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CRITICAL POSTURES ON U.S. DECISION-MAKING IN VIETNAM:
MULTIPLE CHOICE

Working Notes on Vietnam No. 2

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PREFACE TO "WORKING NOTES ON VIETNAM" SERIES

Many RAND researchers never put our D's as unpolished or incomplete as these. Others do. With this series of D's, I move, at last, from the first group to the second: in the interests of communication, stimulation, and in particular, I hope, feedback of thoughts and reactions to me.

Over recent years, especially the last, I have filled many notebooks with reflections and comments on Vietnam as they occurred to me; mostly in fragmentary or outline form. This series of papers, in the first instance, collects those comments by subject and presents them, hastily filled out and edited, in typescript. Rather than polish them or, more importantly, follow through the analysis in any one paper, I have decided to move a fair number of these notes as quickly as possible toward readers who might be moved to comment; for my benefit, and perhaps, in some cases, for theirs. The growing interest at RAND in active work on "Lessons of Vietnam" and Lessons of Rebellion has especially encouraged me to issue these notes to RAND readers at this time, rough as they are.

The notes are appearing in no particular order, but are numbered consecutively for reference. Although I'm already aware that each of these is incomplete, don't let that inhibit your criticism or comments.

CRITICAL POSTURES ON U.S. DECISION-MAKING IN VIETNAM:
MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. "Winning strategies," or policies leading to "good" outcomes less than "winning," were: [pick one, or several, or other]

(a) infeasible, impossible for U.S. to find, or to choose or to implement (Stillman and Pfaff): "not real options" for the U.S.;

or (b) non-existent (Beaufre; Thai, for "win"; Kellen?);

or (c) possible, but missed by:

1. carelessness, inattention (Schlesinger) or by
2. "bad luck" (Kristol) or
3. "inexperience" (Pool) or
4. bureaucratic conflict, and unfamiliarity with proper technique and priorities (Thompson, Duncanson), or
5. unforeseeable incompetence (Kahn)

[i.e., we could have hit on right responses:

1. with closer attention, e.g., by President,
2. with another try;
3. with more time (we are learning);
4. better U.S. organization and better (British) advice; or
5. with ordinary standards of competence];

or (d) unlikely, difficult; i.e., the choices that we made were the likely ones, the easiest for us -- given our ignorance, preconceptions, governmental tendencies, and the situation -- even if not certainly predetermined (Ellsberg);

or (e) the same policies we followed, but

1. not pursued long enough (Rostow)
- or 2. not implemented well enough as yet (Pool?);
- or 3. aborted by the Diem coup (Wolf?)
- or 4. counteracted by U.S. public disunity (Westmoreland?);

or (f) none of the above (specify).

2. As for choices to intervene, commit, escalate, these were:

(a) inevitable, necessary, for U.S. (Rostow, and SDS
"revisionists");

or (b) careless, "mistakes," uncalculated (Schlesinger, Kennan);

or (c) avoidable, but calculated and likely (Ellsberg).

or (d) none of the above (specify).

3. Our aims in Vietnam [effectively: assurance of a non-communist regime in South Vietnam, without need for large, indefinitely prolonged U.S. combat involvement] were:

(a) Immoral, in view of Vietnamese desires (for a government other than the GVN's we supported, and increasingly, for peace), and of the U.S. interventions and violent pressures required (U.S. academic community).

(b) Increasingly irrelevant to larger U.S. interests, as the world situation, and reasonable U.S. Government premises about it, evolved (hence, too costly to pursue) (Galbraith).

(c) Unattainable (perhaps, after some critical date: 1945, '46, '50, '54, '59, '63. . .) (Kellen; after '59, Thai, Ellsberg).

(d) Attainable (by realistically "possible" - though perhaps unlikely - policies), but requiring:

1. different policies than those pursued (Thompson, Kahn, Wolf);
- or 2. much better high-level U.S. Government attention, overall planning, and control; or, less high-level attention and control;
- or 3. better Administration handling of public information policy and domestic politics, to assume broader and more reliable public support (Moyers? Westmoreland?).
- or 4. strong, effective pressure by the U.S. Government to change the character and policies of the GVN (Thai:

- if done before 1957), or, in an interim period, to willingness directly to supplant the GVN (Vann);
- or 5. risks and costs - of success, or failure - disproportionately high in view of U.S. stakes ("Establishment" critics): perhaps even (particularly for costs weighing upon the Vietnamese) immorally excessive (academic/student critics);
 - or 6. simply, longer time for actual policies to take effect: though this might be shortened with a higher intensity of effort, or with some different policies (MACV/JCS).
- or (e) Other.