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VIETNAM: STRATEGIC INCOMPETENCE IT'S
CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS

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18 October 1973

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opinion became alienated. The goals and conduct of limited war are reviewed. Political objectives, national and military strategy of the Korean War and the Vietnam War are subjected to comparative analysis. Further, comparison of command structure and national efforts in Korea and Vietnam is drawn. A danger exists that future limited war challenges will be avoided by the US because of the Vietnam experience. It is held that limited war strategy is a necessary capability and that the unhappy experience of Vietnam was caused by inadequate and inept political direction and hampered by faulty strategy. Defeat by default could lead to wider or total war.

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VIETNAM: STRATEGIC INCOMPETENCE
ITS CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

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The US has intervened in two limited wars in the last twenty years. Further Communist expansion by military effort will probably take place through use of limited warfare or wars of national liberation. In both previous limited wars, the US failed to adopt and adhere to precise political objectives and developed vague military objectives which in Vietnam were pursued hesitantly and without resolve employing a technique of gradual escalation. During a long, bloody and costly engagement, US and world opinion became alienated. The goals and conduct of limited war are reviewed. Political objectives, national and military strategy of the Korean War and the Vietnam War are subjected to comparative analysis. Further, comparison of command structure and national efforts in Korea and Vietnam is drawn. A danger exists that future limited war challenges will be avoided by the US because of the Vietnam experience. It is held that limited war strategy is a necessary capability and that the unhappy experience of Vietnam was caused by inadequate and inept political direction and hampered by faulty strategy. Defeat by default could lead to wider or total war.

"To carry the spirit of peace into war is a weak and cruel policy. When an extreme case calls for that remedy which is in its own nature most violent, and which in such cases, is a remedy only because it is violent, it is idle to think of mitigating and diluting. Languid war can do nothing which negotiation or submission will not do better; and to act on any other principle is not to save blood and money, but to squander them!"¹

LIMITED WAR, A NECESSARY CAPABILITY

"---the only rational course (for the US) is to develop a strategy capable of limiting warfare and fighting limited wars successfully".²

In an age when nuclear exchange is mutual suicide, Communist expansion will likely be attempted at a level insufficient to evoke neither a nuclear response or, in the Communist expectation, a conventional response. The Communist's subdued and subtle approach is certainly not spurred by any humane considerations but rather based on inability to challenge the US in a nuclear contest and with the hope of making a strategic gain in a peripheral area of minor importance to the US. The enemy will seek a challenge likely to be unpopular to the US and one for which it is anticipated the US may not have adequate general purpose forces.

Despite the cries of "No more Koreas" and now, "No more Vietnams", the US must have the capability to do more than mount a nuclear onslaught or surrender to a Communist limited war challenge. The ability to define and adopt precise, attainable political goals and achieve them rapidly with unswerving and bold use of appropriate military force is the essence of limited war, and is the means to counter Communist wars of national liberation. Once engaged in a limited war not waged effectively, there follows loss of reputation in the limited war arena, forfeit of diplomatic power and flexibility and erosion of national political power. If the US lacks the resolve or the capability to undertake limited war, the US will be tempted either to yield to Communist advances or resort to total war. Aware of US reluctance to prosecute vigorously

--or at all-- subversive wars of national liberation, and sensing their unpopularity with the American people and noting Congressional distrust of Presidential warpowers, there is a very real probability that the Communists will soon try again. The irony of genuine desire for peace and US hesitancy to oppose aggression may be one day to allow significant and dangerous Communist incursions leading inevitably to a much larger war.

LIMITED WAR, GOALS AND CONDUCT

Robert E. Usgood in his treatise on limited war provides the principle

"that military power should be subordinate to national policy, that the only legitimate purpose of military force is to serve the nation's political objectives. This principle of political primacy is basic to all forms and all uses of military power, whether employed overtly, covertly or only tacitly." ³

Further Usgood explains that military power must "serve as a controllable and predictable instrument of national policy, ... subjected to an exacting political discipline."⁴ In summarizing his concept of the relation of military force to political objectives, Usgood states,

"The primacy of politics in war means, simply, that military operations should be conducted so as to achieve concrete, limited, and attainable security objectives in order that war's destruction and violence may be rationally directed toward legitimate ends of national policy." ⁵

Further indorsing "political primacy", Usgood further identifies three rules (of application) to "minimize the difficulties and maximize the potentialities of political control."⁶ In his first consideration Usgood refers to limiting the political objectives and clearly communicating the limited nature of these objectives to the enemy. Here Usgood implies that the objectives are clear cut, well-defined and understood by the enemy and, most important, that they are consistently adhered to by the sponsor. He further delineates maintaining diplomatic intercourse and limiting the physical dimensions of the war as the other two rules.

Field Manual 100-5, Operations of Army Forces in the Field recognizes "political primacy" where it defines, "Military strategy is the art and science of using the armed forces of a nation to secure the objectives of the national policy by applying force or the threat of force."⁷ The relationship of national and military power is further explained as "Military power is that element of national power which is designed to apply force in the implementation of national policy and in the attainment of national objectives...", and that "Military forces, the operating element of military power, must be capable of exerting physical force in a manner and on a scale that will insure the attainment of these goals."⁸ Later the Manual reflects on the dilemma posed by limited warfare commenting that "limited aggression presents a double problem. On one hand, aggression must be opposed promptly and forcibly (emphasis added). On the other hand, force must be applied in a manner that reduces the risk of the conflict expanding into a general war."⁹

Numerous authorities have underscored the importance of clearly defined political or national objectives in limited war. Michael A. Morris holds that,

"a political objective is clear when it continues to represent concern for the preservation of the same specific vital interest or for the same kind of post war peace. If the objectives are clear in this sense, they can provide adequate political direction for the choice of military objectives and strategy."¹⁰

Morris further warns of what he terms "drift" in political objectives when he notes that, "Drift occurs when political objectives are not continuous in meaning or when they are so vague as to permit several divergent strategies to appear to be adequate ways of attaining objectives."¹¹ William E. LeGro outlined in two requirements how the US could best employ military capabilities in a limited war.

"The first requirement is that the political leadership must furnish precisely defined political objectives. Our major adversaries must understand the limits of these objectives. Once battle is joined, these objectives should be expanded only with great reluctance for it is essential that we establish a credible pattern of performance in this regard."¹²

LeGro's second requirement holds that, "decisive military objectives should be assigned, and they should be seized quickly", his implicit assumption being, of course, that only precisely defined political objectives can yield decisive military objectives.¹³ In addition to decisiveness, LeGro adds another factor of speed in achievement; consideration of this element will follow.

Seymour J. Deitchman addresses the relationship between political objectives and military strategy from a reversed perspective when he states,

"The military objectives of a military action can be clear; the political objectives should be clear, but are not always because we can not see well enough into the future. If military objectives can be achieved rapidly and decisively, the immediate political aims are easy to see -- Israel preserved its independence; the radical group did not take over the Dominican Republic; and the Hungarians and Czechs did not break away from Soviet domination." ¹⁴

Arthur E. Brown, Jr. in discussing objectives in limited war feels that,

"the objectives sought by the use of force should be reasonable and attainable; for if they are not, it is unlikely that an appropriate balance between means and ends can be reached. This is an essential component of a successful limited war strategy." ¹⁵

Further Brown concurs with Legood's "political primacy" in concluding that "operations involving the use of armed force, or the threat of its use, must be designed to accomplish definite, attainable objectives that support national objectives." ¹⁶

The US, therefore, when encountering a limited war challenge must at the outset define as clearly as possible limited political objectives and promptly inform its polity and the world. Next, appropriate, precise and attainable military objectives must be assembled into a military strategy supporting the national political goal. Barring major changes in the situation, the original political and military objectives should not be abandoned or changed. Political objectives, clearly defined and understood enlist domestic support and foreign understanding of US national effort. Additionally it is essential that the enemy be informed fully and accurately as to US political intent and channels

maintained between the US and the enemy. Accuracy and reliability of word and deed carry enormous weight in a fast moving limited force encounter. Maintaining open channels between US and the enemy is vital to following up early US military and political advances with a probe or solicitation to the enemy to desist or accept future inevitable and more serious losses. This latter concept leads comfortably to another consideration, specifically speed or the time factor in achieving objectives.

The tactics and methods of initiating limited war produce a built-in time lag which confuses and delays an intervening power. Is the conflict a civil war? An insurgency? Is an outside power supporting one side or the other? Does the US have vital interests in the area and is there a US treaty obligation? Time passes while a diagnosis is made, yet in limited war, time is crucial. For centuries the military mind has known that achieving objectives before an enemy can re-inforce or be supported is usually decisive. Deitchman's comment that rapid seizure of military objectives clarifies political objectives is worth noting.¹⁷ LeGro introduces a balance between the least cost and in the shortest possible time in fighting a limited war.¹⁸ He further cautions against hesitation and over concern for exciting confrontations, warning that, "The quick use of decisive force has caused us the most difficulty."¹⁹ LeGro concludes by urging that, "decisive military objectives should be assigned, and they should be seized quickly."²⁰ He believes that if limited wars are fought at all they should be fought "decisively, in a hurry, after a boldly realistic analysis of the risks."²¹ Gradualism as an expression of the flexible response strategy is ruled out by Jay B. Durst in observing that, "step by step escalation as practiced in Vietnam was ineffective because the enemy had sure knowledge of what our threat could become during any succeeding six month period.", and "that the threat of an escalation, whose

top limit was roughly predictable, was incapable of breaking the will of even a small and weak opponent."²² Similarly Walter Beinke warns on use of graduated counterforce as trapping us "on the escalation ladder", if initial commitment does not provide an early solution.²³ Like LeGro and Durst, Beinke advised that, "once our forces are committed, it is imperative that operations be conducted at the level of intensity required to assure rapid victory and early disengagement."²⁴

In discussing duration or time as a limiting category in limited war Brown advocates using time as a form of weapon, that is, inflicting damage for a period, then desisting to allow an enemy "time" to reconsider or cease hostile acts.²⁵ This concept, while attractive by humane considerations, might suggest weakness, uncertainty or vacillation to a determined enemy. Raymond J. Barrett addresses another aspect of time as a propaganda trap. He argues that,

"The time that passes while we gradually increase our application of force allows international pressures to build up. Distortion of the picture received by international opinion is almost inevitable. -- The protracted, gradually stepped up bombing of North Vietnam gave United States a "bully" image in many parts of the world."²⁶

U.S. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES, KOREA 1950-53, VIETNAM 1953-73

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In section II we touched on Usgood's requirement of "political primacy" in limited war and that political goals should be limited, clear cut and clearly understood by the enemy. Most authorities agree that political objectives once pronounced should be consistently adhered to by the sponsor. Other authorities quoted voiced emphasis on how clearly defined political objectives generate precise military objectives.

Application of US strategy in Korea failed to adhere consistently to one clear cut attainable political objective. On 25 and 27 June 1950 UN resolu-

tions restricted the political objectives to restoring peace and recovering the border at the 38th parallel. Military operations above the border would be limited to destruction of military supplies and air action was confined to Korean Peninsula. After the Inchon landing on 15 September 1950, the US government, and, on 7 October 1950, the UN General Assembly altered the political objectives of the war by authorizing General MacArthur to destroy North Korean armed forces in Korea in order to bring about a free, independent and united Korea. By 16 October 1950 the Chinese Communists had intervened and by 28 November 1950, the UN forces had retreated south of the 38th parallel. After the limited offensive of January 1951 the opposing armies stabilized the situation along the 38th parallel. Following the deadlock at the 38th parallel, the US again changed its political objectives back to the original goal of expelling the aggressors and restoring South Korea. Had the UN effort been halted after the Inchon assault, positions consolidated and the enemy advised to desist, it is likely that North Korea would have sought negotiations and the Chinese would not have intervened. A classic "limited war" would have been concluded with political objectives clear and well-defined, military objectives precisely outlined, and rapidly achieved. (four months). Unaltered political goals would have been achieved and war weariness in the US would have been avoided.

Turning now to the other end of the western Pacific area, US strategy in Vietnam unfortunately displayed a similar changing set of political objectives. Evolution of US strategy in Indochina encompassed about 20 years rather than the about three years in Korea (1949-1952). The two decade US involvement in Vietnam will be divided here into ten year periods, 1953-1963, ending with President Kennedy's assassination, and 1964-1973 including President Johnson's gradual escalation and President Nixon's strategic withdrawal.

Following the armistice in Korea, a joint US-French communique of 28 March

1953 warned that if the Chinese took advantage of an armistice in Korea to pursue aggression elsewhere (italics added for emphasis), "such action would have the most serious consequences (emphasis added) for the efforts to bring about peace in the world and would conflict directly with the understanding on which any armistice in Korea would rest."²⁷ In a speech 16 April 1953 President Eisenhower said that peace in Korea should mean "an end to the direct and in-direct attacks upon the security of Indochina and Malaya (emphasis added). For any armistice in Korea that merely released aggressive armies to attack elsewhere would be a fraud."²⁸ Between 2 September 1953 and 7 April 1954, only one month before the French defeat at Dienbienphu, both President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles repeatedly warned China, stressing the importance of Indochina to the US.²⁹ In 1954 President Eisenhower promised "to assist the government of Vietnam in maintaining a strong, viable state capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means."³⁰

Thus despite repeated US warnings to China and indirectly to the Viet Minh, over a two year period - (1953-54) - the US failed to meet its challenge in Indochina. The only power capable of staving off French defeat was the US, and while the US exhorted the French to continue the fight, aiding with air craft, technicians and heavy financial support, the US proved unwilling, at the critical moment, to commit air and ground forces. The defeat was as great for the US as for the French. In the view of Uggood,

"The reverse in Indochina demonstrated that successful containment in the gray areas depended upon a capacity for local ground defense that the United States could not provide. It also demonstrated the disastrous effect upon American prestige, diplomacy, and the credibility of her deterrent of trying to contain Communist aggression by military policies that purported to escape the necessity of local ground defense but that actually put the United States in the position of having its bluff called."³¹

In July 1954 the US shirked any involvement in the armistice negotiations at Geneva. In 1955 American adviser took over from the French in equipping

and training the South Vietnamese army. In October 1960 President Eisenhower assured President Diem of American aid "so long as our strength can be useful".³² Later, in 1961, the US violated the Geneva Accord limits on military advisers by increasing the numbers to 3000 against a maximum allowed of 600. (by the end of 1963 the number of advisers had increased to 17,000). According to William W. Kaufman by 1959, "The guerillas began seriously to challenge the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem."³³ The characterization of the US as a "paper tiger" is evident from the oft repeated warnings 1953-55, and the ineffective commitment of US power in 1961-62.

In 1961 after President Kennedy had sent Vice President Johnson to Vietnam in May and General Taylor there in October, a strategy of a sort began to emerge which was actually, in the words of Joseph Buttinger, a compromise "between withdrawal and full intervention by increasing the advisers and logistical support."³⁴ Not appreciating that, under Diem, the basic structure of South Vietnam was breaking (and being broken by the enemy), the US decided to support South Vietnam militarily without assigning political objectives. The plan seemed to be that the struggle could be somehow limited to Vietnam and, that with US advice and logistical support rendered on a "cost-effective" basis, the war could be militarily won by the South Vietnamese, while the US avoided involvement in an Asian war. In the views of Cornelius D. Sullivan et al, the "Kennedy administration had not formulated a coherent, long range military strategy for Vietnam. The Kennedy calculation appeared to have been that the insurgency would be put down with relative ease with a logistic and advisor role only for the US."³⁵ The implementation of the Kennedy strategy in 1961 and 1962 directly committed US personnel to a combat role and placed US prestige and power "on the line." The program included extensive retraining of the Army of Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) to the concept of mobile de-

fence and further economic measures, but it specifically ordered American personnel to fly intelligence, air reconnaissance and photography missions with the Vietnamese, directed American naval craft to participate in surveillance of coastal shipping and provided helicopter and light aircraft with technician support to enhance the ARVN offensive capability. The results of this program were obvious. American advisors entered battle with the ARVN, American pilots flew missions and American naval units were in action. US prestige was even more positively identified and committed in 1961 than when US aircraft carriers stood off the coast in the Gulf of Tonkin in 1954 ready to aid the French. It is clear that US policy makers "did not appreciate the depth of the struggle to which they were committing US resources."³⁶

By September 1963, Diem's repression of the Buddhists led Kennedy to repudiate Diem's regime, referring to how Diem had "lost contact" with his people and that the war could not be won without their support. While this utterance, followed by US withdrawal of support for Diem's notorious special force (Saigon Secret Police), did not further US strategic aims, it certainly must have encouraged the enemy's plans. The ensuing coup against Diem was undoubtedly encouraged and precipitated by this show of disaffection for Diem by Kennedy.

The first ten years of US involvement in Indochina (1953-63) began with a political objective of apparently trying to bluff China and Ho Chi Minh out of conquest in the area while exhorting the French to fight with the assistance of economic aid and some logistical support. The French capitulation was a defeat for the US as well since our bluff was called and we did not respond to the challenge. The US neglected the Geneva sessions in July 1954 but began at once to back Diem's fumbling and inept regime as the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese began to step up terrorism. Toward the end of the decade Kennedy had not developed a comprehensive strategy toward Indochina but elected

rather than a compromise between withdrawal and intervention with the expectation that the South Vietnamese would do the fighting. But by the end of 1963, Kennedy was disenchanted with Diem and his alienation from the people and the world saw a US President publicly announce that the government of an ally was so out of touch with the people that there was considerable doubt the war could be won. The decade ended thus with no real US strategy, Vietnam about to collapse, its faltering government overturned by a coup, and vast areas dominated by the enemy.

The second decade saw the Johnson administration inherit the strategic hiatus of the Kennedy days. But by the time Johnson took office the situation was rapidly deteriorating. 1964 became for President Johnson what 1961 had been for President Kennedy. Without clear political objectives and no over-all strategy, Johnson realized that some action must be taken and promptly. As put by Buttinger, "1964 was the last year during which a solution could have been sought before the war became primarily American and before it extended to the north."³⁷

Unfortunately for Johnson and for the US as a nation, 1964 was also a Presidential election year. Behaving much more as the politician than the strategist, although faced with a critical situation for which the US had no effective strategy, Johnson embarked on a political campaign for re-election. Opposed by Senator Barry Goldwater, President Johnson believed it expedient to paint himself peaceful in contrast to the bellicose stance assumed by his opponent. Out of political needs stumbled a series of US policy statements from a US President that became, at the time, close to the only strategic concepts available. On 12 August 64, only a few days after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, Johnson promised not to send US youth to South East Asia, and on 29 August 1964 he "rejected advice to load our planes with bombs and drop them on certain areas."³⁸ Even as late as 28 September 1964 Johnson hedged his po-

sition with, "so we are not going north to drop bombs at this stage of the game."³⁹ It should be noted, however, that "in mid 1964 a promise had been made to Premier Khanh for a bombing offensive in return for Saigon "stability and efficacy."⁴⁰

On 2 August 1964, North Vietnamese gunboats attacked the US Maddox and on 4 August 1964 a second incident allegedly occurred. The President ordered retaliation in the form of attacks against the boat pens and dock facilities and obtained from Congress the South East Asia resolution allowing the President "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the US and to prevent further aggression."⁴¹ According to Buttinger there is a question whether the US provoked the Tonkin Gulf incident by accompanying South Vietnamese vessels on a raid, and that "Johnson represented the Congressional resolution as a spontaneous reaction supporting the administration, but some Presidential aides (reportedly) had carried a 'draft of the resolution' around with them for weeks."⁴² Regardless of the mechanics of the situation, Johnson had, in mid August 1964, an incident challenging US on the high seas, an "act of war" if you will. Following his radio address to the nation at the time there was considerable "closing of ranks" in his support. Johnson stood at an hour of decision, armed with a congressional resolution to "take all necessary measures" and "to prevent further aggression" (emphasis added) and backed by a major segment of the people. Instead of defining a clear cut political objective in Vietnam and integrating this into national purposes which would permit definition of precise military objectives, the Honolulu meeting was held and instead the fateful decision was made favoring Secretary McNamara and General Taylor's wish to test the "flexible response theory" or to "twist the arm a little." 1964 thus produced no concrete plans for obtaining victory, no ultimatum to the enemy, no mobilization of US reserves and no appropriate territorial organization for conflict. Perhaps worse, it required no further

efforts toward mobilization of the South Vietnamese.

On 7 February 1965 following the Pleiku attack against US positions, bombing of the North began. Between 7 March 1965 and June 1965 US troops were moved into South Vietnam, reaching 50,000. On 10 July 1965 President Johnson announced what could have been a preamble to a national goal and a strategy for accomplishment; "we committed our power and honor and that has been affirmed by three Presidents."⁴³ By 20 July 1965 McNamara had returned from Saigon impressed with "the deterioration in the Vietnam war." It was McNamara's recommendation that manpower be increased from 50,000 to 150,000 with plans to go to 200,000. By late summer a plan was in being which required obligation of new funds, broad near-war powers for the President and a mobilization of US military reserves. In an apparent breach with the Congressional resolution authorizing "all necessary measures", Johnson rejected this plan and asked for a revision providing for 150,000 men, less cost and no reserve mobilization. Thus began the faltering and fumbling prosecution of the war with escalation in a stepwise fashion roughly predictable by the enemy so that the US commitment could be adjusted to, matched or avoided by the North Vietnamese. It was the US slowly climbing the escalation ladder while, ironically, the enemy enjoyed the option of "flexible response". As Durst ably summarizes, "Escalation, designed to win by destroying the opponent's will, if not massively concentrated, and capable of even further massive and credible steps upward in the scale of attrition, will not do the job."⁴⁴

1965 to 1969 saw US strength rise to a peak of 543,400 men. According to Sullivan et al,

"The first integrated military plan for Vietnam seems to have taken shape with the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) air strike recommendations and General Westmoreland's estimate of the situation for ground warfare in mid 1965. Apparently the JCS submitted a target list of 94 critical targets in North Vietnam to include main airfields, major ports, POL facilities, rail and highway system choke points, war materiel storage areas, barracks and assembly areas."⁴⁵

The JCS favored reduction of these 94 targets within a two or three week period (emphasis added), not gradually over a three year period. Sullivan et al concluded by offering their opinion that had the JCS recommendation been adopted, the "shock of surprise and intensity of such a blow would have had influential military and psychological effect."⁴⁶ The author also pointed out that in 1965 North Vietnam air defenses were primitive and that US losses would have been small.

What restrained President Johnson from a concise definition of national strategy and an associated military strategy may never be known and it is in any event, beyond the scope of this work. In passing comment, however, the pertinency lies possibly in Johnson's inability to define, balance and relate his role as Chief Executive of domestic affairs with his role as Commander-in-Chief.

Survey of some military students and historians reveals lack of agreement on the objectives of US national and military strategy in Vietnam. As in Korea, so in Vietnam, there appear to have been three sets of political objectives. Deitchman summarizes the changes most succinctly as, "In Vietnam, we at first expected to defeat completely the Communist attempt to take over the country; we then argued for self-determination; and now say that, if self-determination leads to a Communist government, we will accept it."⁴⁷ Barrett agrees that the US had adopted a "basic goal of persuading the north to end its aggression."⁴⁸ Durst identifies three other more loosely defined objectives. Durst first states that, "Our long-announced policy had consistently stated that our role in Vietnam was to assist the South Vietnamese in choosing their own form of government, free of outside interference."⁴⁹ Later Durst asserts that the successive steps in the US build up, "were in pursuit of a military strategy which would compel the North Vietnamese to lower their objectives and reduce their involvement."⁵⁰ Finally Durst concludes that after

July 1965, "Our strategy of attrition, designed to grind down his military strength and reduce his areas of control, seemed proved by almost any indicator we examined."⁵¹ To emphasize the lack of coherent strategy and the shifts in whatever interests the US displayed, Morris indicts the Johnson administration by stating that,

"The vicious circle of reciprocal influence between abstract vital interests and vague political objectives makes clarification of US political objectives in Republic of Vietnam extremely difficult... This vagueness allowed the US commitment to the Republic of Vietnam gradually to deepen in spite of the limitations the United States had originally set on its involvement."⁵²

Morris concludes by assigning responsibility to the highest level,

"Most of the responsibility for the drift of US policy in the Republic of Vietnam must be assigned to inadequate political direction. This occurs when vital interests and political objectives are not defined clearly and when their respective costs and benefits of implementation are not thoroughly considered. The US strategy followed until recently in Vietnam was a manifestation of inadequate political direction. As noted, political objectives should determine the nature of military objectives and strategy... Lack of clarity regarding what kind of a situation we want to end up with after the war, and lack of certainty about how to achieve such a situation that is consistent with our interest, led by default to primary emphasis on military efforts."⁵³

The student can only conclude that poorly defined political objectives in Vietnam prevented formulation of an effective national strategy.

THE FAILURE IN MILITARY STRATEGY

TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION, COMMAND STRUCTURE AND ALLIED EFFORT

Without a coherent national strategy based on well-delineated political objectives, an appropriate military plan is impossible. To commit US power and resources to Vietnam alone while military operations slop over into Laos, Cambodia and Thailand was folly. At the moment such a commitment was undertaken or entertained, the US should have sought international understandings with Laos, ~~Laos~~, Cambodia and Thailand, agreeing that the entire area is a war

zone and that a theater of war was recognized and thereby organized. Proper territorial organization at the outset would have precluded the embarrassing "dirty hands" posture the US found itself in with conducting the CIA "secret" war in Laos and the invasion of Cambodia and the basing of bombers in Thailand. Clearly the war zone should include all areas involved or likely to become involved in military operations. Clearly the enemy was able to capitalize on such careless territorial control in contrast to Korea where the geography of a peninsula permitted the classical territorial organization.

In the command structure, striking differences between Korea and Vietnam are apparent. In Korea unity of command was achieved by the creation of a UN Combined command with one allied commander. Non-US troops were integrated as units into major US commands and all ground, air and naval operations were coordinated through a single commander. South Korea mobilized its national resources totally and went on a full wartime basis. It is noted that the Korean population is more homogenous and politically unified than in Vietnam. In Vietnam the bulk of the people were somewhat united in wanting the French out, but were undecided whether to line up with the Viet Minh or the untried Diem regime. The feelings about US intervention were at best mixed, since they did not want the US to take the place of France and were uncertain about US assistance. In any event, in Vietnam, the US tolerated a weak government that failed to mobilize fully its resources. Further the US failed to insist on fully integrating ARVN personnel and units into US units or, at least organized within the US or allied command structure. Thus the ARVN remained weak, autonomous, tactically independent, at best dubious military associates.

While it is true that lack of port facilities prevented massive and rapid input of US forces and material prior to 1967, when through-put capacity was attained in that same year, the US did not seize the opportunity to apply over-

whelming force at what would have been a decisive moment. In contrast to the Israeli effort which took place simultaneously, the US failed to appreciate that fighting a limited war means keeping it short in duration with rapid and maximum force application. Although US strength exceeded 543,000, the US failed to organize into a field army structure and thus was unable to avail itself of the tactical and strategic capabilities of this organization.

When the trail of damages following the Vietnam war is inspected one perceives as General Maxwell Taylor commented, "the loss of national pride, a loss of respect for ourselves and for our institutions starting with the Presidency."⁵⁴ When the loss of life, the dollar cost, the weakening of US prestige, and finally a basketfull of assorted problems of drug use, POW and veteran problems, domestic turbulence and morale in the armed forces is added, the total effect is shattering. We have come ^{to} soul-searching ourselves both as a nation and as individuals. One can ask whether it is morally any worse for a US Air Force Officer to be accused of falsifying flight records of bombing runs over Cambodia than for a US President to stand guilty of failing in the higher political and military direction of the nation? Can a military subordinate be held accountable for a tactical error which occurs in the framework of a faulty national strategy?

CUNCLUSION - NO OTHER COURSE

The US can not abandon the option of the limited war. Although we do not seek such a conflict it will be forced upon us. If there is another time for limited war, the US must diagnose the situation accurately and rapidly, then determine US political objectives and formulate a national strategy and accompanying military strategy to achieve rapidly the political objectives. The political objectives must be consistently adhered to. The military operation must be planned according to acknowledged concepts of war to include

proper territorial organization for war, unity of command, mobilization of the national resources and appropriate mobilization of the allied nations' resources and especially of the attacked host nation. Such actions will affirm our intent to the enemy and impress the national resolve on our people. Finally the national power must be committed rapidly, resolutely and with impressiv force so as to preclude any significant counterforce or residual enemy options and to compel early negotiations to achieve the announced political objectives. With two unpopular limited wars within as many decades, there is a real possibility that the US might flounder if confronted soon again with another limited war situation. To succumb by default will seed the greater war of the future.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Thomas B. Macaulay, 1828
2. Robert E. Osgood, Limited War: The Challenge to American Strategy, p.1.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid, p. 2.
5. Ibid, p.6.
6. Ibid, p.11.
7. US Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5, p. 1-2.
8. Ibid, p.1-3
9. Ibid, p.1-6
10. Michael A. Morris, "When Are Political Objectives Clearly Defined?", Military Review, October 1969, p. 5.
11. Ibid.
12. William E. LeGro, COL, USA, "The Why and How of Limited War", Military Review, July 1970, p. 38.
13. Ibid.
14. Seymour J. Deitchman, "Limited war", Military Review, July 1971, p. 10.
15. Arthur E. Brown, COL, USA, "The Strategy of Limited War", Military Strategy Textbook, USAWC, Vol. III, Chap. VIII, p. 3.
16. Ibid.
17. Deitchman, p. 10.
18. LeGro, p. 34.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 38.
21. Ibid., p. 39.
22. Jay B. Durst, COL, USA, "Limited Conventional War, Can it be Successful?", Military Review, July 1970, p. 62.
23. Walter Beinke, COL, USA, "Flexible Response in Perspective", Military Review, November 1968, p. 52.
24. Ibid.

25. Brown, p. 6.
26. Raymond J. Barrett, "Graduated Response and the Lessons of Vietnam", Military Review, May 1972, p. 89.
27. Henry Brandon, Anatomy of Error, p. 12.
28. Osgood, Note 29 to Chapter 10, p. 300.
29. US Department of State Bulletin, 27 April 1953, p. 601.
30. Osgood, p. 216.
31. Ibid., p. 214.
32. "The Lessons of Vietnam", U.S. News and World Report, 27 November 1972, p. 24, (hereinafter referred to as U.S. News, 27 November 1972).
33. William W. Kaufman, The McNamara Strategy, quoted from Lesson 2, Sub-course S-2, USAWC, p. 68.
34. Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Political History, p. 481.
35. Cornelius D. Sullivan, et al, The Vietnam War: It's Conduct and Higher Direction, p. 5.
36. Ibid., p. 3.
37. Buttinger, p. 482.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Brandon, p. 31.
42. Buttinger, p. 483.
43. Brandon, p. 54.
44. Durst, p. 63.
45. Sullivan, et al, p. 5, pp. 71-72.
46. Ibid., p. 72.
47. Deitchman, p. 11.
48. Barrett, p. 83.
49. Durst, p. 60.
50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.
52. Morris, p. 7.
53. Ibid., pp. 7-8.
54. U.S. News, 27 November 1972, p. 23.

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2. Heinke, Walter, COL USA. "Flexible Response in Perspective." Military Review. Vol. XLVIII, November 1968, pp. 47-52.

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3. Brandon, Henry. Anatomy of Error. Boston: Gambit Inc, 1969.

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