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A New Strategy for Vietnam and Southeast Asia

When a structure crumbles, it is usually a good idea to make a new mix of cement, sand and water. That is what Vietnam and Southeast Asia need.

A political approach and regional treatment should receive primary priority because our policies there have tended to overemphasize the military and undermine the area's requirements. At this late stage, only an unorthodox and rather radical four point political strategy has any chance of turning the tide and establishing an acceptable stabilization.

Political Resurgence, Instant Defense, Military Insulation and Regional Development are the four interdependent components of a strategy which could bring independence, security and peace to Southeast Asia in this century. Like a four-sided structure, each component is indispensable and vital for the others. We must not overlook one and expect the others to work. Together they represent a revision and realignment of our current objectives, programs and organizations in order to arrest the deterioration in Southeast Asia and achieve the general purposes already determined by President Johnson and endorsed in the Joint Resolution of Congress on Southeast Asia.

This Four Point Plan does not envisage major escalation of the war on one hand nor negotiated abdication of our commitment on the other. It does call for increased American political and military intervention in Southeast Asia as the only means to stabilize this region and eventually close out our intervention safely for our national interest.

Political Resurgence: This means the creation of a revitalized political base among the people in the countryside and the cities. The key to reversing the deterioration in Vietnam lies in political action rather than military operations as Ambassador Lodge so aptly emphasizes. This means a new "civilianized" not "militarized" sponsorship and leadership in Saigon and out in the countryside. We must operate at two different levels of politics in Vietnam because rural and urban conditions and peoples are so different. But in both cases the basic purpose of Political Resurgence is political: The Vietnamese must rally to their own future, conduct reform and defend themselves with their own leaders, and become impervious and invulnerable to subversion and insurgency of the terrorist and guerrilla.

Political Resurgence consists of three essentials: a political manifesto, a political action campaign, and a political reform program. As to the first, the Vietnamese must have a set of their own purposes for generating popular allegiance, enthusiasm and sacrifice. They need a convincing "Declaration of Solidarity, Welfare and Freedom" outlining the political principles, beliefs, objectives and reforms subscribed to and acted upon by the National, Provincial, and local administrations and all officialdom throughout South Vietnam and broadcast or dropped into North Vietnam. For example, such a manifesto could guarantee the rights and aspirations of individuals, families, hamlets, and associations free from alien control. It could proclaim (and enforce) a Code of Ethics and Conduct for all officials. It could call for significant social and

economic reforms and provide for general consultative organs for the hamlets and for regional religious, ethnic and urban political groups. It would appeal to the people for suggestions and promise action on their complaints. At all events it would be for the Vietnamese to draw up their own manifesto of goals in their own style and manner.

The central prerequisite to turning the tide in Vietnam is a new psychological-political campaign to organize community representatives who are the villagers' genuine choice and "outside" people who gain the villagers' real trust. Only if a political action campaign first wins the allegiance and inspires the confidence of the rural people can Resurgency, Instant Defense, Vietnam's Insulation, and Regional Development succeed.

Like organizing a union, promoting a social demonstration or campaigning for election, Resurgency will require the recruiting of organizers experienced in political action, the spotting of natural leaders and groups on whom a community leans for advice or initiative, the identifying of the real needs and problems of the community which will generate response and innovation by the people, and the organizing of the needed resources and group actions.

This political action campaign at the precinct and hamlet level will need three instrumentalities: a National Resurgency Corps, Revolutionary Circles, and Rural Centers. The focus of Political Resurgency is The Younger Generation, particularly the educated trained youths. They can provide the energy and drive to get the political program going. Such a Corps of young people would be mobilized to generate political resurgence in the hamlets and the cities, draw out and help train local leaders, assist in setting up genuine authentic local organizations, and build up regional or functional groups into broad social movements of farmers, workers, intellectuals, notables, Buddhists, Catholics, the Sects, etc.

For rural resurgence the National Resurgency Corps would organize and fill a "honeycomb" of "resurgent" hamlets in what might be called a "revolutionary circle". This would surround a dozen or more hamlets around a specially-selected "town", a rural center and "strong-point" providing a schedule of political, social, economic and military services. With our revolution of abundance, the United States and other friends of Vietnam could funnel a vast amount of skills, supplies, equipment and materiel into rural centers and out to the resurgent hamlets in each revolutionary circle. By a systematic program circles would become tangential and interlocking to fill honeycombs until all South Vietnam is covered in depth.

To fill the honeycomb, rural resurgence can and must be planned and scheduled systematically on a detailed basis like any political campaign. The total number of revolutionary circles and resurgent hamlets can be calculated and the priority or target areas for scheduling their programming can then begin. This will determine how many Vietnamese

and foreign political action organizers, technical advisers, and village leaders it will be necessary to recruit, train and assign to specific circles and hamlets in a time-phased plan. Americans and other foreigners, particularly Asians, with much experience and know-how in political action and organization would be the turnkey to Resurgency. A systematic regional resurgency plan within Vietnam would also determine when, where, and how supplies and equipment would be channelled and what specific political and other results to complete on target or "success" dates.

But the program of political action must simultaneously launch real social and economic reforms to make the manifesto and organization of resurgency convincing and appealing to the rural and urban people. A truly dynamic land reform program based on honest distribution of land to farmers with a moratorium on land and tax payments is essential along with cheap rural credit, cheap fertilizers and other tangible agricultural aid. But such aid would be determined by and channelled into local organizations developed out of genuine local leadership and popular response in the political action campaign, such as cooperatives and farmers' unions. Political action and political reform reinforce each other.

To summarize Political Resurgency:

1. There must be new regional and local leadership reflecting national purposes while representing village people fearlessly, independently, and authentically.
2. There must be social and economic reforms planned both on a long-term and a "crash" basis and implemented rapidly and vigorously.
3. There must be a systematic integration and programming of political action, reforms, and security area by area, village by village.

In short, a dynamic movement of Political Resurgency could succeed under foreseeable conditions in reducing communist terrorism and insurgency to a nasty nuisance if a Vietnamese-Free World partnership vigorously undertakes those four internal operations as a whole. Only by tackling the problems of the countryside, the village and the farmer as an entity can we win in Vietnam.

Instant Defense: This is the second interdependent component of a political and regional strategy. There must be security in villages and across the countryside. Progress and protection go hand in hand. Good politics needs good police and vice versa. Without constant and instant protection for each hamlet, no progress on political resurgency can be sustained. Thus, Instant Defense is a paramilitary counterpart of resurgency. With a new political morale and organization on the move, Vietnamese can create and apply a new and unorthodox form of local, fluid warfare which I call "instant defense". If the political campaign takes hold, there will be young people - as in Israel - motivated, trained and reliable for seeking out the terrorist and Vietcong guerrilla bands day and night.

The terrorist or guerrilla in Southeast Asia is nowhere and everywhere at once. How to find him, flush him, and finish him is the dilemma we are farther and farther from solving each year. Air power, fire power, mass power in air strikes, battalions, or artillery cannot do this mean nasty task any more than a wolfhound can unearth a weasel. Americanized military strength should be employed to contain massed Viet Minh strength not to ferret out the furtive, elusive enemy. To evaporate the fluid, seeping warfare of the political terrorist and guerrilla another and complementary tactic is needed. For this we must throw away military orthodoxy and create a new kind of "instant defense".

This would be a small, fast, lightly-equipped mobile combat group selected from the Popular Force (formerly the Self Defense Corps and the Hamlet Militia) and made up of 50 reliable volunteers from a "revolutionary circle" who would be willing to die for their hamlet and devote several days at a time to searching out Vietcong. These mobile combat groups should operate around the clock in scheduled relays. They should afford daily and hourly protection to the hamlets in each "revolutionary group", and sweep their circle in constant surveillance to track down and flush out suspected Vietcong agents or guerrilla units. If the latter were large or heavily armed, the instant volunteers would radio for Army attack.

These popular village commando forces should be equipped differently from the regular Vietnamese Army. Their weapons and equipment should be specially suited to meet their special mission such as the M-16 rifles, needle or "flechette" guns, light personal gear and food capsules, and small radios. A local organization of "air jeeps" should be provided by the United States for fast transportation and constant air reconnaissance.

Insulation of Vietnam: This is the third interdependent component of a new strategy for Vietnam and Southeast Asia. I have long argued that American combat deployment is required to bolster the responsibility of the Vietnamese for defense of their country, insulate it from significant communist infiltration and clean out the Lao panhandle. Although all infiltration cannot be stopped, the seepage of communist aggression can be plugged here and there if not completely sealed off even by us.

Minimally, it would seem desirable to station highly mobile mixed combat groups at strategic points along the border areas between South Vietnam and Laos and between South Vietnam and Cambodia, where most of the infiltration from North Vietnam occurs. American and Vietnamese special forces contingents should be substantially increased to help achieve this broad purpose. Khmers, montagnards, and some Lao tribal groups should continue to be utilized to help secure these border zones.

However, insulation of Vietnam alone is not enough. Regional military interposition of Allied forces to enforce the cease-fire in Laos and nullify the communist sanctuaries is necessary. Vietnamese and selected national units of several members of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) should undertake hot pursuit and reprisal attacks against specific military targets in Laos and North Vietnam when military circumstances in South Vietnam or Laos demand this.

Furthermore, Allied forces should declare a "hold-fast" line running across Laos from the 17th parallel on the Vietnamese-Laos border to the 110th longitude and 23rd parallel, just northwest of Nam Tha near China. The "hold-fast" line or zone would seal off the Lao panhandle from further communist staging for aggression into South Vietnam and thus keep the Mekong Valley below the line out of communist military control. Moreover, the "hold-fast" line would match the northern boundaries of the Mekong Basin watershed which would dovetail nicely with the fourth interdependent strategic component, regional development. The means of insulation and interposition would have to be spelled out in considerable detail. There are several alternate ways to carry them out. But in all likelihood, they would not "escalate" the war to a point that would provoke involvement of North Vietnamese or Chinese troops and thus create a larger conflict, particularly if we engage in a vigorous regional diplomacy.

Regional Development: As for the fourth component, the American people need a clearly-defined and easily-visible objective in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. It must carry conviction, make an affirmative appeal, and justify military involvement. Instead of "compartmentalizing" Vietnam, Laos and Southeast Asia, U.S. policy would secure American support if it promoted the objective of a regional development tying together the three other political and military components of strategy.

President Johnson should propose a new conference to arrange for a large-scale, 30-year plan for the development of the water and power resources of the Mekong River Basin with international guarantees, resources and management under UN auspices. This regional development would comprise the four riparian, mainly Buddhist nations of South Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Since they are now cooperating extraordinarily well to complete the preparation of such development, we have a nucleus to expand into a Regional Plan, for these four countries and the UN have about completed the pre-investment work. Construction can begin when there is a secure peace.

A Plan for the Mekong Basin would have many advantages if all sides - non-communist, neutral and communist - agreed to a "let-live" pact to enable such regional development to proceed. It would serve to pacify tensions and remove the seeds of war in Southeast Asia. It would strengthen the self-determination of these four riparian nations, and improve the living standards of their rural people. It could utilize the immunity of the UN for non-partisan development, attract universal endorsement, and neutralize communist ambitions. Such a structure of regional development could thus provide a new kind of moral, political, and territorial integrity for this tormented region of Southeast Asia. If generally accepted, it could offer all concerned a tolerable and practical way out from war. How to go about this Mekong Plan would challenge our diplomacy.

Instead of nebulous neutralization of Southeast Asia, reconvening another sterile Geneva Conference of fourteen members, rehabilitating the obsolete Geneva Agreements of 1954 and 1962, or withdrawing futilely from Southeast Asia, we could propose a new international conference with

a new mission. The participants could include those fourteen countries plus seven additional ones having a special interest in or contribution to make to the Mekong region: Japan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand and the Federal Republic of Germany. This Twenty-One Power Conference could work out the terms of a new cease-fire line and a demilitarized zone for Laos, reciprocal guarantees and observance of non-intervention for all four riparian states, and arrangements for establishing and financing a Thirty-Year Mekong Project. Then, the United Nations General Assembly could cap it all with a resolution of enablement for a "Mekong Valley Authority". Both Vietnams in a separate "let-live" agreement could participate in Mekong development and establish social and economic relations with each other.

There are other, non-Mekong lines of area-wide development to pursue. These would highlight such political idiograms as: Bulldozers for bombers; kilowatts for megatons; rice for gunpowder; books for bullets; volunteers for peace instead of for terror; program goals; new homes, not burned huts. The United States could now suggest international action in four fields: food, transport, education, and health.

More food is needed for this whole area. Fish are an enormously productive resource, yet the fishing industry is backward. It needs modernization of catching, canning and consuming. This would provide healthy, high protein diet. An international plan and program could bring in the Japanese and others. Then, fertilizer distribution needs expansion. Fertilizer "banks" and farmer cooperatives could distribute and train in agricultural service centers. Also regional fertilizer production by private industry would provide supplies. Rice banks and food ships would meet the food shortage in Indonesia, North Vietnam and in parts of these countries where there is a diet shortage. South and North Vietnam could exchange rice and minerals.

Transportation is a critical shortage and bottleneck to development. Railroads in Southeast Asia need expansion from Hanoi to Singapore. Major roads as well as small farm-to-market roads in a 10-year plan, country by country as well as regionally, would stimulate economies. Rivers and canals should also be used more. For coastal and ocean shipping, Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia could develop a regional shipping enterprise.

In education, a production center in Southeast Asia for materials for primary schools is urgent. There is no paper, books, or chalk in the rural villages. Materials for the teachers at the rural level are lacking. Then, the U.S. could get together a conference of the education ministers to see what they come up with - something specific, to produce results in a short time. At a higher level, the U.S. could sponsor a consortium for an Asian Technological Institute and an Asian Management Institute.

For health, we could initiate an international "Operation Brotherhood" for hospital ships, flying doctors (as in Australia), and mobile clinics.

New types of organizations are needed for regional development:

1. For rural development - "Operation Seedbed", agricultural service centers in a development circle in each country and a few across frontiers. They would train farmers and extension workers, build fertilizer mixing plants, animal and poultry feed mills, provide water storage and roads for farm-to-market.

2. The new town-centered strategy focused on creating new services and markets in a town with smaller numbers of people than the city but larger than tiny hamlets. People could come for marketing, schools, etc. The U.S. presented this idea at the ECAFE Conference in 1964.
3. Housing in the cities. We should work out some combination of selling food and depositing funds for home building in urban areas.
4. A Southeast Asian Development Association. It could implement ideas, would be a working forum for these ideas, encourage a Common Market approach, act as a clearing house, and set up working parties to carry some line of regional development from something immediately manageable to something complex like a TVA on the Mekong.