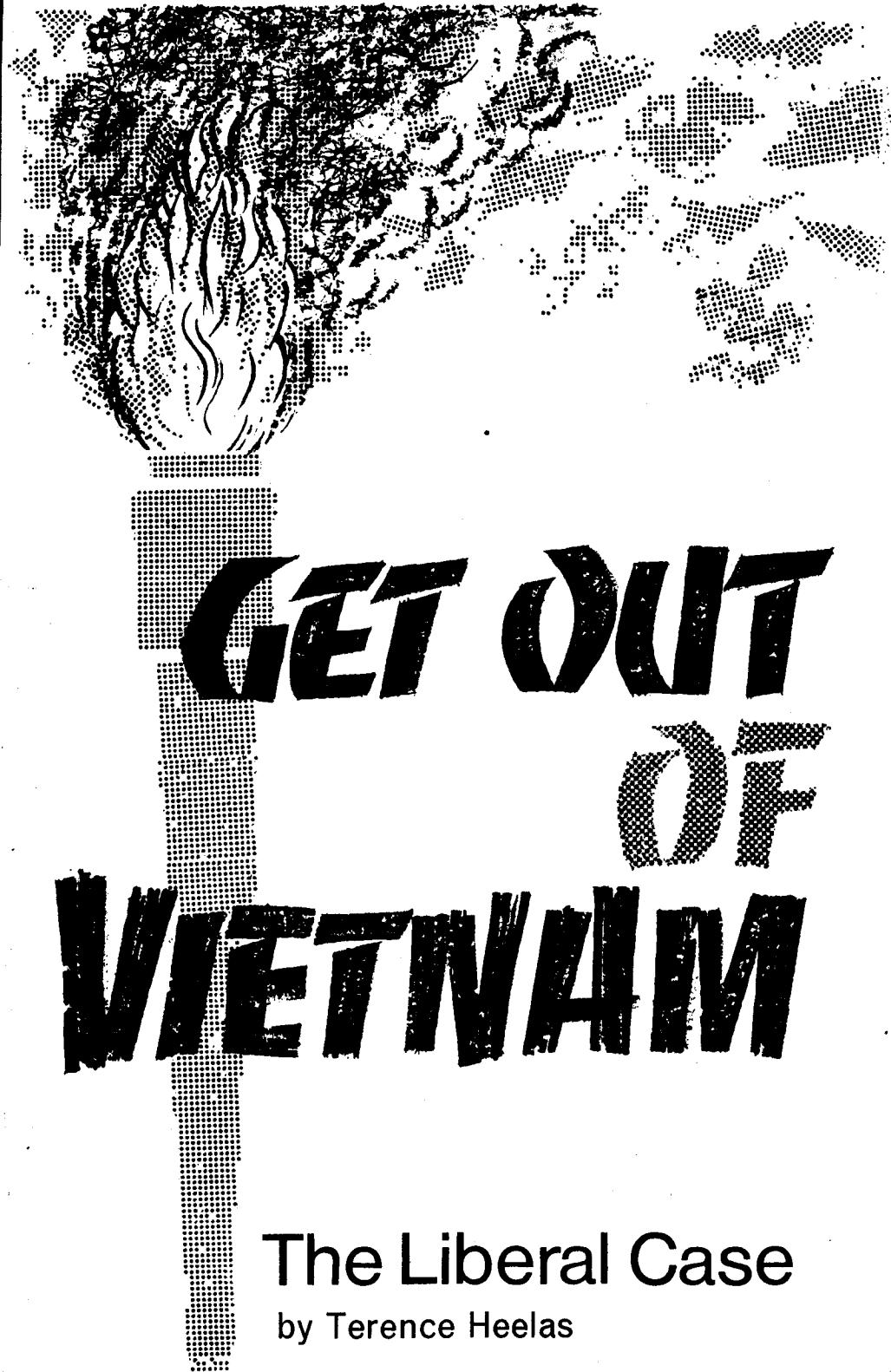




GET OUT OF VIETNAM

The Liberal Case

by Terence Heelas

Michael
Hanna
1970

Get out of Vietnam

Two shillings and sixpence

FOREWORD

Truth, it has been said, is the first casualty in war. Quite apart from the false history and misleading propaganda by which both sides seek to justify their actions, the emotions generated by war – that most theatrical of human activities – are usually so violent as to discourage objective analysis. Even among onlookers, the killing (too often of innocent bystanders) arouses emotions of hatred not at all conducive to clear thinking. Among the antagonists, this hatred becomes an almost insurmountable barrier, with both sides adopting a stance of total self-righteousness which precludes any possibility of compromise. How, indeed, *can* there be compromise in a contest which both sides see as a simple issue of Right versus Wrong?

The Vietnam war, in particular, seems likely to be fought to a bitter and mutually unproductive end, unless the good sense of the American people – already manifest in a growing opposition to the war – finally overcomes the unthinking patriotism on which the President and his Administration have so far been able to rely. If it does so (and the issue is still in the balance) the United States will prove itself unusually mature among the nations of the world. It takes the high degree of maturity for a democratic people to rise above simple emotionalism in time of war, and to recognise where their true interests lie. It is no easy thing for a people, many of whose sons are dead or in danger of death, to arrive at a dispassionate assessment of gain and loss, and to *cut* its losses accordingly.

Yet this is the only way by which the war can be ended without undue risk and disproportionate expenditure of blood and treasure. Non-Americans cannot hope to end this cruel and ugly war – either by patting President Johnson on the head or by kicking him in the pants. The best they can do is to appeal, over the head of the President, to the humanity and good sense of the American people – a people now engaged in an interior dialogue of unprecedented scope and vigour. Non-Americans, particularly those with a tradition of friendship with the United States, can most properly intervene in this dialogue by pointing out, as calmly and cogently as possible, that America's own interests would be better served if moderate counsels prevail.

So, although I am as emotionally involved as anyone, I shall try, in this pamphlet, to present a *reasoned* argument. In the last resort, reason – rather than emotion – will determine whether the US finds a way to disengage itself while still able to do so, instead of sinking ever deeper into the Vietnam morass.

TERENCE HEELAS

January 1968

THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Future historians will almost certainly decide that the United States' involvement in the Vietnam war has been accidental – in the sense of one damned thing leading to another without anyone intending it to lead to the present massive military commitment. Put in another way, it is highly doubtful if the Americans would have ever embarked on the defence of 'free' Vietnam if they had understood at the time where this commitment would lead them. They are now in the position of a business enterprise which has invested so many millions in a basically unprofitable project that it cannot bring itself to write off its losses. The directors – in this case the President and his military advisers – continually persuade themselves that another few millions will turn the trick. Vain hope!

The American commitment in Vietnam arose from a basic flaw in America's post-war political analysis, which regarded Communism as a centralised, monolithic conspiracy imposed on reluctant peoples by a handful of evil men. It never occurred to John Foster Dulles – and it still does not occur to Dean Rusk – that Communism, particularly Asian Communism, is both more popular and less centralised than the American people have been led to believe. For all their faults, the communist regimes in China, North Korea and North Vietnam would probably receive massive electoral endorsement if put to the test. Nor are the two latter the puppets of either Moscow or Peking, any more than Peking is a puppet of Moscow. Nationalism is at least as strong an element as Marxism in the composition of Asian Communism.

This analytical flaw, pardonable in Stalin's heyday but surely unpardonable today, led the Americans to suppose that Communism can *never* reflect the popular will – even as an alternative to the most corrupt, inefficient and alien regimes, and must therefore be resisted at whatever cost (including the cost of supporting corrupt, inefficient and alien regimes!). So that, in the early fifties, America was underwriting a large part of the cost of the French war in Indo-China – a war in which the Vietnamese people, communist and non-communist, identified themselves with the Viet Minh as the main element in the patriotic front against French imperialism.

When the French, after their defeat at Dien Bien Phu, made it clear that they were no longer interested in maintaining their rule in Indo-China, the Americans sought desperately to build up their own puppet, Ngo Dinh Diem, as the leader of an anti-communist South Vietnamese state. This despite the fact that the Geneva agreement of 1954 made it quite clear that the division of Vietnam along the 17th Parallel was to be a *temporary* division, pending elections in both 'zones' (as they were described in the Agreement) to deter-

mine whether or not the country should be reunited. America supported President Diem in his refusal to countenance such elections, which were supposed to have taken place in 1956.

In the early stages of Diem's administration, America provided great quantities of arms and equipment – together with some hundreds of military 'advisers' to train Diem's army in the use of the modern weapons provided – in direct contravention of the Geneva agreement.* Article 17 of this latter laid it down that 'The introduction into Vietnam of any reinforcements in the form of all types of arms, munitions and other war material, such as combat aircraft, naval craft, pieces of ordnance, jet engines and armoured vehicles is prohibited'.

It is important to understand that, although North Vietnam has also broken the Agreement by supplying the National Liberation Front (NLF) in the South with arms and – later – men, it was the Americans who *first* broke the Agreement and who broke it more consistently and abundantly. At no time has Hanoi provided a tenth of the men and equipment (to the NLF) that the Americans have given to Diem and his successors. At this moment there are over half a million American troops engaged in Vietnam, compared to less than 50,000 from North Vietnam – many of the latter originating from the South. In terms of equipment, the ratio is certainly many times higher.

America justifies its support for Diem and his successors with the claim that any sovereign state has the right to support another sovereign state against external aggression. America's legal case for intervention stands or falls on whether South Vietnam – having failed to implement Paragraph 7 of the Final Declaration of the Geneva Agreement (that relating to elections) – is a properly constituted sovereign state, and whether the continuing revolt against successive Saigon administrations is mainly indigenous or not. If it is not, if it could be proved that the revolt originated in the North rather than the South, America would have a case – although the question of Saigon's sovereignty would remain unanswered.

This case was presented in an American White Paper 'Aggression from the North' published in February 1965 – at the moment when the Americans embarked on their policy of bombing the North. In this White Paper the Americans admit that *less than 2½ per cent* of arms captured from the Vietcong were of Communist origin – the remaining 97½ per cent being French or American material which had found its way into the hands of the Vietcong. The same report, using uncheckable figures which may fairly be presumed to be an outside estimate, admits that only one in five or six of the Vietcong had come from North Vietnam.

*Which the Americans never signed, but agreed to abide by.

Even on American estimates, then, it is clear that the Vietnam war was (and is) mainly a *civil* war, with North Vietnam giving some men and supplies to the NLF – *but always enormously less than the Americans have given to the Saigon government*. It is transparently clear that, if all American and North Vietnamese forces were removed from South Vietnam – leaving the Saigon junta to fight it out with the NLF, the latter would control the South in a matter of months. In the circumstances it is a little disingenuous of the Americans to claim the Vietnam war as a simple case of 'Aggression from the North'.

Recently, however, as Senator Robert Kennedy has pointed out, the official American justification for intervention in Vietnam has changed. The war is now being presented, not as the defence of a 'free' people against external Communist aggression, but as part of a self-interested American policy to 'contain China'. Apart from the doubtful morality (to which Kennedy has drawn attention) of the systematic destruction of thousands of Vietnamese – combatant and non-combatant, North and South – in defence of *American* interests, this latest justification is pretty hard to swallow. There are no Chinese troops fighting in Vietnam – or anywhere else come to that. There are 500,000 Americans fighting in Vietnam – and another half million stationed elsewhere beyond America's frontiers.

What it all boils down to is that America operates a double standard. The United States has a perfect right and duty to send (and use) whatever force may be necessary to preserve 'stability' – i.e. the status quo – wherever it may be threatened. The Communist states have no equivalent right to upset the status quo – even when and where the status quo is plainly unsatisfactory to the majority of the people concerned. This because America is 'right' and the Communist powers 'wrong', and because America (for a variety of not always creditable reasons) has a vested interest in the status quo. America, with its enormous preponderance of military and economic power, is determined to defend its interests to the last drop of Vietnamese blood . . . or any blood that may have to be shed.

So we return to the simplistic analysis first propounded by a mentally sick James Forrestal, enshrined in the 'Truman Doctrine' and perpetuated by the late J. F. Dulles: America has a Manifest Destiny to act as a self-appointed world-policeman in defence of its most basic interest – the preservation of a global status quo.

Two questions arise. *Can* America preserve the status quo – even in Vietnam? Is it in America's *real* interests to do so?

THE MILITARY EQUATION

Despite the perennially optimistic reports emanating from General Westmoreland's headquarters in Saigon, it is clear that America and its allies, notwithstanding their enormous advantages in men and material – including complete control of air and sea, are no nearer victory than they were in the days when Mr MacNamara was confident that 'the boys will be home by Christmas (1965!).' At the time the prophecy was made there were some 25,000 boys to come home; now over half a million will be away for Christmas – and no one willing to suggest a terminal date for their homecoming. American casualties (dead) are now running at around 10,000 a year, the Vietcong still control most of the countryside, heavy and continuous American bombing has conspicuously failed to force Hanoi to the conference table, or to prevent Hanoi supplying and reinforcing the Vietcong.

On the political front, the pacification programme is as much a shambles as ever it was – partly due to the venality of Vietnamese officials, partly to the influx of peasants from the war zones overloading the administrative machine, partly to the damage to the South Vietnam economy caused by the presence of half a million highly-paid American soldiers – whose sexual needs have created very grave social problems in the capital. Nor has the recent election given South Vietnam the sort of stability for which the Americans had hoped: the Thieu-Ky administration only attracted 35 per cent of the votes, and it is reasonable to suppose that this figure would have been smaller had it not been for the pressures exerted by the military junta.

The reasons for the present stalemate are not hard to find.

1. One cannot deny the possibility that the Americans may achieve some sort of military victory with the extensive armoury at their disposal, assuming the major Communist powers postpone their intervention. The American presence has even raised the morale of the once-broken South Vietnamese (ARVN) forces – if only by relieving them of most of the fighting. The real point, however, is that, once the Americans withdraw (having stabilised the situation in the short-term), the whole process is likely to be repeated. Military force seldom solves long-term political and social problems, and there is precious little likelihood of it doing so in the peculiarly unfavourable circumstances obtaining in Vietnam.

2. The morale of the Vietcong, on the other hand, is still very high. Fighting on their own soil for – as they see it – their own independence from foreign occupation, and adequately reinforced and supplied from the North, they are more than a match (other things being equal) for bewildered Americans – many of them coloured

and resentful of their home status – fighting 10,000 miles from home for a cause they hardly understand. Consequently the Americans are forced to fight the war in such a way that 'other things' are not equal: they use their enormous superiority in fire-power and air-power to fight the war at long range.

3. Fighting a war at long range brings its own problems. Spraying the countryside almost indiscriminately with bombs, bullets, napalm and chemicals may exact a toll of enemy lives (though it means that we should treat with caution American claims of a 'kill-ratio' seldom less than 10:1); but it also involves high casualties among innocent bystanders and other non-combatants – a fact which tends to alienate the local inhabitants. It also alienates world opinion – a fact which we shall consider in a later section.

4. Because the terrain favours guerrilla tactics, the initiative generally remains with the Vietcong. When they see a favourable opportunity, they attack. When it ceases to be favourable, they melt away into the jungle. When the Americans attack, the Vietcong – more often than not – cannot be located and forced to fight. When the Americans withdraw, they are liable to walk into an ambush. When the Vietcong, as seems likely, are given portable ground-to-air missiles by the Russians, the Americans will no longer be able to rely on helicopters to offset their comparative lack of mobility.

5. The bombing of North Vietnam has not paid the dividends expected by US military planners. Far from weakening the resolve of Ho Chi Minh and his colleagues, it has united the people of North Vietnam behind them in their determination to resist aerial blackmail. The supply and reinforcement of the NLF has increased rather than diminished since the bombing started. The loss of 750 aircraft in less than three years is a serious drain even on American resources.

6. The Americans are rapidly exhausting their 'available options' – to use current Pentagon jargon. They have raised their manpower in Vietnam from a few hundreds to over half a million – until now there are few reserves (under the current draft arrangements) left to draw upon. They have used almost every kind of weapon that a civilised power *can* use – and some which no civilised power should. They have extended the bombing of North Vietnam to the point at which there are virtually no legitimate targets left to destroy.

7. The NLF and their allies, on the contrary, have a whole host of options in reserve. The bulk of the North Vietnamese army has not yet been committed. A whole panoply of Soviet missiles and other weapons remains unused – though the commanders of the US 7th Fleet must be uneasily aware of their existence. No single Chinese 'volunteer' of the millions available has so far appeared on the scene. Until now, the gigantic American war-effort in Vietnam has

been stalemated by (at most) 250,000 part-time guerrillas, stiffened by perhaps 20 per cent of North Vietnam's regular forces.

8. If the Americans try to force the issue by carrying the war into Laos and Cambodia – in an attempt to cut the 'Ho Chi Minh trail', or if they invade North Vietnam by land or sea, they will merely extend the area of fighting and multiply their own problems. If they content themselves with reproducing their present tactics, the war will continue indefinitely. Even if beaten in the short run, a Vietcong detachment can always bury its weapons and bide its time. Sooner or later, the Americans *must* go home: they cannot stay for ever.

9. With every year that passes – and this war has already lasted twenty years – China comes nearer to being a fully-fledged nuclear power. When it has the capacity to destroy just *one* American city as a reprisal to an American nuclear strike (and no ABM system can protect *every* American city), China will control the military situation in S.E. Asia as surely as America controls it in the Caribbean. Where a nuclear stalemate obtains, it is the side which controls the conventional (non-nuclear) options on the spot that calls the tune – as the Americans did in the Cuba crisis of 1962. By 1972 (or a little later) China will call the tune in S.E. Asia.

All this leads to the inevitable conclusion that the Americans cannot *win* in Vietnam. They may drive the Vietcong from some of the areas they hold today, they may (though this is doubtful) force Hanoi to call a temporary halt to the supply and reinforcement of the NLF; but they cannot hope to free all of South Vietnam and constitute it as a viable, independent anti-communist state in the time available to them. Time is simply not on their side. Even the Pentagon (the reputation of which is so much at stake) is aware that a major conventional war in Asia would be disastrous: such a war is not merely unwinnable – it is eminently loseable.

It is because of the time-limit imposed on them that elements in the Pentagon are calling for a more vigorous prosecution of the war in the time remaining. 'Hawkish' suggestions range from the mining of Haiphong harbour, through invasion of the North and a no-holds-barred bombing programme, to a pre-emptive nuclear strike on China's nuclear installations. The mood in America is increasingly one of 'Get on, or get out!' Even the hawks dare not contemplate a seemingly endless, inconclusive struggle – with the odds turning more and more in favour of the enemy. Hence their impatience.

But wiser counsels are beginning to prevail. Those Americans who are jealous of their country's reputation, and who recognise the increasing isolation in which America stands, are questioning both

the wisdom and effectiveness of President Johnson's Vietnam policy. To growing numbers of Americans it is clear that the United States is losing a great deal on the political swings, without gaining anything substantial on the military roundabouts.

THE POLITICAL BALANCE

The political motives underlying America's military intervention in Vietnam may be summarised as follows: (a) to contain China, (b) to defend whatever anti-communist regime happens to be in power in Saigon, (c) to convince America's *other* allies in Asia and elsewhere that the US is a dependable ally, (d) to defend the status quo in all areas where it is threatened by revolutionary – and therefore potentially Communist – upheavals, and (e) to preserve as large an area of the world as possible for American economic penetration.

From the American viewpoint, there is nothing disgraceful in any of these ambitions. Behind the bombing and the bluster, there is a great deal of genuine benevolence. Americans *believe* that the American way of life, so beneficial to themselves (unless they happen to be coloured, or otherwise underprivileged), must ultimately prove beneficial to the teeming millions of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The fact that the Communist states take a diametrically opposite view (and that the Third World, in the main, is suspicious of both camps) does not alter the overall sincerity and benevolence of American intentions.

The fact remains, however, that the benevolence of American intentions is increasingly obscured – in the eyes of an apprehensive world – by the malevolence of American deeds. Babies fried in napalm are a poor advertisement for the American way of life; and even America's friends are disturbed by the increasing brutality and lack of discrimination with which the war is being fought. A David-and-Goliath contest in which *Goliath* uses the long-range weapons is not a pretty spectacle. Nor are America's friends reassured by what is looming ahead in the way of further escalation. There is something very frightening in the phenomenon of great Power escalation, when it appears that the Power in question has more control over the throttle than the brake.

Intelligent Americans are therefore asking themselves whether their military efforts in Vietnam are not going to prove more of a liability than an asset – *even in terms of the aims which they have set themselves*. Those Americans not blinded by jingoism or by the unthinking anti-communism associated with the late Senator Mc-

Carthy are questioning whether America's present policies may not prove to be counter-productive in terms of America's real interests. Thus:

1. China is, sooner or later, going to be a Great Power in the same sense as America or the Soviet Union. In ten, or twenty, or thirty years' time, as even Mr Rusk has pointed out, China will be a power with a billion or a billion-and-a-half inhabitants and a full range of nuclear weapons. It will then, manifestly, be quite impossible to 'contain' China on her own doorstep. Is it therefore in America's long-term interests to goad and frighten this potential giant while it is still relatively weak? Remember what happened to the Philistines who goaded Samson! Would it not be better, on all counts, to encourage those moderate influences in China which can only come to the surface when China feels less threatened than now?

2. By virtually taking over both the war-effort and civil administration of South Vietnam, the Americans are postponing the day when the Vietnamese people can control their own destiny. The building of gigantic and obviously semi-permanent American bases at Da Nang, Pleiku and Cam Ranh (among others) encourages the belief (in Saigon government circles) that the Americans will *always* be on hand to defend whatever regime – however corrupt and inefficient – happens to be in power. This removes any incentive for self-improvement: it also overlooks the fact that, sooner or later, the Americans *must* leave Vietnam. And it is pure illusion to suppose that any Saigon administration that does not include elements of the nationalistic NLF will survive for a month once the Americans have gone.

3. Those of America's allies who are taking note of what it means to be 'defended' by the Americans (as in Vietnam) are becoming less and less keen to be so defended. It is *South* Vietnam, America's ally, which has borne the brunt of the damage and casualties inflicted by American bombs, bullets and napalm. It is in the *South* that the crops have been destroyed and the forests defoliated. It is in the *South* that the children have been killed, maimed or orphaned, the women prostituted, the economy wrecked. America's allies (the peoples, if not the governments) are likely to find this sort of thing too high a price to pay for the doubtful privilege of being defended against their own kith and kin. And America's other, less threatened, allies, such as France, are seeking accommodation elsewhere as the process of escalation seems to threaten their involvement. The Vietnam war, largely fought to validate America's alliances, is having precisely the opposite effect.

4. The defence of the status quo has the effect of wrong-footing America in the minds of under-privileged peoples throughout the world, who simply will not accept a status quo which condemns

them to a life of poverty, hunger and degradation. By supporting the status quo – particularly by supporting selfish and reactionary regimes throughout the developing world simply because they are (somewhat naturally) opposed to Communism – the Americans are trying to play Canute to the ineluctable tides of change. It leaves America wide open to charges of 'imperialism' and 'neo-colonialism', and it outrages the nationalist fervour which – rather than communism – is the mainspring of popular revolt in the underdeveloped world. Finally, to defend a status quo so manifestly unsupportable is to kick against the pricks: whether America likes it or not (and why, after all, *should* she not?) the dynamic of change will always, in the end, overcome the inertia of privilege. America's real interest lies in *supporting* change.

5. Experience has shown, again and again, that one does not, in the end, further one's economic prospects by policies which alienate the bulk of the people in a given area. Trade may follow the flag, but it seldom prospers under it for long: local resentments against the occupying power or its client-governments usually result in greater outgoings and incomings on the part of the 'protecting' power. It took the French and the British a hundred years to learn this simple truth. There is no reason why it should take America so long. It is a fact that the Vietnam war is costing the American taxpayer more than thirty billion (30,000,000,000!) dollars a year. What sort of return can he expect from this investment? And how *many* Vietnams can even the American economy sustain – with its own poverty programme virtually halted and with race-relations at an all-time low?

These are the reflections and questions which occur to more and more Americans – particularly among the young and the highly-educated – as the Vietnam war poses the stark alternatives of withdrawal (albeit graduated) and escalation. There is no middle road. A continuing stalemate is ultimately impossible – for reasons given under the section on 'The Military Equation'. Negotiations, in the sense of a compromise settlement acceptable to President Johnson are simply not 'on' – however much they may be desired by those Americans (and their friends) who want to leave Vietnam without losing face.

The unhappy truth is that there is nothing to compromise *about*. The Americans (that is the present American Administration) will not settle for anything less than a 'free' South Vietnam, anti-Communist and – because such a Vietnam cannot exist without it – permanently dependent on American military support. The NLF and Hanoi will not settle for anything less than an eventual withdrawal of US forces, a South Vietnamese government with strong NLF representation, and – at a not-too-distant date – elections throughout

Vietnam to determine whether the country should be reunited (as laid down in the Geneva Agreement of 1954). In the last resort, China – which is not yet involved – will certainly not settle for any solution which leaves American bases and troops either in Vietnam or Thailand.

THE SOLUTION

In these circumstances, one might well despair. But the situation, though abundantly difficult, is not incapable of solution. All that is needed is a recognition, on the part of this or another American government, that it is simply improvident to throw good money (and valuable lives) after bad, in a foredoomed attempt to police the world in defence of an – in both senses of the word – indefensible status quo. Once this hurdle has been surmounted, it should not prove impossible to devise a solution which, though not perfect, would certainly be more generally beneficial than the waging of an open-ended and beastly war, at disproportionate cost and risk to all concerned.

To help this recognition (on the part of the Americans), let them reflect that, long after the Americans have gone – as go they must, sooner or later – the Vietcong will still be there. Vietnam is the home of the Vietcong, and South Vietnam is the home of most of them. They cannot, in the nature of things, be extirpated . . . unless the Americans are prepared *totally* to lay waste the country they are pledged to defend. It is for this reason that the equivalents of the NLF, in India, Cyprus, Aden, Algeria, have always triumphed, though enormously weaker than the forces opposing them.

It would also help if the American people remembered their own revolutionary background, and understood that nationalism is likely to outlast ideology in those countries still struggling to stand on their *own* feet. Communism is not a centralised conspiracy now, if ever it was. The Russians, Cubans, Chinese, Roumanians and Yugoslavs are as distinct as chalk from cheese – and those not antagonised by American ‘crusaders’ provide an excellent potential market, as General de Gaulle is astute enough to realise.

Once having acquired a sense of historical perspective (which is the same thing, politically speaking, as a sense of proportion), the American people – given the right government – can embark on a programme of phased disengagement in Vietnam, of which the following would be necessary steps . . .

1. Stop the bombing of North Vietnam, both unconditionally and permanently. It is plainly unrealistic to expect Hanoi to negotiate under the threat of renewed bombardment – would America negotiate under a similar threat? It is also unrealistic to demand that

Hanoi must ‘reciprocate’ by cutting off supplies and reinforcements to the NLF and its own (unadmitted) forces in the field. Reciprocity can only be an exchange of like for like. A cutting of supplies to the NLF, if agreed to by Hanoi, would have to be accompanied by a cutting of *American* supplies to South Vietnam. Alternatively, Hanoi could stop bombing New York whenever America stops bombing Hanoi!

2. America must recognise that the National Liberation Front *exists*, that it is predominantly South Vietnamese in character, that it must be a party – in its own right – to any negotiations. To refuse any such recognition (because it is politically inconvenient to have to acknowledge the Vietnam war as mainly a civil conflict) is to deny oneself the only possibility (a) of reaching an agreement, and (b) of encouraging those elements in the NLF which are so *southern* as, possibly, themselves to prefer a separate, if socialist, South.

3. The Americans must themselves be prepared – if necessary on a unilateral basis – to phase down the fighting and withdraw some of their forces. God knows, they have enough of them! *Bilateral* withdrawals should then proceed on a *proportional* basis – bearing in mind that there are at least ten Americans in South Vietnam for every one North Vietnamese. On the issue of *unilateral* initiative, it should be remembered that every American decision to *escalate* the war was taken unilaterally – Washington never waited for Hanoi to reach agreement before ‘raising the ante!’ It need not wait to lower it.

The above proposals are quite unoriginal. They have already been put forward, on more than one occasion, by U Thant on behalf of the United Nations. They have already been agreed to by both the Liberal and Labour parties (though not, alas, the Labour Government) in this, the most sympathetic, of America’s allies. If they were agreed to (by America), and acted upon, the onus would be upon Hanoi to reciprocate where genuine reciprocity is possible.

I have one further suggestion to make, which would allow America to get off the hook with minimum loss of face. It is this:

4. America should allow, and indeed encourage, those elements in South Vietnam currently debarred (because of their ‘neutrality’) from representation, to achieve political recognition. Having done so, they are likely – because of the universal war-weariness in the South – to achieve power. Once in power, they can open their own negotiations with the NLF and with the North. Thus it is possible that a legally-constituted and popularly-based government in Saigon would *invite* the Americans to go home – an invitation which America, as a believer in the democratic process, could properly accede to. This is a solution the American people would be willing to accept.

One final point. The Americans are faced with a choice Either to continue to wage a bloody and ultimately futile war, at wholly disproportionate cost and risk – and with political consequences vastly detrimental to America's own long-term interests; or to face up to reality by cutting their losses and recognising, as a fact of life, whether they like it or not, that the role of World Policeman is beyond their capability and incompatible with the realities of world affairs in the last third of this century.

These realities insist that *no* Power, however good, however rich, however strong, can any longer afford to act as judge, jury and executioner in civil disturbances half a world away. America must learn in Vietnam – as Britain learned at Suez, France in Algeria and Russia over Cuba – that there are real limitations to the power of any nation, and that no nation can afford to challenge local *and* world opinion without doing itself more harm than good Particularly if the nation in question does not control the conventional options in the area under dispute!

The most hopeful aspect of an ugly and dangerous situation is that the American people are beginning to think for themselves; to break free from the rigid mould in which their policies have been formed hitherto; and to reach out towards a new policy in which they will recognise the limitations of their power, abandon their ill-considered crusade against Asian Communism (as they have already done in relation to Soviet Communism) and work for better Sino-American understanding. The only question is – will they alter their policies in time?

In its essentials, the Vietnam war is not so much a struggle between Right and Wrong, Capitalism and Communism, Imperialism and Asian Nationalism, as a struggle between obscurantism and enlightenment in the United States of America. It is here, and here alone, that any real 'victory' can be won.

On the outcome of this struggle depends, not merely the soul of America and the future of Vietnam, but the well-being of us all.

LIBERAL PARTY ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 1967

This Assembly, horrified by the continuing escalation of the war in Vietnam, calls on the Liberal Party to organise a major campaign against the war on the basis of the policy agreed by the LPO Council in February 1966.

It further declares:

- (a) unqualified support for U Thant's peace proposals;
- (b) that the United States Government should cease the bombing of North Vietnam forthwith and unconditionally;
- (c) that the British Government should dissociate itself from American policy in Vietnam in general and from the bombing of the North in particular.

Finally, dismayed at the violence perpetrated by the United States Government and deploring the violence of the Vietcong, this Assembly declares its support for the following political objectives of the National Liberation Front:

- (a) Acceptance of the right of the Vietnamese people to the reunification of their country if the peoples of both North and South so wish.
- (b) The withdrawal of all non-Vietnamese troops and bases from Vietnam.
- (c) Recognition of the right of the Vietnamese people to conduct their own affairs and pursue a neutral foreign policy if they so wish.

CHRONOLOGY

1884-1940	French colonial period.
1940-1945	Japanese occupation.
March 1945	Japanese proclaim an independent Vietnam under Emperor Bao Dai.
August 1945	Abdication of Bao Dai - Ho Chi Minh heads broadly-based provisional government from Hanoi.
March 1946	Hanoi Agreement between French and Viet Minh setting out terms for return of French troops.
November 1946	French naval bombardment of Haiphong - Ho Chi Minh government goes underground.
1947-1954	Indo-China War.
December 1949	Rival puppet regime in Saigon recognised as ruling Vietnam with qualified independence within the French Union.
May 1954	French defeat at Dien Bien Phu - Geneva Conference session on Vietnam opens following day. Provisional division of Vietnam along 17th parallel.
October 1954	Ho Chi Minh returns to Hanoi.
November 1954	Arrival of General Collins in Saigon to negotiate the setting up of the US Advisory Assistance Group.
October 1955	Referendum in the South elects Ngo Dinh Diem as President of South Vietnam.
July 1956	Date for reunification elections under Geneva Agreement.
1957	Guerrilla activities recommenced in the south.
December 1960	National Liberation Front founded.
1962	Formation of American Military Assistance Command (Vietnam).
1961-5	Build up of American forces from 1,000 to 25,000.
November 1963	End of Diem regime - confused political scene in south only stabilised by formation of military junta under Air Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky (June 1965).
August 1964	Gulf of Tongking incident followed by US Senate voting powers to their President to take 'all measures necessary' in the conduct of the war.
February 1965	US bombing of North Vietnam begins.
April 1965	First large increases in American troop presence.
April 1965	Ho Chi Minh gives Four Point plan for peace.
January 1966	President Johnson gives Twelve Point plan for peace.
June 1966	Opening of bombing on targets in heavily populated areas in North Vietnam.
September 1966	South Vietnam Constituent Assembly Elections.
September 1967	South Vietnam Presidential elections - General Thieu elected with Air Marshal Ky as Vice-President.

