



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS  
CNO EXECUTIVE PANEL  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20350


IN REPLY REFER TO  
WAC/fmp  
15 April 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR ADMIRAL ZUMWALT

Subj: VN "Lessons Learned"

1. In connection with the WSJ material I sent you earlier, it occurs to me that one of the more prevalent myths being propagated by the media and elements on the hill is that the Vietnam episode "proved" U.S. military power could not resolve the problem posed in Southeast Asia. If this view is widely accepted, it will downgrade public perceptions of the utility of military power generally, hence support for an adequate defense posture.
2. It seems to me that someone ought to rebut this popular hypothesis and point out that the restraints which were imposed on the use of military power in Southeast Asia effectively prevented it from attaining a satisfactory and timely solution to the problem. At the very least, we should regard it as an open question, and not leap to the conclusion that American military power was shown to be "ineffective".
3. If the point is to get any visibility, prominent personalities will have to associate themselves with it. The current chiefs are unlikely to say anything like this publicly. Retired chiefs have more freedom of action. Do you think some of them could be induced to associate themselves with a statement on the subject? If they did, I think it would get national publicity. The language would have to be carefully cast so they don't come across like a bunch of Curt LeMays (or Westmorelands); but I think it could be managed, if you believe the idea has any merit.
4. In this connection, it is interesting that the recent Harris Poll on attitudes toward defense issues showed that the public, by 41% to 35%, thought Vietnam showed we should not attempt to fight a war by "tying the hands of the military". This proposition was rejected, however, by "leaders" polled, 15% to 79%. I suspect this is another case where the public is ahead of its "leaders"; but action to reinforce the plurality of public views, and hopefully influence some of the "leadership" views could be useful.

Very respectfully,

  
W. A. COCKELL  
Captain, U.S. Navy

*I have replied to  
telco - put in  
OOLC file 2*