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Findings and Recommendations of Special Nine-Member Fact- Finding Commission Upon Returning from Vietnam

The Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, founded in October 1967 by the late President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Former President Harry S. Truman, Former Senator Paul H. Douglas, and 127 other distinguished private citizens, recently sent a special nine-member, bipartisan fact-finding commission to Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Paris to study and report on the war in Vietnam.

The members of the commission were: Dr. Edmund A. Gullion, Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, and Former U.S. Ambassador to the Congo; John W. Hanes, Jr., Former Assistant Secretary of State, and Partner, Wertheim & Co.; Mrs. Oswald B. Lord, Former U.S. Representative on Human Rights Commission, United Nations; Russell T. Lund, President, Lund's Inc., Minneapolis, and Chairman, Board of Trustees, Gustavus Adolphus College; Lester Malkerson, Chairman, Board of Regents, University of Minnesota; Rabbi Schulem Rubin, New York; Charles J. Stephens, Graduate Student, University of California; Charles Tyroler, II, President, Quadri-Science, Inc., Washington; and Abbott Washburn, President, Washburn, Stringer Associates, Inc., Washington.

At the present juncture of the war in Vietnam and the peace negotiations in Paris, the findings and recommendations of this special fact-finding commission seem especially pertinent, and are reproduced in their entirety below. (A more detailed report is in preparation, and will be available from the Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, 1028 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington, D. C. 20036, later in September.)

Findings

1. Since TET, the enemy in Vietnam has become much weaker, our side much stronger. This is chiefly because of the enemy's staggering losses, General Abrams' small unit spoiling tactics, and the mobilization of the South

Vietnamese people which is one of the greatest in modern times.

2. Progress is striking but precarious. Since TET the enemy has won no victory, taken and held no ground, sustained no major long-term engagement and has fallen back chiefly on hit-and-run tactics. The South Vietnamese Army found its soul at TET and in the mass graves of Hue. Since TET it has won victories, expanded its ground, taken over the defense of provinces and an entire corps area, and inflicted far greater casualties on the enemy than he has upon them. Peasants are returning to the fields, rice production is up, increasing numbers of local elections are being held, the number of defections to our side is increasing and the enemy keeps the fight going in the South by infusion of troops from the North.

3. Yet the enemy retains a kind of initiative through use of his sanctuaries on Laos and Cambodia and north of the DMZ. If he is willing to bleed himself white he can still, for short periods, double American casualties. If American and Vietnamese commanders are not able or are not allowed to deny him access to certain corridors, our casualty rolls could go still higher. Our commanders know this and we were tremendously impressed with their concern to spare American lives.

4. The South Vietnamese must still rely for some time to come upon United States troop lift, air support, staff assistance and reserves. Progress on the political and pacification front is gratifying but still vulnerable.

5. In this situation timing is crucial, particularly with respect to the substitution of Vietnamese troops for Americans. *The policy of reciprocal de-escalation is feasible, provided the withdrawal of U.S. forces is closely geared to demonstrated improvement in South Vietnamese capabilities and is not forced prematurely by war-weary American public opinion.*

6. To our surprise we found the Vietnamese eager —

perhaps over eager for the transfer. The first withdrawals have actually stimulated them. However they see the whole process as gradual, related to their own progress and involving at the end an important American residual logistical presence.

7. President Nixon has made three stipulations for U.S. force reduction of which we consider South Vietnamese progress the cardinal one. As to the other two — reduction in the enemy's military activity and progress at Paris — the so-called "lull" in the fighting collapsed while we were in Vietnam. We do not believe such "lulls" mean that the enemy is trying to tell us anything, only that he has had to fall back and regroup.

8. As to the Paris peace talks, they have not failed but they have shown no progress of the kind the President stipulates. They have, however, served to demonstrate that the enemy is unwilling to face the challenge of free elections, wants the United States to throw the Thieu government out, then wants the United States itself to get out unconditionally after having installed a coalition government for the future convenience of Hanoi. There has seldom been a clearer case of a belligerent's trying to recoup at the conference table what he is losing on the battlefield.

9. As a result of all this, a kind of protracted "stand-off" seems to be looming in Vietnam. If the President, the American and South Vietnamese people stick by Mr. Nixon's three criteria and if the South Vietnamese succeed in cementing a political consensus, there is a better than even chance that the "stand-off" will be resolved in favor of peace with freedom. If we pull out prematurely the enemy can reverse the tide running against him, complete his subjugation not only of Vietnam but of adjoining territory and we will have lost more than 38,000 American lives in vain.

10. In Laos and Thailand we became more aware of the possible effect of a premature American withdrawal on other countries in Asia. In Laos we noted that the North Vietnamese invaders' unprecedented success during the rainy season had coincided with the so-called "lull" in Vietnam. In Thailand our visit coincided with the move by the Thai government to reduce the United States forces, a decision which, however conditional and hedged toward gradualness, must give comfort to the enemy.

Recommendations

1. That the substitution of Vietnamese for United States troops take place on the basis of demonstrated improvement in South Vietnamese capabilities; the American policy should be: "cut and look" not "cut and run."
2. That no time table be proclaimed and that any schedule for planning purposes be flexible.
3. That President Nixon and General Abrams set up an extraordinary commission to assess ARVN progress; and that this commission inquire into whether "Vietnamization" can in fact involve a more rapid rate of modernization and activation than was laid down in schedules before "Vietnamization" became a by-word publicly linked with U.S. force reduction.
4. That American editors and correspondents and USIA give much more coverage to ARVN sacrifices and progress.
5. That the United States continue to urge the Vietnamese government to broaden its base and find new support in the countryside. The object should be a government which can not only prosecute the war but which can also face up to the enemy in the stand-off which will follow United States reduction and can speak more authentically in peace negotiations. Such a broadening should not, however, prefigure the kind of peace-at-any-price coalition Hanoi would like to see imposed without elections.
6. The United States should recognize the political benefit which can accrue from the proposed new land reform program and give appropriate assistance.
7. The United States and South Vietnam should stand firm at Paris for free elections, against a coalition prior to elections, and against unilateral withdrawals (despite the fact that we already seem to have begun them).
8. That the United States, consistent with the accords of 1962, try to expedite the equipment of Laotian forces; and that our stand on the withdrawal of forces apply to Laos as well as to Vietnam.
9. That the United States give what explanations and assurances as it can to its Asian allies about the purposes and implications of U.S. force reductions.

August 28, 1969