

In other words, the struggle in South Vietnam is assuming the classic form it has taken wherever a guerilla war developed into a successful war of independence, be it Algeria or Cuba. Beginning with an overwhelming superiority in favor of the Right-wing and colonialist forces, the ratio constantly changes in favor of the resistance forces until a sort of equality is approached, followed by a sudden collapse of the Rightists. Outside support is powerless to change this. U.S. forces in South Vietnam already exceed 12,000 men, and new weapons are constantly being added, including helicopters with more fire-power than any fighter plane of World War II, amphibious troop carriers, new types of small arms, and rockets. But in the first days of 1963, defeats were already so severe, including mounting American casualties, that President Kennedy demanded a special report from Mr. McNamara. These costly defeats have continued to mount. Nor are American arms and dollars capable of squeezing out a big expansion in Diem's forces, who are obviously unwilling to fight.

Direct U.S. military participation, even with forces of division strength, cannot bring about a reversal of the changing ratio. On the other hand, the resistance forces could be doubled or even quintupled in a short time because they spring from the people defending their own hearths and families. The inexorable logic of the people's war has caught up with Diem and his American backers. The United States is now faced with a choice between facing a straight-out defeat or seeking a negotiated withdrawal.

It is therefore no surprise that by April 1963 Washington was already making soundings—either directly or through British, French, Indian and other channels—for the kind of formula under which an "honorable" withdrawal could be negotiated. But as in Laos, Washington was seeking a formula which would provide gains through diplomacy or intrigue that could not be obtained on the battlefield. Thus the favorite formula being offered by Washington's agents in April 1963 was a form of "neutralization" of South Vietnam which would admit some NLF elements into a Diemist-type

regime in the South (although without Diem himself), in exchange for the "neutralization" of the North, guaranteed by the presence of some Diemists in the government of North Vietnam. Other variants, always including "neutralization" of the North, envision a coalition government in the South formed by Diemist elements on the Right, some members of the NLF on the Left, and some liberal Vietnamese exiles in Paris to provide the "neutralist" filling. Again, Diem himself is to be excluded, as all but the most die-hard U.S. diplomats agree he is impossible.

The fact that such schemes are being offered within little over a year of direct U.S. intervention is a measure of the frustration of U.S. policies in South Vietnam. Meanwhile, the NLF leadership does not see in these schemes any evidence that Washington now wants a realistically negotiated settlement. They are prepared to continue the resistance struggle until the United States finds it necessary to negotiate seriously for withdrawal.

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