

A NEW POLICY FOR VIETNAM
Statement by the American Friends of Vietnam

THE DILEMMA

If we are to identify wisely our most effective forward course in Vietnam, it is important first to understand the exact nature of our dilemma there. We know the inherent generosity, both toward Free Vietnam and its neighboring countries, which has led us to involve our substance and our blood. We know that but for our commitment, Free Vietnam would long since have fallen into the political darkness and physical despair which oppresses Communist North Vietnam. We know that our presence there is in response to the wish of most segments of Vietnamese leadership, however they differ among themselves on other matters. We know that our presence there is earnestly desired by most neighboring countries of Southeast Asia. We know that our purpose is to assist responsible and responsive government and to enable Vietnam and its neighbors to maintain national independence against external encroachment. We know that we have neither wished to "establish" nor "dominate" a Vietnamese government nor to seek for ourselves political, military or economic advantage.

Our dilemma flows in part from the fact that this knowledge is not shared by all of the Vietnamese people, is not accepted by the members of the Vietcong, is not believed in parts of the less developed world still suffering the scars of recent colonial experience. Nor, in fact, is this understanding uniformly shared by our own people.

The dilemma is sharpened further by a spreading doubt among leadership elements in independent Southeast Asian countries that the U.S. has staying power. Thailand's foreign minister, Thanat Khoman, recently warned members of the Overseas Press Club: "The Thai government knows much better but some people are not sure we can depend on outside help -- especially when there is so much talk of quitting and going home. The Communists have never spoken that line of quitting. When they go some place they stay there."

In part, at least, this skepticism is fostered by the doubt among some Americans that any valid purpose led to our presence in Vietnam in the first place.

THE ALTERNATIVES

The lack of public understanding flows in part from inadequate examination of the alternatives confronting the U.S. now. In our opinion there are six choices:

1. Continue as now. Whether or not the Vietcong are, in fact, increasing their effectiveness there is a growing conviction in Saigon, in the U.S. and in much of the rest of the world, that this is so. This alone makes continuation of our present policy undesirable. The overriding hazard of the present policy is the undeniable fact that it has not provided sufficient psychological and political potency to sustain a Vietnamese government.

2. Withdraw. This would violate our pledge not to abandon the Vietnamese

people. It would manifest throughout the world a U.S. inability to long sustain an effort designed to frustrate Communist intentions. The implications would be read as eloquently in Berlin or in Cuba, as they would be in Vietnam, Indonesia, or India. There can be no question that this alternative would require the governments of the Philippines, Thailand, Taiwan, India, Japan, to reassess totally present policy and to reorient toward what would be the dominating new facts of Asian life.

("Neutralization" of Vietnam is not suggested here for a simple reason: genuine and reliable neutralization of Vietnam is not possible at the present time. What is most often talked of in this connection is merely a rhetorical euphemism designed to make withdrawal more palatable. On the other hand, the proposals discussed here are valuable in part precisely because they do hold the promise that they may generate sufficient Free Vietnamese vitality to make true and assured neutralization possible at some future time.)

3. Military cordon sanitaire across Vietnam and Laos. An estimated military force of up to 100,000 would be involved in making such a cordon truly effective and enemy penetration genuinely hazardous. Its greatest contribution would be in providing hard evidence of new determination to maintain Southeast Asian integrity. Although military effect of interdicting the Vietcong's transport and supply may be limited, it is nonetheless, one useful alternative, especially when employed with other steps outlined here.

4. Extend military action to the north. Until last week, steps taken in this direction were, in our judgment, not sufficiently explicit, either to rekindle Vietnamese faith in our intentions or to inspire confidence in other Asian countries that we are indeed willing to accept risk as the price of our commitment to freedom. The increased external, Communist intervention in South Vietnam has made it both reasonable and essential that there be a vigorous anti-communist military response. The limited air strikes in North Vietnam by American and Vietnamese planes constituted such an appropriate response.

There are many other forms of stronger American action and involvement and they are not mutually exclusive. They include:

a.) Formation of an open, well-publicized North Vietnam Liberation Movement sponsoring major psychological operations programs, including para-military action, against the North Vietnamese regime.

b.) Establishment of an International Voluntary Corps dedicated to the maintenance of free nations in the Mekong basin. This corps should consist primarily of volunteers from Asian countries but may also contain a liberal admixture of Americans with military experience. Operating normally in small units with sufficient air support, this force -- under the sponsorship of the proposed North Vietnam Liberation Movement -- would harass the enemy wherever suitable targets exist, including targets within North Vietnam.

c.) Positioning of United States combat forces within South Vietnam to act as a general reserve -- a sizable fire-fighting force. Such a military contingent (perhaps as many as two brigades) should not be used for routine combat or security duties, but as an immediate-reaction fighting force intended to engage Vietcong troops in fixed positions. Desirably, combat elements from other nations will be attached to this force.

d.) Continued bombing of selected military targets in North Vietnam. In contrast to the indiscriminate terrorist activity of the Vietcong in South Vietnam, the Free World's concern for the Vietnamese people in both halves of the country makes it undesirable for us to conduct warfare upon cities where the innocent will be hurt. However, those military targets in North Vietnam which are vital to their aggressive capability and which can be destroyed with our assistance are, in our view, legitimate targets for stage-by-stage destruction.

What is the risk involved in such action? In our judgment the possibility of Chinese involvement in South Vietnam would be only slightly increased. The possibility of Chinese "help" thrust upon North Vietnam would be greater. However, this probability may be precisely what is needed to make clear to even the most communist leaders of North Vietnam how undesirable such "help" is to them in the long run. A heightened awareness of this danger might, in fact, force greater restraint upon the government in Hanoi than our present policy can achieve.

Frankly, however, the direct military damage inflicted on the Communist regime in North Vietnam is the lesser of our reasons for suggesting that these steps be undertaken. In our opinion, it is urgent that the people of Free Vietnam be assured that President Johnson means what he says -- that we mean to stay and help, no matter what risks we must incur. It is equally urgent that these intentions be understood also in Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, the rest of Asia and the world. Staunch, long-term American commitment -- fully communicated and understood -- would provide a lift to morale in Free Vietnam, inject new vitality in the Vietnamese government and require a new assessment of the United States among neighboring countries and among Asian allies elsewhere.

There is one final reason we support this painful course of action. Basic requirements for victory in Vietnam are not primarily military. They are psychological, social and economic. Below we address ourselves to instruments which can meet the non-military aspects of the undertaking. But neither the economic nor political measures we propose will get off the ground without evidence of the seriousness of our military intention. Nor will our military commitment produce the desired results without the companion economic and psychological supports.

America's experience in relation to the instability in post-war Europe is clearly relevant. The Marshall Plan did not begin to come to life until the physical security promised by NATO was added. Nor would NATO by itself have been meaningful without the human vision and economic future presented by the Marshall Plan.

5. Forging a more popular or responsive government. It is clear that the difficulties confronting any Vietnamese government under Communist attack are enormous. We can but sympathize with those who carry the burdens of government in circumstances so frustrating and continuously demanding. It is possible that 20 years of civil war, colonial war, and Communist insurrectionary war, have so debilitated the structure of government as to preclude the immediate possibility, no matter how desirable, of absolutely stable government. There are political personalities with nationalist backgrounds who are deserving of our help and encouragement. We must do what we can to help them and bring them forward. At the same time, we must help to diminish

the present conflict of personalities that has proved in past years to be so destructive. In any event, we believe it is futile to concentrate, as we have in the past, on personalities, rather than on purposes, ideas and institutions.

6. Injection of new purpose. If charismatic leadership is unavailable, charismatic purpose can be found. One aspect of that purpose involves the modest extension of military effort discussed above. It involves the clear demonstration that the United States means to remain committed even at enlarged risk. And such charismatic purpose must, of necessity, accept as workable "the best available choices of Vietnamese government personnel" -- choices made by the Vietnamese not by us. But our object would be to harness our military commitment and the Vietnamese effort to an infinitely larger objective than has previously motivated our participation. It would make crystal clear that the objectives which unite us with the Vietnamese people, as with our other allies in Southeast Asia, are constructive and inextricably linked to the welfare of all Southeast Asian peoples.

We suggest that all of our military, political and economic programs in Vietnam be subordinated to a massive Southeast Asian development program. A Johnson plan for the full flowering of Southeast Asian economic resources and independence will have as much potency and promise for success in that corner of the world as the Marshall Plan did in Europe and the Tennessee Valley Authority in the United States.

The Mekong Basin is one of the world's richest and least developed areas. In an area of the world already food rich there is an opportunity to harness the tributaries of the Mekong Basin toward an economic flowering offering infinite promise to Laos, Cambodia and Thailand as well as to South Vietnam, and offering to the people and the government of North Vietnam economic opportunity which only their blindness or non-cooperation can frustrate. To Burma, Malaysia and even India, this would present an opportunity in both economic and political terms which, especially at this moment, could not possibly be more desirable. To the Philippines such a program would provide the same magnetic opportunity for participation as led them generously to create and man Operation Brotherhood a decade ago. It would also offer the first possibility of really involving the wealth and energy of the Japanese government and people. A Johnson development plan for Southeast Asia would manifest to the entire world that the welfare of the people of Southeast Asia is our only purpose.

The Mekong Basin development program will provide for the first time a future-oriented thrust around which a Vietnamese resurgency program can be made vital and toward which the efforts of Americans, Japanese, Lao, Thai, Cambodians and Filipinos can hopefully be attracted.

THE MISSING LINK

Within the last three years the Communist nations have revealed their inability to meet their own most pressing economic needs. The short-cut to the future has suddenly proved to be a dead-end of economic failure, recrimination and political embarrassment. But this has not frustrated the "wars of national liberation" nor prevented the Communists from mounting insurrectionary warfare whether in Congo or Vietnam. National governments and native peoples assaulted by such Communist purposes have, at best, sought to sustain their own energy through defensive effort. Virtually unused has been the

enormous potential for hope which can be found only in the non-Communist world, cooperatively employing the resources of the U.S. and nations friendly to it whether in Asia, the Pacific or Western Europe.

We have offered to the Vietnamese people our assistance in their struggle for national independence. We have failed, however, to harness that struggle and our assistance to an all but miraculous future, a flowering of man, his capabilities, his resources, his aspirations. Ours indeed is the truly revolutionary opportunity. The Johnson plan offers to Southeast Asia a genuine opportunity to harness nature, enlarge justice, extend life, eradicate the scourges of illness and illiteracy and enable long-suffering peoples to reap the fruits of their soil and the permanent benefits of national independence. Behind this large vision, men throughout the world may be led to voluntary association in Lincoln Brigades, Gandhi Brigades, Magsaysay and Marti Brigades -- an international volunteer corps for peace and freedom.

The Johnson plan for the development of the Mekong Basin has, in our judgment, the following potential, essentially unavailable in the present circumstances:

1. It will inject dramatic, viable and politically potent new purpose adequate to sustain popular support of Vietnamese government leaders.
2. It will infuse new energy into the Vietnamese already risking their lives in daily defense against the Vietcong.
3. The plan offers concrete reasons for the cooperative involvement of neighboring Southeast Asian countries as well as a generous commitment able to sustain emotionally an international corps of volunteers.
4. It contains an enormous incentive to North Vietnam to turn away from its present fratricidal course.
5. Finally, the Johnson plan constitutes a pioneering laboratory of hopeful consequence to other less developed areas where Communist insurrectionary warfare presently finds soil in which to sow the seeds of destruction.