



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
USARPAC  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF  
FORT SHAFTER, HAWAII

ATOE-NY-RIT

04 MAY 66

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

SUBJECT: Advise Courses of Action

- 1. Purpose:** The purpose of this memorandum is to inform the President and his administration on the flawed logic used to devise the strategy in Vietnam. It is my intention to give due notice to the President of the new nature of the conflict in Vietnam and the motivations that drive the South Vietnamese regime. As the chief of staff for the United States Army Pacific Command I feel that it is my duty and obligation to challenge the status quo and suggest a fresh COA (course of action).
- 2. Current Strategy:** The current strategy in Vietnam is driven by strategy already established by previous administrations, but in all reality this is just a cloak over the non-existence of a strategy. George Kennan in 1947 stated that the United States should take a "policy of firm containment, designed to confront Russians with unalterable counterforce at every point..."<sup>i</sup> This policy has been the status quo for foreign strategy in the United States since Truman announced the Truman Doctrine. As too many presidents have done in the past, decisions are being made without consulting advisors, just as President Truman created the Truman Doctrine.<sup>ii</sup> While we are fighting the Vietnamese we still claim that this is an intervention from Russian and Chinese aggression, although most military analyst would argue their involvement in this conflict is extremely limited, if not non-existent. In a speech the President made to John Hopkins University the President claimed that we were in Vietnam

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because “we have a promise to keep,” and that “since 1954 every American President has offered support to the people of South Viet-Nam.”<sup>iii</sup>

- 3. President Eisenhower, Vietnam and the Sunk Cost:** Every American business has come across the problem of “sunk costs” at some point in their lifetime. Managers and employees alike seek to keep a project alive that money, time and emotions have been invested in, that in all reality have no business of staying alive. So, because of the costs of the past people keep feeding the problem project with the notion that if they do not then all the costs already created will be in vain. The United States Armed Forces are responsible for this mistake as well on many occasions. It probably would even be fair to say that the government has been caught in this illogical reasoning. The investments made by Eisenhower in the mid to late fifties are now the only reasons why we are in Vietnam still today. President Eisenhower himself displayed his disgust with Indochina to the NSC by stating “how bitterly opposed I am to [putting ground forces anywhere in Southeast Asia],” claiming that, “this war in Indochina would absorb our troops by divisions!”<sup>iv</sup> Although President Eisenhower was disgusted with the thought of sending troops into Indochina, especially just after a peace was signed in Korea, he finally caved in to pressures from France, the Senate, and his own advisors to take the COA he despised. Eisenhower claimed that if no action was taken then “the broader considerations” of the “falling domino principle” could over take all of Southeast Asia<sup>v</sup> and even worse in the future “the loss of Southeast Asia would be followed by the probable loss of Japan, Formosa, and the Philippines, which would then threaten Australia and New Zealand.”<sup>vi</sup> At the time this claim could have been conceivably true, but as the war has been fought for almost 12 years now the conflict seems to be more internal

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rather than externally controlled by the major powers of the world. The costs that we have paid in the past should not extend the war to a major American conflict. The consideration of increasing the amount of troops in Vietnam to over 400,000 by the President should not be persuaded by a "promise" made by past Presidents. Instead the increase should be decisively made because of a need of more man power to fulfill the current mission.

4. **Emergence of Autonomy:** Prior to the beginning of this decade independent nations have been fairly influenced by both Soviet and American intervention alike. Now we face a world with a new sort of autonomy that is being found more and more in these nations.<sup>vii</sup> The demise of European colonialism has brought about third world autonomy that has been present more in latter years. The roots of this sort of international policy derive from Yugoslavia's Tito. Tito can be identified as a Communist, but by no means was he a *Stalinist*. By "non-alignment" Tito was able to play the Soviet Union and the United States against each other to achieve what he wanted by giving the prospect of tilting the balance of power.<sup>viii</sup> This policy of "non-alignment" went well beyond Eastern Europe, and as European colonialism in Asia declined the policy was adopted by the rising nationalistic countries. Therefore, any threat made by the South Vietnamese of falling to communism should not be considered when making the decision on troop and resource commitments. China only reluctantly plays a role in the Vietnam conflict because of the very same threats made by the North Vietnamese that if they do not give support then they will fall to capitalism. If we do not help the South Vietnamese it is likely the communists will take over, but they would not be aligned with China or the Soviet Union; which in Yugoslavia's case would not be terrible.



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5. **Strategic Points:** It is justly shown that the flawed thought of sunk costs and the new emergence of autonomy identify Vietnam as an insignificant point in the large grand scheme of Communist-American conflict. While we claim that the strategy in Vietnam is to contain communism, the Vietnamese claim that the strategy in Vietnam is to achieve independence (from either Northern or Southern perspective). Communist or not, Vietnam will remain independent from either US or Soviet/PRC camp. In essence this conflict transcends ideology and is only about nationalism.
  
6. **Courses of Action:** Currently the United States has a few COA to consider for the Vietnam conflict:
  - A. **Continue advising role** – Under this COA the United States would maintain its current troop numbers and keep an advising role in South Vietnam. This would call for commanders on the ground to train up South Vietnamese counterparts to do jobs that Americans would do if the troop numbers and involvement were increased. Minimal amounts of direct conflict will be conducted by Specials Operations and CIA.
  
  - B. **Expand conflict using General Westmoreland's guidance** – General Westmoreland requested in 1965 for a troop increase to bring our involvement to at least 600,000 troops on the ground. Expanding the conflict to decisively engage North Vietnamese Army (NVA/PRVN Army) with a plus-up of troops in the provinces of North Vietnam would be a bloody fight. Infrastructure, main supply routes (MSRs) and main NVA installations would need to be targeted and disposed.

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For commanders on the ground I would recommend that the *Vietnam Primer* by Lt. Col. David H. Hackworth be read to fight against insurgent Vietcong (VC) forces. *Vietnam Primer* was written in the summer of 1965 and is a compilation of tips, tactics, and techniques that will assist battalion commanders down to platoon leaders conduct operations. The compilation was developed out of thousands of unit after action reports (AARs) and is highly modeled off of VC and NVA operations. Lt. Col. Hackworth wrote that in order to win in Vietnam the key to victory is conducting operations that bring the fight to the VC and NVA. With a plus-up of troops to bring the number of operating soldiers to 600,000 the fight would certainly be brought to the NVA's door step.

C. **Realign strategy in Vietnam** – Most analysis can generally agree that the conflict in South Vietnam is being fought for the purpose of checking Communist aggression. While this driving factor has been the predominant school of thought in the United States it is one that is flawed, as discussed above. Nationalism clearly is Ho Chi Minh's motivation, and it is clear to me that his intent is to create a unified Vietnam by means of Communist ideology. In order to combat that the United States must turn the fight from a fight against Communism to a fight supporting nationalism. The end state of this will be an independent, stable South Vietnam that would be capable of operating military forces in North Vietnam. I consider this course of action the best of the three because it has a plan of redeployment that is lacking from the other two. Nation building should be the by-word in the United States Army and commanders on the ground would have to change operations to include the following:

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- i. Infrastructure Development by Army Corps of Engineers to include agricultural, power, sewage, educational institutions and economic.**
- ii. Government Building**
- iii. Security Operations**
  - 1. Phase 1 – Security operations conducted by United States forces**
  - 2. Phase 2 – Training of South Vietnamese military and police forces**
  - 3. Phase 3 – South Vietnamese forces shadow American forces**
  - 4. Phase 4 – Hand off of security operations with American escort forces**
  - 5. Phase 5 – Total responsibility of security operations to the South Vietnamese**
- iv. Humanitarian projects by American forces and NGOs**

7. **Conclusion:** The Vietnam conflict has been driven by old state policy that needs to be reformulated to align with North Vietnam policy/strategy. Creating a strategy of nation building, rather than direct military conflict, would combat the insurgent style of fighting that Ho Chi Minh currently maintains. The South Vietnamese people need to feel that the United States is there to help them and this can not be done with military might. Only with a finely tuned strategy of nation building will the United States find success and an eventual withdrawal.

OFFICIAL

Nicholas E. Snodgrass  
COL, EN  
Chief of Staff, USARPAC



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Notes:

<sup>i</sup> "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" first published in 1947 by *Foreign Affairs* authored by George Kennan

<sup>ii</sup> *Eisenhower: Soldier and President* by Stephen E. Ambrose, Page 223

<sup>iii</sup> April 7, 1965 President Johnson's "Peace Without Conquest" speech given at John Hopkins University. Referenced from the LBJ Library and Museum.

<sup>iv</sup> NSC notes taken down from a stenographer on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1954

<sup>v</sup> April 7<sup>th</sup> new conference Eisenhower's famous declaration on Indochina from the Eisenhower Library

<sup>vi</sup> *Eisenhower: Soldier and President* by Stephen E. Ambrose, Page 361

<sup>vii</sup> *The Cold War: A New History* by John Lewis Gaddis. This is the thesis that John Lewis Gaddis portrays in Chapter Four of this book. It charges that while the superpowers thought they had enormous amount of control and influence over independent small nations, in reality they had little to none. In fact, most of the time these small nations persuaded the super powers by given threat of falling to the others camp.

<sup>viii</sup> *The Cold War: A New History* by John Lewis Gaddis Page 124