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Vietnam: What Is Really Needed

The U.S. Government's review of its policy toward South Vietnam involves a question and answer process. The questions are not particularly elusive; the answers are implicit in history.

Q. As the war in Vietnam moved into its final convulsive stage, one heard a great deal about the poor morale of South Vietnamese armed forces. Was this a new development?

A. The lack of fighting spirit in the armed forces of South Vietnam was nothing new. Twelve years ago, President John F. Kennedy was disturbed by reports concerning the inability of the government of President Diem to imbue its army with a desire to fight. Every U.S. president since J.F.K. has been aware that large numbers of South Vietnamese—not just in the armed forces but among the citizenry—have had no feelings of basic allegiance and commitment to the existing government. It was precisely because the South Vietnamese forces, though possessing superior firepower, were incapable of doing the job assigned to them that hundreds of thousands of U.S. fighting men were infused into the war.

Q. Why shouldn't the people of South Vietnam—whether in or out of the army—believe in their own government?

A. Under the terms of the Geneva Peace Treaty of 1954 marking the end of French control of Indo-China, free na-

tional elections were to be held in all the countries of the region, including Vietnam. Elections were scheduled for 1956 in Vietnam for the purpose of re-uniting the country. These elections never took place. General Eisenhower wrote in his memoirs that the United States supported the decision of South Vietnam to call off the elections because of the probability that the vote would go against the Saigon government. Though the United States and Ho Chi Minh fought together against the Japanese during World War II, and though U.S. officials knew that Ho would not be subservient to any outside government, including the Communist Chinese, the U.S. wanted a government in Vietnam responsive to our policy. The cancellations of the elections caused Hanoi to feel it had been cheated out of certain victory. Hanoi thereupon began its campaign of terror against the South. This marked the effective start of the war.

Many South Vietnamese who were sincerely anti-Communist felt that the United States had assumed all the liabilities of the departed French. They turned against the United States as they had against the French. They found it difficult to support a government they believed was not truly representative.

Q. Even acknowledging the original errors of the United States in Vietnam, why didn't the United States send massive military aid during the emergency stage

of the war—planes, surface-to-air missiles, new-style tanks, machine guns, ammunition?

A. Substantial military help had been authorized and was available, but U.S. military officials were reluctant to send help because they had no confidence it would be effectively used. Over the years, the United States sent an estimated one hundred billion dollars' worth of military equipment for the war against North Vietnam. The portion of this military aid that has found its way into the hands of North Vietnamese forces has constituted a major part of the total arms used by North Vietnam.

Sending military aid at the last minute, therefore, was not likely to have had the effect of saving what was left of South Vietnam. Conceivably, it could have had the effect of increasing the amount of firepower available to the North Vietnamese.

Q. Is THERE NOTHING Americans can do to alleviate the suffering and the peril of the South Vietnamese?

A. It has cost the United States approximately \$30,000 to kill a single Vietnamese. Are we willing to spend, say, half this amount to save a single life? If so, we can mobilize for mercy in behalf of the Vietnamese on a scale never before attempted in history. We had no difficulty in sending clouds of planes to bomb Vietnamese villages. We can fill the skies with planes that bring food and medicines. We should make every effort to carry out this operation in connection with the International Red Cross so that it will not appear we are being politically selective either in supplying aid or in carrying out rescue operations.

Q. Is anything to be learned from the terrible tragedy of Indo-China, a tragedy that has taken an estimated 1,600,000 lives of Vietnamese and 56,000 lives of Americans?

A. We thought we could cope with the international intrigues and undercover activities of Stalinist Russia by imitating them. The biggest mistake of all was calling off the 1956 elections that were supposed to unify the country. American people, historically, have always been committed to the principle of self-determination. The moment we violated our tradition in this respect we set the stage for a series of escalating miscalculations.

If we have learned anything at all from Vietnam, it is that American security does not depend on secret police or undercover agents playing the inter-

Letters From Readers

Of Omissions and Objections

Roger Williams's article ("Fighting 'City Hall': The Rise of Middle Class Activism," March 8) typically promotes the concept that a group of people who entitle themselves a "public interest organization" has the interest of the public in mind and that other groups do not. The simple fact is that any group of people who work together on a given issue or project have a common special interest which joins them at that time and which may or may not be in the interest of the total public. . . .

While Common Cause is probably the largest and the best known of the so-called public interest groups, it certainly has no basis for indicating that its positions are based on any widespread involvement of the general public in its policymaking. Seemingly without any physical procedures for determining real

public interest on a broad basis, Common Cause, as do other public interest groups, arrived at positions based on the self-interests of the few people involved in policymaking. . . .

John H. Hall
Canal Winchester, Ohio

I was generally in agreement with Roger M. Williams's article. However, I was deeply disappointed that Mr. Williams failed to include the League of Women Voters in his references to "public interest groups" interested in "an assault on the system." . . .

Since the league's inception in 1920, it has played a significant part in the passage of historic legislation. A few examples are: the Sheppard-Towner Act (1921), the Social Security Act (1935), the U.S. ratification of the U.N. Charter (1945), the Nuclear Nonproliferation

national game of subversion and intrigue. It depends primarily on the creation of instruments of world order. The U.S. government never really took the concept of a United Nations seriously; it never really accepted the notion that the time had come to create a genuine world organization capable of protecting the world's peoples against aggression and all the other abominations that have disfigured the record of nations over the centuries.

The inability or reluctance of our government to understand that no nation, not even a nation as powerful as the United States, can serve as policeman for the entire world is a related major lesson to be learned from Vietnam.

IT WILL BE MUCH MORE DIFFICULT today to develop the United Nations into a world organization invested with the responsible authority of world law than it would have been a generation ago. All the weaknesses that were inherent in the original design for the U.N. are now fully visible. The General Assembly is so constructed that it is unable to command the support of major nations to the degree necessary to develop or use statutory power. Similarly, the Security Council is so constructed that it cannot command

the support of smaller nations to the degree necessary to keep the peace. Neither in the General Assembly nor the Security Council nor in the office of the Secretary General is there a codified basis for world law. The result is an anomaly. Attempts to deal with world anarchy are improvised. They reflect the balance-of-power struggle in the world. They run counter to the need to create a workable new basis for durable peace.

The failure to create a genuine basis for world peace and justice is not chargeable to the U.N. itself. It is directly chargeable to the refusal of nations, especially the larger ones, to accept an authority that can tell them what to do in the international arena.

This, then, is the basic challenge today—how to create a world authority to keep the peace that has behind it the confidence of the world's peoples.

The difficulties in the way of upgrading the United Nations are enormous. Considering the amount of energy and resources we have put into Indo-China since 1954, however, the central question is whether we are willing to make a similar commitment to the cause of world order. If we are, there is a good chance that three billion people in the world may yet live out their lives without a nuclear war.

N.C.

Treaty (1969), the Economic Opportunity Amendments (1967 and 1969), and the Water Resources Planning Act (1965). More recently, the league has conducted in-depth studies concerning the Equal Rights Amendment, Campaign Financing, and House Committee Reform. . . .

Jean Wilcox Wolfert
Ogden, Utah

Roger Williams's piece deals with a subject of great interest and importance. Therefore, it was a shock to see him so poorly informed. Colorado's new governor is Richard D. Lamm, not Michael, and it was he, then a state representative, who was the true moving spirit behind the anti-Olympics fight. Three organizers, or coordinators, as they call themselves, put the drive together under then-Representative Lamm's direction, and the rest of the hard work that editor Williams correctly refers to as so essential to the success of middle-class activism was performed by hundreds of petition carriers, telephoners, press release people, and the "fold and stamp brigade."

Mary B. Filley
Denver, Colo.

Roger Williams replies:

My subject was not traditional groups that have long been working in behalf of their version of the public interest—no matter how commendable the work—but rather groups that are arising to fight for the new concerns of the middle class. The things that stick in a writer's mind! I had a college fraternity brother named Michael Lamm—and ever since then all Lamms have been Michael to me.

A Bewildered Consumer

An unmentioned horror lurks in the penultimate paragraph of Ivan Berger's article ("The Politics of [Amplifier] Power," March 8). If a customer were to buy speakers capable of handling the advertised, but not the real, power an amplifier contains, what is to keep him from turning the controls all the way up on his new acquisition and burning out the speakers? I am not qualified to judge what safety factors are currently built into speakers, but if some manufacturers were to underrate the power of their amplifiers, while others did not, the ordinary stereo buyer would be even more dependent on the competence and honesty of the salesman than he now is.

Edward Adelson
Marion, Ohio