

D No.: D-19736-ARPA

Assigned to: _____

Prospective RM: YES NO

Project No.: 9793

Contract No.: DAHCl5 67 C 0142

Task Order No.: _____

RAND DOCUMENT

U. S. STRATEGY IN SOUTH VIETNAM:
EXTRICATION AND EQUILIBRIUM

Gerald C. Hickey

December 15, 1969

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I. THESIS

Not long ago in a published interview, the eminent Viennese psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl, made the observation that there is a tendency among Americans to think pragmatically and in doing so to think unidimensionally. Reality, he adds, is multidimensional.

The reality of the Vietnam situation certainly is multidimensional, and we have had the tendency to view it very pragmatically -- very unidimensionally. Many of our shortcomings can be traced to this limited view of the reality of the Vietnam situation.

Two outstanding failures definitely can be traced to this limited view.

- A. We have failed to understand the revolutionary character of the war.
 - o There has been considerable criticism that our military have mistakenly approached Vietnam as we did World War II and the Korean War and neglected to appreciate the political side of the conflict.
 - o *It is more than a military and political conflict -- it is a revolution that involves all aspects of Vietnamese society -- all of the social, political, and economic institutions. It also conforms to an historical pattern for revolution which has been thought of as a legitimate means of achieving power in Vietnam.*
- B. The second failure which springs from our limited view of the reality of the Vietnam situation was our lack of anticipation of the multiple effects of decisions, strategies, and programs on Vietnamese society.
 - o Many examples of this could be cited, but to me the most outstanding one was the decision to introduce U.S. combat troops into the conflict in 1965, and the way in which this was done. The need for our action was military -- to prevent South Vietnam from being cut in half by Viet Cong operations in the central highlands and Binh Dinh Province -- and the response was the military strategy that has been so severely

criticized since. In addition to the large American military presence, we introduced a sizable number of allied troops.

- o Unlike either World War II or the Korean War, our strategy also involved bringing in a vast number of American, Filipino, Korean, and Japanese civilians (by the end of 1968), U.S. civilian contractors alone numbered 14,047 while the number of Filipino and Korean workers was higher). Pacification efforts put American civilian and military advisors in every Vietnamese government agency and at every level of the administration from the Prime Minister's office down to the village level where civic action advisors attempted to introduce socio-economic innovations.

There were, to be sure, both positive and negative effects.

Rural Areas -- Vast dislocation of population, widespread destruction in some areas (Quang Nam, Tay Ninh, etc.) and a wartime boom in other areas (portions of the delta along routes to market towns).

Urban Areas -- Wartime boom, combined with an accelerated increase in the urban population without a concomitant increase in urban facilities.

My contention is that the negative effects predominate, and the result is a very disrupted society. Although the country was saved militarily by the introduction of American and Allied Forces, the overwhelming presence of an estimated 700,000 foreigners among the Vietnamese who, because of their historical experiences, tend to be anti-foreign, exacerbated the social disorder already generated by the war. Given the revolutionary nature of the conflict, this is extremely important to consider, for one of the aims of the revolutionaries is to destroy the existing social order as part of the process of bringing about the social revolution and building the new society. We are aiding them in achieving this objective.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

Had we anticipated the multiple effects of our decisions and strategies on Vietnamese society, there is no doubt that much of the

disruption could have been minimized or avoided. By the same token we now must anticipate the widespread consequences of our withdrawal in order to avoid further and perhaps disastrous disruptions.

In order to do so, it is essential that we analyze the situation that exists at the present time in Vietnam. For the sake of discussion, this can be done in terms of some of the social, political, economic, and military dimensions, bearing in mind that all of these are interrelated.

A. Social

The impact of the war and our presence on social institutions has been very great, but it cannot be measured in any quantitative way. In two areas, however, some of the reported figures do indicate a great deal about social changes -- the displacement of population and the rate of increase in urban population.

- o Refugees -- Figures on the number of refugees at the peak of the dislocation vary, but a relatively reliable figure of 3,500,000 refugees (out of a total population of 17 million) was reported at the beginning of 1968 following the Tet offensive. In reporting figures prepared for a November 18, 1969, conference in Washington, Ambassador Bunker was quoted as saying that as of the beginning of 1969 there were 1,000,000 officially recognized refugees, but this figure had declined to 537,827 as of the beginning of October. There is disagreement over this reported decline in refugees. Some journalists and CORDS personnel in the provinces describe this as a "numbers game" that is played by merely changing designations -- refugee villages become "resettled villages" and refugees are struck from the rolls, although these villages and individuals still require government support. In Quang Tri Province, for example, 8,000 Bru refugees are in an untenable situation. They are unable to farm where they are now located because of insufficient land and they cannot go back to their own land in the Khe Sanh area because it is held by the NVA. Yet they are slated to be removed from the refugee rolls in the near future.

o Increased urban population. The events since 1965 have caused a movement of population into the urban areas for a variety of reasons, the foremost being a search for security and for better employment. A 1965 report listed the Saigon metropolitan population as 2,474,000. Current estimates place it now at 3,600,000, an increase of 52.1 percent. Danang has doubled in population since 1965.

Density in Saigon. A recent prefecture report estimates that in parts of Districts 2 and 5 there are 1000 persons per hectare (a 1965 study reported 356 people per hectare while at the same time Paris had 275 and Tokyo 152).

Urban facilities strained. There is no public bus system. Power, water, health, and hospitals are all strained.

Educational facilities. In 1969, the city of Saigon had a total budget of \$14 million, and this included funds for schools and teachers' salaries. There are a total of 832 primary and secondary schools in the city of Saigon. Classes are held in two-hour shifts, and most schools have 4-5 sessions per day. A Saigon prefecture report states that 69 percent of all city school-age children can be accommodated in the existing school facilities. Some 58 percent of those who began primary school in 1965 are completing school in 1969 -- which means that around 30 percent of the Saigon children are completing five grades of primary school.

B. Political

Political factionalism has been the historical pattern in Vietnam, and it continues at the present time with a proliferation of political parties and movements. There are the older political parties, such as the VNQDD, which at present has some ten factions, and the Dai Viets who are now split into the Revolutionary Dai Viets, the Tan Dai Viets (also called the Southern Dai Viets), and the Northern Dai Viets. Then there are the religious groups which have been engaged in political activities: the Hoa Hao, through their Social Democratic Party, and the Cao Daists through their individual leaders. More recently the

Buddhists and Catholics have become involved in politics, and political movements also have emerged among the ethnic minorities -- the Montagnards have the FULRO (Front Unifiee de Lutte des Races Opprimees or United Struggle Front for the Oppressed Races), the Cham support the Cham Liberation Front, and the Khmer have the Struggle Front of the Khmer of Lower Cambodia.

Current Political Processes

The proliferation continues with new parties planned or recently formed. The Movement for the Unity of the Southern Highland Minorities was launched early in 1969, and it has absorbed many of the FULRO followers who are using the new party as a government-sanctioned vehicle for open political agitation. A new Cao Daist party -- the Social Republican Party -- was formed in November 1969, and at the same time plans for a new Buddhist laymen's political party were announced. The leaders of the Confederation of Vietnamese Labor, which includes labor unions and the Tenant Farmers' Association, have recently declared their intention to form a political movement.

Since mid-1968 there have been coalitions of political parties and groups. There is Thieu's National Social Democratic Front, which includes Revolutionary Dai Viets, Hoa Hao, Catholics, NVQDD, and the Montagnard Unity Party -- right wing, pro-government elements. In November 1969, however, the Hoa Hao party bolted, and there is talk of other parties leaving primarily because the coalition has not "been doing anything."

Another is the Progressive Nationalist Movement dominated by southerners. It includes Tan Dai Viets, the National Institute of Administration faculty, Southern Renaissance followers of Tran Van Huong, Cao Daists, some Hoa Hao, and Catholics. It is an active coalition and has organizations in 22 provinces.

(There are indications of other increased activities by some political parties in rural areas: Revolutionary Dai Viets are organizing in Phu Bon province among the Montagnards -- they have a new headquarters in Cheo Reo and manifest competition with the Montagnard Unity Party.)

Thieu has made some accommodations through these coalitions, but there definitely has not been any expansion of his political base by giving the socio-political groups increased local authority or power in the central government. The September 1969 cabinet changes have given the military more of a role in the central government. Thieu has relied much more on the support of the military, particularly the hawks in the ARVN, the most vociferous of which are the northern-born colonels, lieutenant-colonels, and majors. The Thieu regime has been taking on some Diem-like characteristics: strong military support, increase in the number of former Can Lao in the cabinet and in other high positions, and appeal to right-wing groups. This has the elements of a "survival pact" to maintain control and press the war. Should Thieu make any moves in the direction of accommodation which might result in a coalition that includes the NLF, there is a strong chance of his being deposed by the hawks.

Vice-President Ky's aims are not clear. One predominate idea is that he is the spokesman for Thieu on issues where it would be too sensitive for Thieu to speak out -- such as criticism of the United States, expressing hawkish views, and in one-upping President Nixon by advanced announcement of troop withdrawals. Another idea is that Ky is building support among the military hawks for a possible future political takeover.

Opposition voices include the recent public statements of General Duong Van Minh and Senator Tran Van Don, advocating a new government and neutral South Vietnam based on the "third force," and an end to the war. With the support of southern Nationalists (both Thieu and Prime Minister Khiem are from Central Vietnam; Ky is a northerner), they may be forming a political movement in preparation for the 1971 presidential elections. They also may gain the support of the An Quang Pagoda group (led by Thieh Tri Quang) which advocates an end of the war through direct negotiation with the NLF leading to a neutral South Vietnam and a complete withdrawal of the United States. These views are echoed by lawyer Tran Ngoc Liang.

Controversial figures, An Truong Thanh and General Nguyen Chanh Thi (former commander of I Corps), recently have expressed their intention to return to Vietnam to engage in political activities.

C. Economic

The wartime economic boom continues. There are lots of piasters in circulation and there is a continued demand for labor, and a high demand for many things such as new housing, consumer items, and so forth. The potential exists for a relatively stable postwar economy but a great deal depends on whether or not capital is invested. There will be an abundant supply of skilled and semi-skilled labor which has increased considerably since 1965 as a result of US training and current programs to replace third country laborers with Vietnamese workers by the end of 1971.

Currently there are some basic problems in the national economy. Inflation has been around 30 percent per year, but since the beginning of 1969, rice prices have doubled, and there is a current rice crisis. The Austerity Tax that went into effect on October 24 brought about an increase in prices. For example, rice went up 20 percent and is rising, laundry soap up 48 percent; Dalat cabbage up 20 percent; pork bellies, up 20 percent, to name a few. Factors in the rising price of rice include the normal price rise that immediately precedes the harvest in the delta, hoarding, and inflation. Government stocks are low. Issuances normally average around 400 tons a day, but in October they began to increase to 2,400 tons per day on October 30 and to 3,188 tons on November 5.

Evidence does exist of rice being sold to the Viet Cong. One ARVN report documented the use of ARVN 2-1/2-ton trucks delivering army rice to a rendezvous in Long Khanh Province for sale to the Viet Cong.

The national deficit for 1969 is around \$600,000,000 U.S., and the Austerity Tax was put into effect to realize more revenue. GVN officials expect that it will raise revenues 55-60 percent in 1970 on the condition that the tax is not lowered. But because of pressure from the legislature, taxes on gasoline and kerosene have been reduced slightly.

The Plans of Economic Minister Phan Kim Ngoc

Economic Minister Phan Kim Ngoc wants the Austerity Tax to continue but he recognizes that some of those in the upper income groups and those in the legislature want to lower the taxes. Ngoc also would like to expend foreign exchange only on essentials and such things as farm equipment. He emphasizes the need for rural economic development. Along with rural economic development he would like to import things to improve life in the rural areas. This would include such things as generators for electricity and television. He hopes to lure people from the overcrowded cities back to the rural areas. Ngoc points to the necessity of "Vietnamizing the peace." Plans should have been made two years ago for a U.S. withdrawal. Ngoc states that the war must be over by the end of 1970 as there will be grave economic problems including rising prices and heavier financial burdens for the government and increased unemployment in urban areas. The South Vietnamese will have to develop a "People's Army" after 1971 in order to replace the present military machine which the Vietnamese cannot afford. Ngoc predicts that the Viet Cong "will bring the perfidious war to the cities" to take advantage of the growing discontent over the "hardships of life." Ngoc points to the fact that there is no significant investment taking place; there are some investments in war-connected enterprises like scrap metal exports, and such. Investment in rural areas has been going on during the war. Farmers have purchased tractors and other farm equipment, Hondas, sewing machines, and radios.

In the urban areas the "little economy" will do much to sustain working class people. The petty commerce -- exchange of capital, goods, and services locally -- will probably siphon off some of the surplus labor, particularly female labor. How far the "little economy" can be stretched is the essential question.

D. Military

Armed Forces of the Republic of South Vietnam

o Vietnamization is the current vogue word. Essentially it means that we are turning the war over to the Vietnamese armed forces.

They have been playing a secondary role since we took over the fighting in 1965. The answer to the basic question of whether or not the RVNAF can effectively take over the role is difficult to predict.

In the past, some units, notably the Airborne Division, Rangers, and Marines, have performed well, but they are not being increased significantly. They now number around 46,000. The Vietnamese army numbered 345,000 as of September 1969, but the largest increases thus far have been in the Regional and Popular Forces, which now total 391,000. The Air Force and Navy number 21,000 each. Paramilitary forces -- the National Police and Police Field Force, Revolutionary Development teams, Montagnard Mercenaries, and armed Viet Cong defectors -- total 185,000.

In addition to issuing M-16 automatic rifles, M-60 light machine guns, and M-79 grenade launchers, forty UH-21 helicopters have been delivered, forty more will be delivered soon, and sixty A-37 jets are on order. These aircraft all go to VNAF. Thousands of vehicles of all sorts are being given to the Vietnamese. The 600 armored personnel carriers they already have will be increased to 1,500.

- o The caliber of the Armed Forces has not really been tested as there have been no large-scale conflicts involving VC/NVA and ARVN ground troops with just U.S. air support.
- o A basic question is whether Vietnamization essentially is Americanization of the Vietnamese Armed Forces -- that is, saddling them with a strategy that was not very successful for us.
- o Cost is a very important consideration. The \$1 billion bill for the 3-year program is more than the Vietnamese GNP for the same period. The Minister of Economy pointed out in a recent discussion that the Vietnamese cannot maintain this military machine and they cannot rely on the U.S. to continue supporting it. They will

have to begin downgrading in 1971 and rely on a "People's Army" after that.

- o There is nothing to indicate that the leadership of the Armed Forces has improved and only recently has the regulation requiring a second baccalaureate to enter OCS been changed. The officers are still urban, upper class.
- o The military is deeply embedded in politics and they are occupied also with administration throughout the country.
- o Corruption is rampant, and military is very much involved in it.

Viet Cong-North Vietnamese Army

There are an estimated 100,000 North Vietnamese regulars and 100,000 Viet Cong. Reports from most sources indicate that the Viet Cong have been having difficulties in supplying themselves, difficulty in recruitment, and problems in morale. The NVA have had some trouble in the northern part of South Vietnam and on the trail in Laos due to heavy rains and floods this year. There is nothing to indicate that the NVA itself is in trouble. Infiltration continues -- even across the DMZ in Huong Hoa district of Quang Tri province. They have been moving into the Khe Sanh and Ashau areas, and they have been infiltrating into the Mekong River delta.

III, PROGNOSIS ON WITHDRAWAL

Given the disruptive effects of our presence I believe that from any point of view it now is our responsibility to conduct the withdrawal in such a way as to do all in our power to maintain an equilibrium among the dimensions noted above. *We have, by our presence, restructured Vietnamese society, we continue to be the primary instrument for change, and the direction of that change depends to a great extent on our future course of action.*

While the current emphasis of U.S. efforts are in the pacification of the countryside, I believe the crucial events will be in the cities. Our restructuring of Vietnamese society has affected the urban areas very deeply, and I feel that the impact of our withdrawal on the cities will do much to determine whether or not the desired equilibrium can be maintained.

- o The urban problems created by the vast movement of population into the cities will be accentuated if any kind of national crisis develops. In 1964 I witnessed near anarchy in Saigon when the Buddhist-Catholic conflict precipitated rioting and mob behavior. Most of the mobs were young people, some of them around 10 years of age, who fashioned weapons (barbed wire wrapped around sugar cane).
- o Urban labor force has vastly increased. Paul Mus noted in his *Sociologie d'une Guerre* that when the revolution broke out in the 1930s there was no proletariat in Vietnam prepared for a Marxist mission of any kind. This labor force has the potential for being that kind of proletariat.
- o The capital and the money class, both the old and the new, emerging from the war boom are concentrated in the cities.
- o Minister of the Economy Phan Kim Ngoc sees the cities as the targets of enemy proselytizing beginning in earnest in 1970. He cites the rising prices, and rising unemployment as the US withdraws as providing a fertile field for this action.

IV. EXTRICATION AND EQUILIBRIUM

A. The equilibrium could be maintained easily given the following ideal developments:

- o A US withdrawal accompanied by withdrawal of the NVA.
- o A political accommodation taking place between the GVN and socio-political groups and ultimately the NLF, leading to a coalition government as a political solution.

- o Capital investment taking place, which would absorb the unemployed created by the US withdrawal, leading to a peace economy.
- B. The existing situation is, of course, not the ideal:
- o The NVA are not withdrawing; the US is withdrawing slowly; the capability of the RVNAF is untested.
 - o The government of President Thieu is exhibiting Diemist tendencies. There is an alliance with the right wing and military in a "survival pact." Little accommodation to the socio-political groups has taken place. There is no accommodation to the NLF. And there is increasing opposition to the government by "Big Minh," the An Quang Pagoda group and other forces.
 - o There is little capital investment and evidence of increased flight of capital from Vietnam.
- C. Less than the ideal, but still acceptable would be the following:
- o The NVA does not withdraw while the US continues to withdraw slowly, maintaining some combat capability in 1972 (two mobile divisions). ARVN is holding, that is to say, it is not falling apart.
 - o President Thieu continues to maintain control, i.e., there is no open political conflict. The regime continues as it is functioning now and some of the provisions of constitution are maintained; for example, presidential elections take place in 1971, and provincial elections before 1972. The National Assembly continues to function.
- D. Less than the above developments probably cannot be tolerated. The following must be avoided:
- o A deteriorating military situation:
 - (1) Collapse of the pacification program
 - (2) Collapse of ARVN

- (3) VC/NVA take-over of certain areas of the country, for example, the western highlands, creating a situation similar to the one in June-July 1965.
- o Open political struggle leading to demonstrations, riots, and mob behavior similar to that which occurred in 1964 in Saigon.
 - o The flight of capital and of the money class. A serious rise in prices and possible runaway inflation. Massive unemployment leading to food riots, etc.
- E. We must maximize the possibilities of achieving the ideal in the context of US withdrawal.
- o US withdrawals must continue whether or not the NVA withdraws, but a deteriorating military situation such as that described above must be avoided.
 - o Politically, it must be recognized that the Diemist approach will not work in the long run, therefore the US must pressure Thieu to accommodate to the socio-political groups and eventually the NLF. This does not mean that we accede to NLF demands to overthrow the Thieu government. We should not. Nor must the US allow a coup d'etat by either Ky forces within the government or "Big Minh" outside the government.
 - o US capital must be used in such a way so as to sustain the economy -- for example, develop WPA-like programs to absorb the unemployed left in the wake of US withdrawals. There is the possibility that the Mekong River Basin Development Project will absorb available labor.