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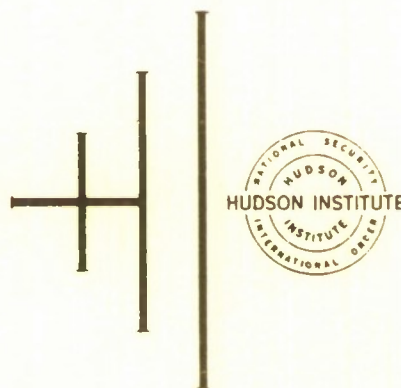
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FOUR PAPERS ON THE VIETNAMESE INSURGENCY

III. PRINCIPLES FOR SETTLEMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Raymond D. Gastil



HUDSON INSTITUTE

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Four Papers on the Vietnamese Insurgency

III: PRINCIPLES FOR SETTLEMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM

By

Raymond D. Gastil

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Four Papers on the Vietnamese Insurgency

- I. A Conservative, Decentralized Approach
to Pacification in South Vietnam, HI-878/2/I
- II. Counterinsurgency and South Vietnam:
Some Alternatives, HI-878/2/II
- III. Principles for Settlement in South Vietnam,
HI-878/2/III
- IV. Toward the Development of a More Acceptable
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Some of those who have been kind enough to review and contribute to the document disagreed considerably with the author over the concepts contained in this report, but the criticisms were almost invariably constructive, and in general are reflected in the document, even where substantial disagreement still remains.

Four Papers on the Vietnamese Insurgency

General Preface

In these papers I have attempted to consider a number of alternative means to raise the level of security in South Vietnam so that the tide of allegiance begins to flow strongly against the communists. In developing these papers I have been aware of the many important issues relative to security with which I have not dealt, or have only dealt with tangentially. These issues have been ignored because: 1) I thought I had little to say that others haven't said; 2) I felt that they were of second priority; 3) I thought that the United States, or at least an American analyst at a distance, could have little of real use to say on these topics.

I am convinced that the evolution of a more legitimate Saigon government is crucial, and, more importantly, the collapse of the Saigon consensus could ruin all other plans. This is something to worry about and try to avoid, but this subject does not appear to be one to which we can add much to analytically.

I believe that economic, social and educational development are of great importance in South Vietnam. Land reform is an important aspect of this, although increasing land and man productivity may be equally important. In many parts of South Vietnam, however, the issue is more one of finding steady, remunerative employment for a locally surplus population than it is a matter of dividing up land more equitably. I believe that the country can be made to grow now, and may really "take off" if peace is achieved. For example, a subsidized rice price for the farmer might go a long way toward reversing production trends in the Delta. But I do not believe that economic development is generally a very effective counter to insurgency once stated. Indeed, the readjustments attendant on the economic development of underdeveloped countries often prepare a fertile ground for communist or other radical ideology.

I believe that there does have to be change in the Vietnamese social and political structure to accomplish the demands of a changing economic situation. There needs to be institution building. Yet the question is one of timing. For example, a change toward greater centralization which might be desirable in 1990 might merely further disorganize society in 1970.

I am confident that there is administrative insufficiency in South Vietnam. There need to be better men, more trained men, and a more organized national structure. However, to say this does not solve the immediate problems. My reaction is to reduce or restrict the demands on the structure rather than to imagine its rapid improvement. However, at the apex of the command structure I believe that a joint Vietnamese-American war council may help to solve the most general problem of insufficient direction and coordination. It is necessary to have a generally accepted strategy, including priorities and standards of performance, even if we are to use a generally decentralized administration for the actual execution of plans.

The security suggestions given in these documents stem from a number of alternative assumptions and judgments of the current scene. The first paper (A Conservative, Decentralized Approach to Pacification in South Vietnam) is based on the observation that many Vietnamese and American advisers at the district and province level believe that if they were simply provided with more resources at this level--perhaps another regional force company in every district--then they could vastly improve and perhaps solve their pacification problem. Since in most areas our conventional offensive makes it extremely difficult for the VC/NVA to match these increases at the district level, I judge that this may well be correct. If so, then only a rather modest change in priorities may be necessary for the Vietnamese forces with almost no reallocation of U.S. forces. This approach stresses a primarily Vietnamese solution to the insurgency problem. To a large extent, a discussion of district emphasis and decentralization is a plea for a solution which fits GVN's administrative capability and which builds on the strengths available in the South Vietnamese society.

Yet this minimum approach may be insufficient. The security problem of most pro-GVN areas in the country is severe, for the war is everywhere and there is no front in terms of which success can be measured. A review of alternative counterinsurgency systems and of the present war in Vietnam suggest that we need to separate the people from the insurgents more positively than the districts can do in isolation. (Counterinsurgency and South Vietnam: Some Alternatives) But if we are to set up an effective frontal system, I believe we must make a major reallocation of all friendly forces in Vietnam. This appears to require deep fronts of patrolling, both area saturation and what I call a thickened perimeter. On the basis of this set of assumptions I have tried to look at the forces which might be required and the degree to which present deployments might have to be altered.

In addition to these questions I have tried in the remaining papers to ask what we want by way of final settlement, what we might expect to end up with if things go moderately well. (Principles for Settlement in South Vietnam) I have also tried to inquire into the possibility of improving the morality of our position in Vietnam--maintaining stringent limits which are sometimes costly to us, but also accomplishing our objectives with less cost to everyone involved. (Toward the Development of a More Acceptable Set of Limits for Counterinsurgency) In particular, I am thinking of the legacy of this war. What are we going to think of ourselves after it? What lessons might it have for our next one?

III: PRINCIPLES FOR SETTLEMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM

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PRINCIPLES FOR SETTLEMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM

With or without negotiation the war in South Vietnam will end. The ways in which it will potentially end affect fighting today, and will do so more in the future. Equally important, it is necessary for all of those involved on our side to develop a framework within which the war should and must end. This framework must be satisfying to Americans and Vietnamese in both the short and long run. Particularly in the face of negotiating pressures, pressures which may rise if we start to be successful, we need to have a common basis for our effort. It is hoped that this paper will contribute to the development of this framework.

The following are the general principles of settlement as I see them:

1. Identity of Themes for Negotiated or Non-Negotiated Settlement
2. Indochina Viewed as the Proper Area for Settlement
3. Settlement Plans Officially Announced by Saigon, Vientiane (or Bangkok)
4. Reconciliation the Major Theme of South Vietnamese Settlement
5. General Amnesty to Vietnamese Who Illegally Entered South Vietnam After 1956
6. Phased Withdrawal of Most Large Foreign Units as an Allied Objective
7. Maintenance of Long-Term Role for U.S. Advisers and Special Forces in Laos and South Vietnam
8. De-escalation to Panhandle Bombing

1. Identity of Themes for Negotiated and Non-Negotiated Settlement

The United States and its allies fear to negotiate for many reasons. It is reasonable in the present context for South Vietnam to fear a sell-out by the United States, or for the United States to fear a sell-out by its sometimes European friends, and particularly by the United Nations. It is also reasonable to view asking for negotiations as a sign of weakness which might particularly shake the GVN. Because we are a democracy with an articulate opposition to the war, it is also difficult for us to have an asking price very different from our bottom price. Similarly, it is hard for us to fight well during negotiations, and negotiations may easily be used to stall the war against our interests. Moreover, because negotiations raise such high hopes for peace on our side, it is very difficult to let them fail, and Hanoi would know this weakness. However, we should not be in a position of fearing negotiations because we ourselves are not clear what we want, or because we view settlement through victory as a fundamentally different kind of situation from settlement through negotiation. Hanoi does not really distinguish the two situations and I do not think we should either. Negotiation should be viewed as merely another way to attain the same ends.

It might be desirable, then, to select certain themes, most of which are not new, and repeat these ad nauseum as our objectives and the objectives of South Vietnam. The content of these is given below. But these themes should be stated in quite general terms, the implication being that they will turn out strongly in our favor, while the reality may be less favorable. Thus, within statements that an allied goal is reconciliation or the removal of U.S. troops, there would remain a great deal of room to negotiate or settle upon details of local control, time schedules of removal of troops, etc.

I realize that in making these principles as plain as suggested below we will be giving away a number of "negotiating points," if negotiation should occur. But I believe that it is more important for the U.S. to look moderate and implacable, and thereby reduce the potential destabilization that might accompany negotiations, if and when our leaders feel that it is either necessary or desirable to enter into them.

If a set of general principles looking toward settlement and peace is clearly presented, and accompanied by actions moving in that same direction, then there should be a reduced pressure upon the American government to negotiate. Similarly, with such principles and progress any negotiations which do occur would not have the same amount of pressure upon them. For they would be seen as auxiliary to what is happening anyway. Even the collapse of negotiations would not be as great a tragedy as it would seem today, when peace and settlement are seen by many Americans as necessarily related to negotiation.

Emphasizing the identity of themes for settlement and negotiation has the added advantage of easing the relationship of the United States and the government of South Vietnam. It makes it possible for both parties to work out long-range programs and enter into guarantees to local groups within Indochina which would be more difficult if the possibility of a quite different negotiated settlement loomed in the near future.

Finally, identifying the themes of settlement and negotiation makes it possible for all sides to "save face" (and this is as important for the Americans as the Vietnamese). Thus, the North Vietnamese have made a great issue out of stopping bombing in the North and getting the American troops out. If we can give them a large part of this as what we and the South Vietnamese also want, then both sides can congratulate themselves on

the same result. If, on the other hand, everything is up for bargaining-- i.e., we require an explicit quid pro quo for everything, then the situation would force the parties concerned to acknowledge at least one loss for every gain, and these losses may be very hard to take in terms of "face."

2. Indochina Viewed as the Proper Area for Settlement

The decision to "neutralize" Laos in 1962, and the decisions not to interpose between Cambodia and her neighbors probably had a good deal to do with the magnitude of today's difficulties in South Vietnam. For both decisions allowed the North Vietnamese comparatively easy sanctuaries and supply routes into the whole length of the country. But now let's turn this around, and imagine that the struggle in South Vietnam dies down and we withdraw our forces. Whether we withdraw in victory or defeat, it is quite possible that North Vietnam will increase pressure on Laos, and reactivate the Pathet Lao. At this juncture it will be difficult for the American public to support another large-scale intervention in Southeast Asia, and perhaps difficult for the Thais and Laotians to accept it. But the more essential point is that it is extremely difficult to defend either Laos or South Vietnam without the other.

It also seems quite possible that by expanding the area of settlement we can with little cost come to improve the international image that concerns many Americans. First, we can, in line with the general themes of peace and settlement, guarantee all borders in the area, including those of Cambodia. Sihanouk is quite changeable, and I think a real swing back is not impossible with the correct U.S. policy. He already seems to have friendlier relations with the Laotian anti-communists than with the communists. I think that our position in Laos looks relatively good to the world, for the liberal

neutralist, Souphanna Phouma, has become increasingly anti-communist, while NVA violation of the agreements, even with major military units seems quite blatant. Unfortunately for the communists, their Pathet Lao has made claims to Cambodian territory which were disclaimed by Vientiane; and the North Vietnamese have a claim to the Sam Neua province of Laos.

Another reason for bringing Laos into consideration of settlement in South Vietnam is that our present position in Laos looks fairly good. The Pathet Lao seems to be gradually withering away; Vientiane continues to move in our direction.

It would seem, then, that we should explain to ourselves, our public and Southeast Asia now, before the Vietnamese struggle is over, that we view Laos as a unitary country which has the right to extend its influence over every foot of its land. The American government should probably suggest that Laos and South Vietnam should enter into agreements for the gradual elimination of the Ho Chi Minh trail below the 17th parallel as soon as this becomes practical. The elimination of this trail is necessary for the national self-dignity of Laos and for peace in South Vietnam. As long as the North Vietnamese operate the trail complex and Laos cannot control it, South Vietnam has the right to intervene. Yet Saigon does not want to aggressively intrude on the territory of a friendly state. Therefore, a formal or informal co-operative agreement seems to be required.

If we make clear the area within which settlement must occur, then the sigh of relief at the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Vietnam will not be viewed by Americans as the ending of our commitment, but as the ending of a phase of a more general commitment to containment in the area.

3. Settlement Plans Officially Announced by Saigon, Vientiane
(or Bangkok)

America has a great deal of power and influence in Southeast Asia, but it is a mystery why we have to talk about it so much. For example, in South Vietnam it would cost little to have Saigon announce major battles and victories where this would be even vaguely appropriate. But more relevant here is the fact that nearly all of the statements I am suggesting in this paper that "we" make, might most appropriately be made and repeated by the South Vietnamese, albeit often at our urging. In many cases it would be better to get a less desirable statement from Saigon than to have us continually appear to be at the helm. The reasons for a gradual shift to more diplomatic and policy initiatives emanating from Saigon may be obvious, but let us review them.

Announcement of settlement policies by the local governments will in most cases improve the image of these governments in the eyes of both their own people and the world. Thus, the approach should improve both the stability and the ability to act of the pro-American governments. Giving them the initiative would also reduce internal pressure on the U.S. government to negotiate or settle. For as it becomes accepted that the local governments have strong interests and policies of their own which it would be dangerous for us to interfere with, it will be more difficult to demand strong U.S. initiatives.

I believe that it is also important for settlements to be closer to the interpretation of their own self-interest than these governments seem to have than to our own standards. This will reduce later in-fighting between the allied governments. Moreover, it should make the long-term viability of any settlements greater. For at least our allies will be less likely to feel that the eventual settlements were simply imposed upon them.

4. Reconciliation the Major Theme of South Vietnamese Settlement

The United States has repeatedly urged the reconciliation theme, most recently at the Manila Conference. Generally, we have emphasized this in the form of an expanded chieu hoi program aimed at increasing the number of defectors. After several years of experience with the program I imagine that the Vietnamese on working levels are quite familiar with it, and perhaps it is now gaining momentum. There are a number of ways in which it could be improved, notably by having more for the ralliers to do during their periods at camps, and preparing them for more definite jobs. Americans are well aware of these problems. It might, however, be possible to come up with chieu hoi-type programs for prisoners, with a classification system taking the average prisoner out from under VC camp control. While prisoners and chieu hoi should never be mixed, VC/NVA should become aware of two programs, and see considerable hope in the prisoner program as well. I judge that large-scale surrenders might be as devastating to the VC as individual rallying. Here, of course, the problem is early ARVN treatment of prisoners, and America should lean harder on the Vietnamese in this regard.

Reconciliation as a theme also has some broader implications than the instrumental ones of getting a larger number of defections and surrenders. I feel that in many areas the Vietnamese, pro-government commune's attitude towards its VC members, especially those who do not try to directly oppress it, is a paternalistic one toward erring sons, towards kids who have gone astray. They would like to unite these people with their families again, to make the village whole. Diem's failure to realize this sense of community, alienated whole communes. For in going against a few communists, he hurt a whole commune--even if their sympathies were anti-communist. Thus, an officer

in a distant province may want to kill rather than reconcile, but the local people, especially the elders, may react quite positively to this theme.*

I imagine that any civilian government in Vietnam, even one headed by Thieu, might well be willing to push harder the reconciliation theme than the present military junta.

On their part Americans should also react positively to the reconciliation theme for non-instrumental reasons. In particular, it would improve our morale if we felt better about the discipline and behavior of the pro-GVN Vietnamese toward both VC combatants and non-combatants. A publicly reiterated theme of reconciliation can be used as a club to coerce behavior closer to this ideal by both Americans and reconciliation-minded Vietnamese.

Another aspect of reconciliation is the support it might give for attempts to reconcile disputes within Vietnam among groups other than the communists. For example, this theme might contribute something toward better Chinese-Vietnamese, or Montagnard-Vietnamese relationships. In another direction this theme could in general terms maintain the desire of South Vietnamese for a united country, for better relations with the North, for the possibility of contacting their relatives in the North, etc.

Finally, reconciliation can be used as a reason to allow something less than complete victory. In other words, we know we want peace, and a non-communist urban state in Vietnam. We would like no communists ruling anywhere in South Vietnam. But we do not know whether we or the South Vietnamese will have the stamina to root out the communists from every village. If not, under the theme of reconciliation peace could be declared in certain provinces such as An Xuyen before government control is established there. Saigon would announce that in answer to the universal desire for peace in these areas,

*There is hatred however, in some communes and in regard to some VC. VC in this position should be kept in jails or re-integrated elsewhere in the society.

it has been decided to arrange a truce that may be indefinitely extended.

"It is clear that we can win, but there is no point in further bloodletting. It is expected that gradually our VC brothers will want to reintegrate their communities with the general society."

5. General Amnesty to Vietnamese Who Illegally Entered South Vietnam After 1956

One of the goals of military success under the theme of reconciliation should be to reach a point where it would be possible, at least in certain provinces, to announce a general amnesty for infiltrated North or South Vietnamese communists in the country who give themselves up by a certain date. The suggestion here is not greatly different from present official policy toward ralliers, but it can be made to seem quite different by the nuances.

The choices given the person turning himself in should be fairly broad. He should first of all have the choice of returning home, perhaps at a later date. Or he may choose to be treated as a regular rallier, with the chance of integration into South Vietnamese society. Finally, it might be possible to offer the communist the chance of free emigration overseas--if an arrangement could be worked out with a country willing to take these persons.

Formally or informally, this aspect of settlement should be accompanied by an attempt to arrange for a similar amnesty for GVN and allied prisoners. The conditions of this agreement may, of course, foreclose certain aspects of what is being suggested here.

Another variation on this theme would be to emphasize the time limits involved. For example, it might be determined that a certain district was nearing pacification. In this district there might then be an announced, intensive campaign to collect and care for those turning themselves in within

this district under the program. However, after a certain date any infiltrated communists caught will be tried for illegal entry into South Vietnam and/or other personal crimes.* Thus, for this district, the infiltrator must choose to quit immediately, become a common outlaw without reprieve, or leave the district.

6. Phased Withdrawal of Most Large Foreign Units as an Allied Objective

A basic objective of Saigon must be to regain control over its own country. Thus, it wants the NVA out, but it also wants the vast majority of the Americans and Koreans out. While remaining friendly to the U.S., the reduction of the foreign presence should be a stated objective of Bangkok, Vientiane and Saigon, as conditions permit.

There are a number of advantages to be gained here. First, these are the announced objectives of the Cambodians and North Vietnamese, although the latter do not recognize that their troops in the South may be recognized as foreign. Thus, withdrawing our troops may serve their propaganda needs, and a settlement is surely easier if everyone's propaganda needs are somewhat satisfied. If done cleverly, talking about withdrawal of foreign units can also help the position of Saigon. Yet if done poorly, and in the wrong context, it could hurt GVN's resistance. It is clear at any rate, that the sort of open-ended, non-realistic talk of U.S. withdrawal used at Manila does not severely shake Saigon.

It is now a recognized, but might be made a more explicit, policy to withdraw the U.S. military presence from Vietnamese cities as soon as possible. In this way we certainly reduce the political harm of our presence and, on balance, may not greatly impair the effectiveness of our forces.

*An attempt to use a time limit of this kind for ARVN deserters seemed to work quite well.

In the context of a projected reduction of U.S. troops by hundreds of thousands, the added information that we expect to leave a couple of conventional divisions in the country for several years might be relatively acceptable. I imagine that the security and peace of South Vietnam will require about one U.S. division in the highlands and one along the DMZ for some years. While the war is at its height it is probably the best time to make this a part of our announced peace policy. This conflicts with some statement on U.S. withdrawal quite carelessly made at Manila, but I think that effort should begin now to reinterpret those statements to something closer to reality.

7. Maintenance of a Long-Term Role for U.S. Advisers and Special Forces in Laos and South Vietnam

Just as surely as we are likely to feel we will need to maintain a couple of divisions in South Vietnam for some years to protect against the movement of major communist units back into the country, so we are likely to feel that we will need to preserve a more detailed country-wide presence in pacification and border control, particularly in the highlands. Among other functions, U.S. advisers will act as a grass-roots source of information as to the actual build-up or potentialities of renewed communist activities. But primarily they will give the local people, especially in exposed areas, the economic and military base to defend themselves until the government can come to their aid.

The societies of South Vietnam and Laos are not strong, and will not be for years. Laos is weak because of its very low population density and the contrast and poor relations between the lowland Lao and the very large maze of minority, mountain peoples. Some of these areas have never been

put under effective control, even by the French. South Vietnam suffers from this problem, but more importantly from the religious and ethnic heterogeneity in its lowland areas, as well as much greater destruction and dislocation by war, foreign domination and just foreigners.

The way in which the U.S. maintains its presence during the approach to settlement and thereafter is delicate, but most important. First, as suggested in an accompanying paper,* our greatest military and economic advisory effort should be directly inserted at the province and district levels. On the military side this probably includes some continued Special Forces--CIDG type role--although perhaps ostensibly integrated with the district advisory function. Aside from this, U.S. advisers should remain in Saigon primarily at high ministerial levels and in narrow technical positions. The Vietnamese should, in sum, be granted much more of a feeling of running their government than they have today. Finally, U.S. supply depots and the coordination for the U.S. effort might better be set up outside of Saigon, for example in Dalat, Cam Ranh Bay or Nhatrang. In many cases supplies might be sent directly to American personnel or projects by air.

8. De-escalation to Panhandle Bombing

The image of the United States as a power which could handle most of the problems of the world without escalation was severely damaged when in a desperate moment we became involved in a bombing effort against a wide range of targets in North Vietnam. My own judgment is that we lost a good deal more in U.S. government morale, and the world opinion that significantly supports it, by the escalation than we gained by improved South Vietnamese morale and by the interdiction of supply routes to the South. But my

*Raymond D. Gastil, A Conservative, Decentralized Approach to Pacification in South Vietnam, HI-878/I-RR, August 8, 1967.

belief is unimportant. It may, however, be decided in Washington that we want to de-escalate for any number of political reasons. If so, then this should be in the framework of the reconciliation, return to normalcy, themes suggested here.

One possible compromise between the opponents of the present general bombing of the North and those who urge the need to interdict the NVA supply lines would be the restricting of bombing to the Ho Chi Minh trail itself. This would include bombing up to and through the passes into South Vietnam from a line west of Vinh south, and to attacks on all logistic routes and troop concentrations immediately north of the DMZ. It is felt that it would be possible to attain many of the advantages now attained in a broader area by concentrating on a smaller, and attain them without the collateral casualties and civilian losses necessarily accompanying interdiction in areas with high population concentration. Looking toward problems which might arise after a general settlement, it would be well to begin now to institutionalize a right to reinstitute bombing in this restricted area if we had reason to believe that significant supplies were again being moved.

I recognize that opposing beginning the bombing of North Vietnam is not the same thing as suggesting its reduction. In the short run, at least, any reduction of bombing of North Vietnam is apt to improve North Vietnamese morale and depress GVN's. For it will be impossible to show convincingly that we were not forced to stop or reduce our effort. Nevertheless, I feel that this reduction would put us in a stronger moral position. From this position U.S. leaders might be more apt to accept a long, slow war than they are today. And in this sense, it may be worth it. It is simply more difficult to believe that an America which de-escalates to this extent without asking for anything in return is not a moderate, truly peace-seeking power.

Conclusion

I am suggesting that we develop a set of principles applicable to both settlement and negotiation. These principles should begin now to reflect our longer term needs in the area of Indochina, so that there should be few surprises later on. Principles of settlement should also begin to emanate more from local sources than from our embassy, military commanders or Washington. While we should strongly urge a few policies on our allies, we should allow them at the same time to build up their image in the world and before their own people. America on its own part should use the enunciation of principles as a chance to combine a renunciation of unnecessary violence with the development of a calm appearance of implacable strength at the negotiating table or in the tacit acceptance or imposition of our desires and those of our allies. Yet this implacable exterior should in fact be flexible enough to allow America and its allies to adjust to those political realities which we do not have the strength of commitment or moral surety to change.

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