

Our action in Vietnam appears to many Americans to have been taken in violation of the spirit, and probably of the letter, of the United Nations Charter which was properly ratified by Congress. Our actions are in clear violation of the Geneva Agreements of 1954, which we did not sign but which we agreed to respect. It seems questionable whether we followed the provisions of the SEATO treaty for consultation with other powers. In short, our unilateral actions in Vietnam have caused our government's word to be doubted.

Myth 7. If we leave, all Southeast Asia will fall as dominoes.

Reality: The major force in Asia is Asian nationalism, or, as the beguiling Japanese slogan in World War II said, "Asia for the Asians." This is a drive for native rule and complete independence from European or American domination. As mainland China has shown, this means independence from Soviet Communism. The revolutionary forces of Asia are mainly nationalist with a touch of Marxism adapted to local conditions. Communism in Asia is more splintered than in Europe.

Vietnam has fought off Chinese aggression for centuries. It may become "Communist" but unless we force it to become completely dependent upon Peking, it is likely to be to Mao what Yugoslavia was to Stalin — a thorn in his side. Our war against Communism is strengthening it by uniting diverse and antagonistic Communist groups. Without us as their common enemy they might be fighting each other.

Former Secretary of Defense, Clark M. Clifford, in the summer of 1967 was asked by President Johnson to visit our Pacific allies along with General Maxwell Taylor. The purpose of the trip was to get these countries to increase their troop commitment in South Vietnam. Mr. Clifford, in the *Foreign Affairs* article referred to earlier, says in part: "It was strikingly apparent to me that the other troop-contributing countries no longer shared our degree of concern about the war in South Vietnam. General Taylor and I urged them to increase their participation. In the main, our plea fell on deaf ears . . ."

"The President of the Philippines advised President Johnson that he preferred we not stop there because of possible adverse public reaction. The Philippines, so close and ostensibly so vulnerable if they accepted the domino theory, had sent a hospital corps and an engineer battalion to Vietnam, but no combat troops. It was also made clear to President Johnson that they had no intention of sending any combat personnel . . ."

"Australia, then with a much smaller population, had been able to maintain well over 300,000 troops overseas in World War II. They had sent only 7,000 to Vietnam . . . But Prime Minister Holt, who had been fully briefed, presented a long list of reasons why Australia was already close to its maximum effort.

"In New Zealand . . . officials . . . made it clear that any appreciable increase was out of the question. New Zealand at one time had 70,000 troops overseas in the various theaters of World War II. They had 500 men in Vietnam. I naturally wondered if this was their evaluation of the respective dangers of the two conflicts.

"I returned home puzzled, troubled, concerned. Was it possible that our assessment of the danger to the stability of Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific was exaggerated? Was it possible that those nations which were neighbors of Vietnam had a clearer perception of the tides of world events in 1967 than we? Was it possible that we were continuing to be guided by judgments that might once have had validity but were now obsolete? In short, although I still counted myself a staunch supporter of our policies, there were nagging, not-to-be suppressed doubts in my mind."

Later in the article Mr. Clifford recommends withdrawal from Vietnam of all U. S. combat forces by the end of 1970.

Myth 8. We have support from much of the Free World for our war in Vietnam.

Reality: Only two countries free of U. S. domination supply troops to Vietnam. They are Australia and New Zealand, and they have sent only token forces. In both countries, these troops were an issue in recent elections, and the strength of the Administrations which sent them was cut deeply. The Philippines have withdrawn their token force after it became a key political issue. South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand — heavily dependent on U. S. aid and military strength — have troops in Vietnam, and, according to a Senate sub-committee study, we have actually paid for them; they are, in effect, mercenaries.

The New York Times, December 1, 1969, reports: "Informed Congressional sources said that it had cost the United States about one billion dollars to obtain the deployment of a Thai division to fight in South Vietnam."

Myth 9. We can fight the war and make much progress at home.

Reality: Since the escalation of the Vietnam War, prices have risen 20 percent in an inflation that threatens our economic stability, our export market, and our balance of international payments. War costs have starved the cities of funds needed for schools, recreation, law and order, housing and the poor. The war has required raising taxes all along the line. By the close of the next fiscal year, Vietnam will have cost us \$110 billion. The greatest costs are yet to come, in veterans' benefits and interest on the debt. As of today, veterans payments cost us almost twice as much as federal public welfare assistance. Price inflation is offsetting wage gains and making it harder and harder on persons with fixed incomes. The value of our dollar is in danger and foreign bankers are in a position to force us off the gold standard. All this because of Vietnam.

Myth 10. The end of the war will produce a bloodbath.

Reality: The war itself is a bloodbath beyond any savagery in modern times. Our weapons of mass destruction wantonly kill troops and civilians. Hospitals are filled with children burned by our napalm, women and non-combatants whose bones are shattered by our anti-personnel weapons. The "Pinkville" massacre is worse than Lidice, for all inhabitants, except those who escaped by being beneath the pile of bodies, were killed. The other side, too, has killed indiscriminately. However, Jean Sainteny and U. S. author Richard Barnet in visits to Hanoi are convinced an agreement can be worked out to provide either an amnesty or a sanctuary for almost all the South Vietnamese who prosecuted the war. Tran Van Dinh, who was charge' d'affaires in Washington in 1963 for the Saigon Government writes: "To talk about a future massacre against this present background (of killing) is ironic, to say the least."

In Conclusion

The Wall Street Journal on February 23, 1968, expressed editorially the realities: "We think the American people should be getting ready to accept, if they haven't already, the prospect that the whole Vietnam effort may be doomed."

The London Daily Mirror said November 26, 1969: "A war in which a people have lost faith — as the Americans have lost faith in Vietnam — is a war that is lost. It is a war that must be ended. That is the harsh and inevitable reality that President Nixon has to face."

America's resolve should not be to follow with stubbornness a strategy that has failed to produce desired results. We should no longer delay liquidating a losing venture. Our resolve should be to consider with realism our goals, our priorities, and our resources — at home and abroad. We should aim to build a better future for our nations and for all mankind.

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TEN MYTHS ABOUT VIETNAM



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Introduction

Realism — a recognition of cold hard facts and their implications — can lead us out of our involvement in Vietnam. Myths about Vietnam are widespread but are gradually being replaced by reality.

Political parties and candidates must consider the growing opposition to the war among the voters and their revolt against misinformation and misleading or inaccurate statements made by our Government about the war. People want to know why we are in Vietnam, why we are supporting a so-called “democratic” government which jails the leading unsuccessful presidential candidate, (Truong Dinh Dzu), and many others, who dared advocate negotiating for peace with the National Liberation Front.

This booklet gives briefly some of the unrealistic statements and assumptions concerning the Vietnam War, which have been made by the Administration and its supporters. I call these myths. Like other myths, they are often accepted without critical examination but they fall when carefully considered. I believe that if the United States faced the problem of Vietnam realistically, we would begin an immediate phased withdrawal to end our participation in the war and we would support a settlement on the general principles of the Geneva Agreements of 1954.

It is to the interest of the Saigon Government to prolong the war. It is to the interest of the United States to end it.

Our withdrawal from Vietnam can lead to our gradually regaining world leadership towards the organization of peace — not by our becoming the world's policeman but by our strengthening international machinery and organizations for the preservation of peace.

The views which I express in this paper are generally consistent with the position of Business Executives Move For Vietnam Peace but the members of BEM do not necessarily agree with them. I give my personal beliefs and verifiable facts. I have talked with a number of persons who have been close to South Vietnamese who were not dependent upon Americans for jobs or tips or graft for survival. My months in Asia in 1954 as U. S. Government official helped me to look at my own country and her actions from the point of view of other countries as well as my own. I try to judge ourselves on the same basis as I judge others.

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TEN MYTHS

Myth 1. South Vietnam is a separate country which we are defending from aggression.

Reality: The Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference, July 21, 1954, ending the war in Indo-China, divided Vietnam into two zones at the 17th parallel. Article 6 states: “The Conference recognizes that the essential purpose of the agreement relating to Vietnam is to settle military questions with a view to ending hostilities and that the military demarcation line is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary.”

The constitutions of both North Vietnam and South Vietnam claim that the whole of Vietnam is one indivisible country. The United States is participating in what is essentially a civil war. It is not aggression by a separate country. Most of those fighting against the Saigon Government are South Vietnamese. All, or practically all, are persons whom both the Saigon and Hanoi Governments claim belong to one country — Vietnam.

Myth 2. We are fighting to protect the freedom of South Vietnam.

Reality: We are supporting a government which is headed mainly by persons who are from North Vietnam and who fought in the 1940's and in the 1950's alongside the French against the independence movement of their own countrymen. We appear to a great many Vietnamese, both North and South, to be taking the place of the French colonialists and they wish to be free of all foreign domination. We encouraged the Diem regime not to hold the elections scheduled to be held in 1956 by the Geneva Agreements. We did not condemn the exclusion from the ballot in 1967 of candidates who had advocated seeking peace with the Viet Cong. We support a regime which was elected by less than a majority of the voters in an election the fairness of which has been questioned. A South Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, says:

“The Communists want to save us from colonialism and under-development, and Anti-Communists want to save us from the Communists. The problem is that we are not being saved. We are being destroyed. *Now we want to be saved from salvation.*”

Myth 3. Our military progress has been considerable.

Reality: The Washington Post, November 3, 1969, said editorially, it is a mistake to assume the war “is any closer to being ‘won’ than it was that day in 1960 when the first American was killed in combat. The North Vietnamese retain the capacity to attack and attack again, and to inflict casualties and keep on inflicting them . . . The war can go on, at a lower level than last year, but at a level higher than anyone in this country is prepared to support.”

Various optimistic statements have been made by our highest government officials over the years since we began sending in our armed forces. Over the years, the enemy has become stronger, better armed and controls more territory. At first, the Viet Cong depended for fire power largely upon American weapons which they secured by graft, theft or battle. They captured what they could and used it against us. Gradually, as we have escalated the war by introducing more and more men and better and better weapons into the area, the friends of the Viet Cong, particularly the USSR and Red China, have supplied more and better weapons.

A U. S. officer in Vietnam is reported to have said that “We are winning more and more battles nearer and nearer to Saigon.”

The resources of Asian manpower are enormous. North Vietnam has a well-trained, well-supplied army of about 500,000 men. It has committed, at most, less than one-fifth of these to the South.

Myth 4. By resuming the bombing of North Vietnam we can drive Hanoi to its knees.

Reality: The USSR has supplied North Vietnam with highly sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons and technicians, and it is now believed few of our planes could get through to their targets. Of the old bombings, Secretary McNamara admitted the cost to us was high, and the bombings had not stopped the flow of men and supplies southward.

The USSR and China have both stated that they will take action to prevent the defeat of North Vietnam.

Clark M. Clifford, former Secretary of Defense, in an article in *Foreign Affairs* for July, 1969, writes: “In the long run, the security of the Pacific region will depend upon the ability of the countries there to meet the legitimate growing demands of their own people. No military strength we can bring to bear can give them internal stability or popular acceptance. In Southeast Asia, and elsewhere in the less developed regions of the world, our ability to understand and to control the basic forces that are at play is a very limited one. We can advise, we can urge, we can furnish economic aid. But American military power cannot build nations, any more than it can solve the social and economic problems that face us here at home.”

Myth 5. Our main enemy is North Vietnam.

Reality: The main enemy is the Viet Cong, some 200,000 guerilla troops, three-fourths of whom are natives of the area south of the 17th parallel. Hanoi's strength in South Vietnam varies, and is reported from 40,000 to 90,000 men.

The Hanoi government is helping the Viet Cong and it and the National Liberation Front (now called the Provisional Revolutionary Government) are no doubt getting some direction from North Vietnam. The Saigon Government of South Vietnam is getting help and some direction from the

United States. The Viet Cong claim to be independent of Hanoi to the extent that they may not agree to terms decided for them by Hanoi.

If the United States used its atomic bombs and utterly destroyed all life in North Vietnam, it would not end the fighting in South Vietnam. Guerilla warfare would go on there for many years. Those who think of complete victory over Hanoi should consider whether they are willing to continue the guerilla warfare indefinitely in the South. To really stop the shooting of our men we would have to bomb and destroy most or all of South Vietnam, including Saigon in which many Viet Cong and their sympathizers are living. This would be like “destroying the town in order to save it from the Communists”, to use approximately the words of a certain U. S. officer reporting upon an operation under his command.

Myth 6. We have commitments to the South Vietnamese and if we don't honor them our word will not be trusted anywhere in the Free World.

Reality: Our Government seems to find it difficult to define what these commitments are and who made them. For instance, the official State Department booklet (No. 8173, July 1967) entitled “Vietnam In Brief” asks and answers a question, as follows:

“What is the basis of our commitment?”

“—it derives from the Southeast Asia treaty, from the resolution of the Congress of August 1964, and out of the formal declaration of three Presidents of both political parties.

“—and, legalities aside, it derives from the fact that we know we have a commitment, the South Vietnamese know we have a commitment, the Communist world knows we have a commitment, and the rest of the world knows it.”

President Eisenhower, in October 1954, wrote a letter to Ngo Dinh Diem, who headed the Saigon Government, in which he undertook to “examine” with Diem how an intelligent program of American economic aid “given directly to your government can assist Vietnam . . . in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means.” A critical qualification was that even this aid was to be subject to Diem's carrying through reforms responsive to the aspirations of the Vietnamese people. They were not carried through. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson got us more deeply involved.

The Constitution of the United States gives Congress the power to declare war. It makes the President Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy and of the militia when called into the service of the United States but it does not give him dictatorial powers in foreign policy.