

LETTER TO EDITOR OF NEW YORK TIMES FROM ROGER HILSMAN, IN AUGUST 8, 1970 ISSUE

Since I was the action officer for Vietnam in the latter part of the Kennedy Administration, perhaps I can clarify a point raised in Tom Wicker's column of August 4.

The Taylor-Rostow Report to President Kennedy in the fall of 1961 recommended sending combat troops to Vietnam, as well as aid and advisors. Kennedy rejected that part of the recommendation, and from that time until the spring and summer of 1963, his policy was to urge the Vietnamese not to pursue a military strategy but a political one—to concentrate on winning the people rather than killing the Vietcong.

It was the only strategy that would work, he felt, and it could be successfully pursued only by the Vietnamese.

In 1963, however, the President became increasingly skeptical that the Vietnamese were either willing to carry through the needed reform or capable of it.

He made it abundantly clear to me on several occasions that ~~XX~~ if that judgement turned out to be correct, his intention was to negotiate a settlement along the lines of the 1962 Geneva accords on Laos, and to reject the advice, which like his successor he also received, to bomb the North and introduce American combat forces.

Roger Hilsman
New York, August 4, 1970