communist thinking, while such conventional efforts may impede the progress of Communism, they cannot change the final outcome. The West must eventually tire of protracted warfare without the possibility of victory and content itself, sooner or later, with face-saving negotiations leading to the inevitable concessions to Communism which will pave the way for Communist continuation of the struggle. One need hardly qualify as a military strategist to foresee the outcome of protracted conflicts in which one side is willing to continue quite indefinitely and the other is not.

The three basic assets of Communism in protracted wars are space, time and manpower. Because the Communists are willing to invest all three assets without limitation, the West finds it difficult, if not impossible, to estimate with any accuracy the ultimate scope and cost of such a war. The West therefore, in confusion, attempts to minimize its investment in any one such conflict by committing limited numbers of men and limited amounts of equipment to maintain a conventional war effort of measured dimensions. The really vital factors in this type of war -- the support of the native peoples and world support -- receive only secondary attention.

Some in the West, reasoning in a fashion which can only be termed simplistic, mechanistic and subjective, apparently pin their hopes on a disintegration of the Communist bloc arising from its own internal differences. But those who so readily adapt a Communist theory about the inevitability of internal explosions within Capitalism to fit their own hopes fail to recognize that such explosions in the Communist bloc are necessarily muffled; such internal conflicts can do no more than delay the timetable of the Communist master plan for world domination. There may indeed be changes in the Communist superstructure; centres of power may shift within the bloc; individual leaders may be replaced; but the basic objectives of Communism will never change as long as Communist protracted wars are successful.

A third concept of revolutionary warfare is Communist insistence upon its permanent character. So long as a non-Communist country maintains an independent existence, there can be no real peace in the world. What the West may term "peace," by Communist definition, is simply "another kind of warfare," waged without military fanfares. Mankind will never know true peace so long as Communism continues to profit from protracted revolutionary wars, with or without overt military aspects.

Communism finds it convenient to represent any conflict anywhere as part of the world-wide confrontation between Communism and its enemies. What may appear to the Free World as a purely internal affair is automatically treated by the Communists as part of the world struggle and dealt with accordingly. Any struggle anywhere -- with or without armies, violent or non-violent, political or psychological -- is part of the never-ending war. It may be termed "hot" or "cold" according to circumstances which vary in intensity and duration in each situation, but each description denotes only a time phase in the Communists' eternal war with the rest of the world.

Communist theorists have long been preoccupied with the view that the world is in a constant state of flux and change resulting from conflicting forces. When Karl Marx discovered the dialectic of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and surpassed even this past master of obscure writing to produce some of the most turbid prose in history, he was hardly breaking new ground. The ancients wrote often, in every known language, of the troubles which men's passion for change must bring. More recently, the English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, born exactly a century before the Glorious Revolution of 1688, opined that human society is always in a state of insecurity and that latent waves always exist which will change human society and its institutions.

But it remained for Communist pragmatists of the Lenin - Stalin mold to enunciate quite clearly the Communist view that warfare has no respites at all. When Lenin repudiated the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1920 with the blunt statement that any peace treaty signed with a capitalist country is simply a continuation of the war upon other terms, he spoke only the truth. Stalin's actions in World War II, when he concluded treaties first with the Germans and later with the Allies, were logically followed later by his occupation of eastern Europe and, after a startlingly brief participation in the Pacific War against Japan, Sakhalin Island, the Kuriles, Port Arthur and Dairen, and North Korea (effectively monopolizing the railways which served Mongolia, parts of China and North Vietnam). Thus Stalin demonstrated that the cessation of the military phase merely marked the beginning -- more properly, the resumption -- of the political war. While the West talked of eternal peace under the aegis of the United Nations the Communists moved boldly forward with their realistic plans for protracted war. While the Free World won the military victory in World War II, the political victory was Russian exclusively. Even while Franklin D. Roosevelt was seeing himself in the role of benefactor to humanity and his signature to the Yalta Agreement as the keystone of world peace, the Communists were viewing the situation more realistically. Ironically enough, only 48 hours after signing this document, a member of the Russian delegation, Andrei Vishinskiy, was answering a question from the then King of Romania about the execution of Yalta terms by shouting, "Yalta? I am Yalta!"

One of the most striking and unfortunate aspects of the contrast between Communist and Free World concepts of revolutionary warfare is the constant and considered exploitation -- and creation, wherever possible -- of internal conflicts within the enemy camp. The West, for a whole variety of reasons, has never chosen to give support to the genuinely internally-inspired revolts which have been attempted by native peoples behind the Iron Curtain. The cases of East Berlin in June of 1953 and Hungary in ^{Oct to Dec} November of 1956 are well known, and lamented by some as lost opportunities. Almost unknown in the western world, however, are the revolts of the people in North Vietnam such as the Quynh Luu uprising against Communist "agrarian reform" measures and

the ideologically inspired revolt of North Vietnamese intellectuals in the Nham-van Gial-pham movement, both occurring in late 1956. Had we been both able and willing to support such revolts by the people living under Communist oppression, we might at least have given the Communists a taste of their own medicine, while working to achieve a strategic parity from which to exercise our superior technical resources.

The contrast in our intent and preparation is illustrated in the events surrounding the Geneva Agreement of 1954. In transferring cadres and sympathizers to North Vietnam in accordance with the terms of the agreement, the Communists deliberately left behind many of their best and ablest hard-core cadres, and later, after training, returned many others born in the South. On the Free World side, those who fled to the South did so in such hasty and disorganized fashion that many family members were accidentally left behind -- not as democratic cadres, but simply as victims of bad management. Had we left in the North an equivalent number of clandestine nationalist cadres to match the Hanoi-directed cadres in the South, how different might have been the events which followed!

As of this writing, it becomes clearer each day that the Western concept that "weapons will decide everything" (a modern version of the Napoleonic aphorism about God's side in battle) is a fallacy. On the contrary, as the production and destructive power of atomic weapons steadily increases, the likelihood of their use steadily wanes. Mao is thus able upon the one hand to announce his dedication to peace and opposition to any war employing atomic weapons, saying, with Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, that such wars could mean the end of humanity on earth, while, on the other hand, he continues the development of nuclear weapons as rapidly as possible and continuously carries on another kind of warfare. For Mao, revolutionary warfare has proved both profitable and risk-free.

Meanwhile the Afro-Asian nations appear inclined to adopt a wait-and-see attitude, either because they recognize their own weakness or because they hope to gain some advantage by playing one side off against the other. Some would even like to assume the mediatory role between Communism and the Free World, while freely indulging their penchant for criticism only against that side which they correctly deem least likely to punish them later for their tamerity now. Hypersensitive to world opinion and yearning for peace, the West has yet to formulate a basic strategy for a long continued struggle, a strategy which could appeal to those now hanging in the balance.

The necessity for such a new strategy can no longer be denied by reference to the awesome power of thermonuclear weapons, intercontinental missiles, supersonic jets, Polaris submarines and the like -- not while every conflict waged under Communist ground rules continues to increase the balance of relative forces in favor of the Communists.

Lack of a positive Western strategy for a protracted struggle has enabled the Communists to copyright the short-range policies of "Neutrality" and "Co-existence" as escape routes to offer the very large, but weak, Afro-Asian bloc. Posing as proponents of peace, the Communists cunningly and hypocritically exploit the natural fear of under-developed countries in a critical situation which threatens to explode into an all-out war of nuclear destruction. With their own long-range objectives and strategy clearly before them, it is hardly surprising that the Communists encourage support for short-term policies which would leave them free to continue to wage their real war of revolution without hindrance or criticism. Meanwhile, the West continues to flounder as it searches for an escape from the dilemma created by a capacity for massive retaliation which it cannot employ, and an enemy determined to wage a protracted political war in which the Communist assets of space, time and manpower have thus far more than balanced the Free World's superior military power and technology.

END OF CHAPTER ONE