

**THE SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT
WHITE PAPER ON VIETNAM**

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If the cause the U.S. Government supports in Vietnam is just, and the war it has been waging is honorable, why have the facts about Vietnam been kept secret from the American people for almost 15 years? Secretly, the U.S. began its role by financing the French in a losing colonial war. Secretly, U.S. involvement increased as more and more Special Forces troops were sent as "advisors." The secrecy prevailed until the activities of the U.S. in Vietnam attracted the attention of the entire world and could no longer be kept from the American people. Then, on February 27, 1965, the U.S. State Department issued a White Paper attempting to justify the presence and conduct of the U.S. Armed Forces in Vietnam.

The White Paper was presented with the strong implication that the policy it was trying to justify was being instituted for the first time. In fact there is nothing new about either the policy or the justifications being offered for it. The Administration has moved from secret escalation on a lower level to overt escalation toward a major war. Each act of escalation has been presented as a *fait accompli* and described as a response to provocations. The White Paper seems to have been issued to justify continual escalation in lieu of specific rationalizations. This analysis will demonstrate that the whole scheme of secrecy and rationalization constitutes an attempt by the Administration to push through a war policy in Vietnam while avoiding the protest that would inevitably arise if the American people were given the facts.

In early February the Administration notified the American people that it had made

overt air strikes against North Vietnam. These "retaliatory measures" were but an escalation of earlier attacks on North Vietnam, which began in 1957 with intelligence and counter-espionage operations. They picked up after 1961 when the Kennedy Administration sought to "disorganize the economic and military potential of the North in order to prevent its aid to the rebels in the South, an aid they feared without yet having formal proof of it." (Georges Chaford in *Le Monde*, August 9, 1964)

The Administration had not informed the American people about this phase of its "advisory" activity. An article that appeared in *Aviation Week* on April 6, 1964, stated,

"War against the Communists has erupted over the borders of South Vietnam in hit and run guerrilla raids and infiltration moves as far north as China... With U.S. backing in aircraft, weapons and money an estimated 50,000 elite South Vietnamese troops are being trained to take the offensive in over-the-border strikes at Communist supply centers and communications routes. Despite Defense Secretary McNamara's implication in Washington March 26 that the decision has not yet been made to extend the war it is known here that guerrilla strikes against the Communists have been increasing since last summer..."

On August 4, 1964, the Administration "retaliated" for an alleged attack on an American ship by North Vietnamese P.T. boats. But the U.S. destroyers were in fact providing an escort for a flotilla of South Vietnamese junks that were raiding the North Vietnamese coast, and were within 12 miles of the North Vietnamese coastline. Any vessel committing hostile acts within 12 miles of our shores would also be attacked. At the time of the alleged incidents the Adminis-

tration claimed that there had been two attacks and that on the second occasion the American ships were withdrawing from North Vietnamese coastal waters. The Administration could furnish neither flotsam and jetsam nor pictures of the three boats that were allegedly sunk during the second attack, which North Vietnam has claimed was a complete fabrication. Turning to the reprisals themselves Professor Bernard Fall, author of *The Two Viet-Nams*, wrote in the *Washington Post* on August 9 that "none of the targets attacked (during the American "reprisal raids") was previously known as a regular port or base area. Hon-Gay, for example, was one of the largest open-pit coal mining operations in Asia, if not the world." (quoted in L.F. Stone's *Weekly*, August 24, 1964) In the same issue Stone further pointed out that on August 9 when Senator Eugene McCarthy was queried by Robert Pierpoint on "Face the Nation" as to why "the North Vietnamese navy would have decided to take on the U.S. Navy?" the Senator replied, "I don't know, it may be that they were bored."

The American public, however, did not respond belligerently to the alleged North Vietnamese attacks upon our ships, and during the election campaign President Johnson felt it politic to project himself as the "peace candidate." On September 28 he said that

"...some of our people—Mr. Nixon, Mr. Rockefeller, Mr. Scranton and Mr. Goldwater—have all, at some time or other suggested the possible wisdom of going north in Vietnam... When we retaliated in the Tonkin Gulf, we dropped bombs... within 35 miles of the Chinese border. I don't know what you would think if they started dropping them 35 miles from your border, but I think it is something you have to take into consideration. So we are not going north and we are not going south... We think that losing 190 lives in the period that we have been out there is bad, but it is nothing like the 190,000 that we might lose the first month if we escalated the war..." (L.B.J. at Manchester, N.Y., September 28, verbatim White House text)

In February the Johnson Administration took up again the policies it had abandoned before the election. A new series of "retalia-

tions" were launched for the Vietcong attack on Pleiku. This time Administration sources alleged "that the size and intensity of the attack indicated that it was a major blow carefully timed by Hanoi." But Charles Mohr in the *New York Times* of February 8 noted:

"...Reports from the field indicated...(that) this is not a large Vietcong assault. Many are much larger. There were American casualties, but the attack was not especially intense... Another factor advanced by Government sources is a belief that attacks launched the same night...indicated a pattern of overall direction probably from Hanoi. Since larger numbers of Vietcong attacks have taken place throughout South Vietnam on other nights, why should this particular conclusion necessarily follow? There were other inconsistencies in the Administration's story: Secretary McNamara ...at his news conference...said he did not believe 'it would ever be possible to protect our forces against a sneak attack of that kind, that the mortars had been fired from a considerable distance, and that clumps of foliage on the generally open plateau had offered cover.' Reports from Pleiku, however, later established that the Vietcong had been able to crawl right onto the U.S. helicopter base to place explosive charges against barracks walls on the outstrip."

Even though no evidence was produced indicating North Vietnamese involvement in the specific attack, the Administration proceeded to "retaliate" against "military targets" in the North, among which was the village of Dong Hoi, bombed on February 7. On February 17 Bernard Fall noted in a radio interview that Dong Hoi is "a small fishing village with only a small road leading out of it." Defense Secretary McNamara had told the press that "Dong Hoi was a staging area for sending soldiers and supplies into South Vietnam." Fall said that this was extremely improbable, pointing out first that the village has only one small road. Secondly, he noted, it can easily be watched as well as shelled from the sea, eliminating any military need for air strikes. "And thirdly, a team of the International Control Commission was stationed in Dong Hoi at the time...One member nation of the Commission, Canada, a close ally of the United States,... certainly would report to

this country any hostile military actions.... For the Communists to put depots in the path of the International Control Commission would be unlikely," he said. (I.F. Stone's Weekly, March 1, 1965)

The Defense Department and the State Department had been experiencing some difficulty in keeping their rationalizations consistent. On the one hand, the Defense Department justified "reprisals" against Hanoi by alleging that the given occasions for the reprisal represented important acts of intervention by the North in the civil war in the South, whereas the State Department has made Hanoi solely responsible for the existence and continuation of all strife in South Vietnam. If the Defense Department was right, then the State Department was wrong, since the Defense Department's rationalizations freed Hanoi from general responsibility for the war and pointed instead to specific acts of intervention that had to be punished. If, however, the State Department was right, then the rationalizations of the Defense Department were meaningless.

In addition, the State Department's version of the starting point of Hanoi's offensive prior to the latest White Paper upset the justification of the Defense Department's actions preceding that date. In his speech before the Economic Club of New York on April 22, 1963, Secretary of State Rusk asserted that "the Communists... decided in 1959 to renew their assault on South Vietnam." (I.F. Stone's Weekly, October 28, 1964) If the offensive was "renewed," it had apparently ceased at some time prior to its renewal in 1959. This destroys the Defense Department's justification for waging an uninterrupted war against the North since 1957. (Georges Chaffard in *Le Monde*, August 7, 1964)

With the publication of the recent White Paper, the State Department and the Defense Department have achieved a desired meeting of the minds. The attack is transformed into a continual process beginning in 1956, while the Defense Department's policy, it is claimed, has been to limit operations against Hanoi's aggression to the territorial confines of South Vietnam until the recent air strikes. According to the White Paper,

"...after 1956 Hanoi rebuilt, reorganized and expanded its covert political and military machinery in the South.... In short, Hanoi and its forces in the South prepared to take by force and violence what they failed to achieve by other means.... By 1958 the use of terror by the Vietcong increased appreciably.... From 1959 through 1961 the pace of Vietcong terrorism and armed attacks accelerated substantially.... Though it has been apparent for years that the regime in Hanoi was conducting a campaign of conquest against South Vietnam.... the Government in Saigon and the Government of the United States both hoped that the danger could be met within South Vietnam itself. The hope that any widening of the conflict could be avoided was stated frequently. The leaders in Hanoi chose to respond with greater violence.... Clearly the restraint of the past was not providing adequately for the defense of South Vietnam.... It was mutually agreed between the Governments of the Republic of Vietnam and the United States that further means for providing for South Vietnam's defense were required. Therefore air strikes have been made.. (that) constitute a limited response to the aggression that produced them."

This new position distinguishes itself both by its inconsistency with either of the two official positions formerly held and by its false presentation of Defense Department policy since 1957. However, even this partial success of the White Paper in effecting a meeting of the official minds represented considerable progress in comparison with the uncertainty, embarrassment and discord which prevailed when the Administration adopted in February the policy which it had explicitly rejected in September.

In the *New York Times* on February 18 Max Frankel reported from Washington:

"President Johnson and Vice-President Humphrey indicated in brief public comments... what their associates have been reiterating in private: that they see no alternative at the present moment to standing militarily... at the side of the South Vietnamese Government and that a call for negotiations or any other commitment to future tactics would further weaken the position of anti-Communist forces in Asia. The reasoning behind this position has not been made explicit. A number of high State Department officials have described themselves as embarrassed by uncertainty in conversations with colleagues in allied em-

bassies. Members of Congress who oppose negotiations have joined those who favor them in urging the President to explain his tactics and objectives. Some of Mr. Johnson's reticence has been ascribed to differences among Mr. Johnson's closest advisers about the extent to which retaliatory attacks upon North Vietnam should continue. But fear of displaying an interest in negotiations has been virtually unanimous.

"The private response of officials to the appeals for negotiations has been, 'When and with whom?' It is based on a belief that the non-Communist forces of South Vietnam are too weak politically and militarily to negotiate anything except the surrender of their country to the Vietcong. The question is based too on a belief that even if the Soviet Union, Communist China, and North Vietnam were interested in guaranteeing the "neutrality" of South Vietnam they could not persuade the Vietcong to lay down their arms without assuring them a dominant position in the future Saigon governments—the equivalent, in Washington's eyes, of a defeat...."

By publishing the White Paper the Administration has sought to restore consensus amidst this confusion. The position reached is that,

"Above all, the war in Vietnam is not a spontaneous and local rebellion against the established government.... In Vietnam a Communist government has set out deliberately to conquer a sovereign people in a neighboring state. And to achieve its end it has used every resource of its own government to carry out its carefully planned program of concealed aggression."

President Johnson has repeatedly stressed that the United States' goal is to see peace secured in Southeast Asia. But he has noted that

"...that will come only when the aggressors leave their neighbors in peace. The people of South Vietnam have chosen to resist this threat. At their request, the United States has taken its place beside them in their defensive struggle.... The choice between peace and continued and increasingly destructive conflict is one for the authorities in Hanoi to make."

This position raises an important question: How is it that one week before the White Paper was written, officials believed that the "non-Communist forces of South Vietnam are too weak politically and militarily to negotiate anything except the surrender of their country to the Vietcong" and that the Soviet Union, China, and North Vietnam

"could not persuade the Vietcong to lay down their arms without assuring them a dominant position in future Saigon governments...?"

If North Vietnam alone, not to mention the Soviet Union and China, could not compel the Vietcong to surrender, then the Vietcong is apparently not controlled from the North and its success cannot be attributed to the assistance of Hanoi. If the Vietcong was dependent, the North could compel the NLF to surrender by threatening to withdraw what the State Department describes as the overwhelming proportion of the "hard core Vietcong" and to cut off the flow of "up-to-date arms and special types of weapons." According to the White Paper, their requirements for such weapons "have risen to the point where the Vietcong cannot rely on captured stocks."

If the Vietcong is independent of the North Vietnamese regime, as high officials in the administration seem to fear, and with good reason, this independence is based on the ability of the Vietcong to withstand the withdrawal of support in men and material from the North. The striking thing about the State Department's new White Paper is how little support it can prove. According to the Pentagon figures given in I.F. Stone's reply to the White Paper, which was published as an advertisement in the *New York Times* on Sunday, March 7, only 179 Communist-made weapons turned up in the 18 months from June 1962 to January 1964. This was only 2.5 per cent of the total weapons captured from the Vietcong during this period, hardly a measure of massive intervention.

But the White Paper says "dramatic new proof was discovered just as this report was being completed" in the capture of a suspected Vietcong arms cargo ship on February 16. The *New York Times* commented astringently on this in an editorial on February 28: "Apparently, the major new evidence of a need for escalating the war, with all the hazard that this entails, was provided by the sinking in a South Vietnamese cove earlier this month of a 100-ton cargo ship loaded with Commu-

nist-made small arms and ammunition. A ship of that size is not much above the Oriental junk class. The standard Liberty or Victory ship of World War II had a capacity of 7,150 to 7,600 tons." Stone comments further: "The affair of the cargo ship is curious. Until now there has been little evidence of arms coming in by ship. A huge fleet of small vessels patrols the coast and there have been glowing stories in the past of its efficiency. 'About 12,000 vessels, the AP reported from Saigon (New York Times, February 22) 'are searched each month by the South Vietnamese coastal junk patrol force but arrests are rare and no significant amounts of incriminating goods or weapons ever have been found.' This lone case of a whole shipload of arms is puzzling."

Stone's study also reveals that the White Paper was unable to establish that there has been a substantial movement of men from North to South Vietnam. "The White Paper claims 'that as many as 75 per cent of the more than 7000 Viet Cong who are reported to have entered the South in 1964 were natives of North Vietnam.' But a careful reading of the text and the appendices turns up the names of only six North Vietnamese infiltrees. In Part I of the White Paper, Section B gives 'individual case histories of North Vietnamese soldiers' sent South by Hanoi but all nine of these are of South Vietnamese origin. The next Section, C, is headed 'Infiltration of Native North Vietnamese.' It names five infiltrees but one of these is also from the South. That leaves four North Vietnamese natives. Then, in Appendix C, we are given the case histories and photographs of nine other Viet Cong sent South by Hanoi. The report does not explain which ones were originally from the South but it does give the names of the provinces in which they were born. When these are checked, it turns out that only two of the nine were born in North Vietnam. This gives us a total of six Northern infiltrees. It is strange that after five years of fighting, the White Paper can cite so few."

In short, there is precious little evidence for the Administration's claim of widespread outside aid for the Vietcong, from North Vietnam or anywhere else. The structure of the White Paper's argument in this instance is built upon crude techniques of statistical mystification. I.F. Stone points out that: "The number of North Vietnamese infiltrees (according to the White Paper) is 'based on information...from at least two independent sources.' Nowhere are we told how many men who infiltrated from the North have actually been captured. There is reason to wonder whether the count of infiltrees may be as bloated as the count of Viet Cong dead; in both cases the numbers used are estimates rather than actual bodies." (emphasis in original) In dealing with the alleged support in terms of arms and material the White Paper confines itself to the presentation of numbers and types of weapons captured. Nowhere does the White Paper deal with the question of what proportion of any specific type of weapon used by the Vietcong comes from the North, or for that matter what proportion of the total Vietcong arsenal is coming from the North. Without an answer to these questions it is absurd to present data in the form of numbers and types of weapons captured as evidence of control by Hanoi.

The Administration argues that the Communists lacked serious popular support in 1954, and that the South Vietnamese government through its own progressive economic and social policies succeeded in reducing that support to the point at which spontaneous popular rebellion was inconceivable. Therefore the Vietcong movement, this view continues, was dependent upon Hanoi from the beginning and has remained so because of its character as an agency of Hanoi attempting to overthrow a popular government.

The argument combines the virtues and deficiencies of medieval theology; it is logically consistent and empirically a non sequitur. In 1954-1955 Hanoi did not have

to take any measures whatever to insure the support of the South Vietnamese people. It had been built up during a ten year struggle against the French colonial regime during which the Communist Vietminh gained a political position in the South which was as strong as their position in the North. In his memoirs former President Eisenhower states, "I have never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgeable in Indo-Chinese affairs who did not agree that had elections been held as of the time of fighting possibly 80 per cent of the population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh." (Mandate for Change, p. 372) Joseph Alsop writing in March 1955 stated, "If you ask the Americans here, (in Saigon) they will tell you that outside of the feudal domains of the military and religious sects, anywhere from 50-90 per cent of the Southern Indochinese villages are subject to Vietminh influence or control." French experts gave still higher figures: between 60-90 per cent. (Ellen Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, p. 36) Ellen Hammer, who cited Alsop, observed that "some experts believed that the Vietminh was stronger south of the 17th parallel than it was in the North." (Ibid., p. 22) Graham Greene, writing in the *New Republic* of May 1955, stated, "You will find no Vietnamese who believes that the elections (scheduled for July 1956 under the Geneva Agreements of 1954) will ever be held...no one has the slightest doubt that Ho Chi Minh could agree to any form of supervision without risk; his majority in the north and south is assured." Finally in the *New Yorker* of June 25, 1955, Joseph Alsop wrote, with telling surprise, "I could hardly imagine a communist government that was also a popular government and almost a democratic government."

What the White Paper euphemistically refers to as "South Vietnam's refusal to fall in with Hanoi's scheme for a peaceful takeover" was Diem's refusal to hold the elections scheduled under the Geneva Agreement, a refusal which bears witness to the popularity of the Communist government of Hanoi in the South.

The White Paper alleges that the Diem regime consolidated and increased its support among the South Vietnamese people between 1954 and 1960. Strangely absent from the "evidence" that is supposed to indicate growing support for the regime is an assertion of the existence of political democracy in South Vietnam. Previously the State Department has been less modest concerning the achievements of its protege. Secretary of State Rusk, in his speech before the Economic Club of New York on April 22, 1963, noted that "their four national elections, their thousands of elected hamlet councils, and their forthcoming village council elections show steady movement toward a constitutional regime resting on popular consent." Other analysts were less enthusiastic. Bernard Fall sums up the situation that prevailed under the Diem regime as follows:

"It is, in terms of the actual relations between government and governed, an absolute monarchy without a king, such as Admiral Horthy's Hungary...or as Franco's Spain... Diem received absolute dictatorial powers on June 19 (1954)... Diem was never again to entrust his power to the incertitudes of parliamentary democracy." (*The Two Viet-Nams*, pp.237-244)

Secretary Rusk's indiscreet enthusiasm is missing from the White Paper, but it assumes, as does much of our government's propaganda, that the Diem government and its successors have merited and received the support of the South Vietnamese people. The State Department's "evidence" on this point is a hash of statistical confusion, phrase mongering and outright lies. Figures which purport to show an increase in food production per capita do not by any means indicate an increase in the consumption of food per capita. The political loyalty of the peasantry, which represents over 80 per cent of the South Vietnamese population, does not depend on the increased productivity of peasant labor, but on what the peasants are getting out of the increase in production. The latter, in turn, depends on the structure of landholding, rent and taxes, or conversely on what the peasants

themselves are paying for increased production both socially and economically. The White Paper approaches this question very indirectly, failing to go beyond the sterile cliché. "An agrarian reform program was instituted." The White Paper is conspicuously silent on the substance of that reform, its effects on those peasants who had lived under Viet Minh rule, the manner in which it was implemented, and its political consequences.

The White Paper statement that "food production levels of pre-war years were reached and surpassed" is an outright lie. Official South Vietnamese and U.S. Government statistics indicate that with the single exception of 1959 total rice yields were below the level of 1938; after 1959 the figures move steadily downward until the last official estimate in 1962, which gives a figure that is well below the official estimate for 1938. The official figures as presented by Bernard Fall are as follows: (op. cit., p. 294)

Year	Total Yield (metric tons)
1938	5,300,000
1954	2,565,540
1955	2,839,324
1956	3,412,567
1957	3,191,567
1958	3,995,333
1959	5,311,250
1960	4,955,000
1961	4,259,000
1962	3,000,000

As far as these statistics were used at all in the White Paper to adduce increases in food production per capita, Professor Fall's observations as to their creditability places the honesty of the entire procedure in question. U.S. Government estimates and official South Vietnamese estimates are often at variance; and "even those so-called official figures are subject to retroactive revisions....Private sources vary even more sharply....The foregoing makes it obvious that even 'Western statistics—since they are in the post-colonial era usually derived from local base figures—must be taken with a grain of salt.'" (Ibid., p. 294)

As far as it is possible to conclude any-

thing from these statistics, the picture is dismal, especially when it is recalled that the population of South Vietnam has increased by 50 per cent since 1938 and is currently increasing at a rate of 3 per cent per annum. In short, food consumption per capita has declined drastically since the pre-war period.

The statement in the White Paper that "Production of textiles increased in the South more than 20 per cent in one year (1958)" is improbable, to say the least. Professor Fall, writing in *Pacific Affairs* in September 1958, cited "the official organ of the Saigon Chamber of Commerce, April 11, 1958." It described the situation of the textile industry as follows: "The newspapers of the past week have announced the closing of many spinneries...12,067 textile worker families will be out of work....Mill owners have stated that the textile weaving industry is at present the prey of difficulties it had never known before. The artisans bring their product to market, but find themselves faced everywhere with strongly rivalizing foreign products....On March 28, 1958, the Federation of Vietnamese Industrialists in a meeting of its delegates with the Vice-President of the Republic stated that "the invasion of the Vietnamese market by foreign products has almost paralyzed local production...." Professor Robert Scigliano, in his volume *South Vietnam Since Independence*, refers to a 1958 industrial study that "showed half of Vietnam's industrial capacity to be unutilized." (p. 116)

The White Paper's statement that "in the same year, South Vietnam's sugar crop increased more than 100 per cent" represents an attempt to create a general impression of growth and prosperity by introducing an irrelevant datum. Sugar is a rather insignificant item in the total South Vietnamese food production. The production figure for sugar in 1960 was 57,091 tons, compared to 4,955,000 metric tons of rice. In any event, the production of sugar in 1960 was well below the level of production in 1938. According to Bernard Fall:

"...South Vietnam, save for coffee, never even reached pre-war levels—let alone made up for the impressive population growth.... Since the cease fire, the value of food imports to South Vietnam has almost consistently exceeded the value of food exports ..." in spite of the fact that South Vietnam is an agricultural country. (Fall, p. 293)

The irrelevance of this figure as an index of economic development is most clearly seen from Fall's observation that "diversification of the economic structure is further off in the mid 1960's than it was in the colonial era or at any time between the two wars." (Fall, p. 296)

According to official statistics cited by Fall in 1962, "In a population of more than 14 million only 4.8 million out of 9 million potential workers are employed; of those, 3.9 million are in agriculture." And outside of the armed forces and the civil administration which absorbed another 600,000, there were 300,000 working in other economic activities, including 50,000 domestic servants. (Fall, p. 312)

In June 1962, a study cited by Fall summed up the situation as follows:

Merely to avoid urban pauperization, 400,000-500,000 jobs would have to be created each year. (There are fewer than 100,000 jobs a year opening now.) Present investment, internal and foreign, amounts to about 8 million a year; about 120 million would be needed just to break even, in view of the fantastic population rise of 3 per cent per year." (p.301)

In short, the economic picture is one not of "steady progress and growing prosperity," but is summed up as follows: "After six years of large-scale American aid, Vietnam is becoming a permanent mendicant." This description was given by "...a former American taxation adviser to the South Vietnamese government, Professor Milton Taylor, in the fall of 1961 issue of *Pacific Affairs*." (Fall, p. 290)

According to the White Paper, "the elementary school population nearly quadrupled between 1956 and 1960." This statement is both factually inaccurate and a typical example of the State Department's

statistical mystification. According to South Vietnamese government statistics cited by Fall, primary school attendance in 1956 was 638,104, whereas in 1960, it was 1,365,939. (Fall, p. 314) Total attendance in primary schools doubled, not quadrupled, and the figures do not give any indication as to whether the number of places available matched the increase in the number of children of primary school age. Assuming conservatively that the population of South Vietnam was 10 million and assuming a linear increase of 3 per cent a year on that base, the number of children born in South Vietnam between 1956 and 1960 was 1.5 million, whereas the number of new places opened was 730,000. Thus, if the population estimates are correct, more children of school age were out of school in 1960 than in 1956.

The figures on building construction in South Vietnam published by the official American Aid Mission do not indicate that the regime has a social conscience. "Between 1957 and 1960 South Vietnam built 47,000 square meters of cinemas and dance halls and 6,500 square meters of hospitals, 3,500 square meters of rice mills, and 86,000 square meters of schools but 425,000 square meters of high-rent villas and apartment buildings." (Fall, p. 315)

According to the conservative Australian journalist, Denis Warner,

"A meager 1.4 per cent of United States aid, or \$15 million, went to agriculture between 1955 and 1960. The much-vaunted rural help programme does not exist. Land reform was a flop. Industry was insignificant... In the first five years of American assistance, 87 per cent of the non-military aid came in the form of commodity imports. These were sold by the Vietnamese government. The piastres thus generated went into a counterpart fund from which the government paid the army.... Nearly half the imports were in the form of consumer goods and their display in the shop windows, and their use by the well-heeled minority distracted attention from the lack of well-being and the mounding unemployment, or underemployment, among the majority." (Warner, *The Last Confucian*, pp. 137-8)

If imported food was to help the peasants

they would have to buy it. There is some reason to think that peasants were not in a position to buy anything.

"The Japanese peasant pays the equivalent of 600 piastres for a ton of (fertilizer); the Vietnamese pays 2,300 piastres a ton—if he buys it, or can afford to buy it. The Japanese rice sells at 1,000 piastres a ton; Vietnamese rice at 600 piastres. The Japanese yield is about five tons a hectare, the Vietnamese yield only slightly more than two. The Japanese peasant is conservative and satisfied with the status quo. What should we expect the Vietnamese peasant to be?" (Warner, p. 141)

It is unlikely that many peasants buy imported food.

The famous Diem land reform was preceded by efforts on his part to provide social cohesion and eliminate opposition to his government. In mid-1955 Diem proclaimed the "Anti-Communist Denunciation Campaign," under which all Vietnamese were called upon to denounce anyone who was suspected of any loyalties to or past associations with the Vietminh. "Political Re-education Centers" were established as early as 1954, and a presidential ordinance of January 1956 provided for the arrest and indefinite detention of anyone deemed dangerous to the State. (Scigliano, pp. 167-70) The South Vietnamese Secretary of State for Information stated in 1956 that "between 15,000 and 20,000 Communists and active sympathizers had been held in political re-education centers since 1954. This figure was probably low at the time." (Scigliano, p. 171) However it turned out that "the majority of the detainees (were) neither Communists nor pro-Communists," according to Scigliano. (p. 171)

Diem's avowed purpose, according to Edgar Snow (*The Other Side of the River*, p. 700), was

"...to confound the Communists (by providing) land for the landless tillers, to show that the regime stood for some betterment of the havenots. With a satisfied peasantry as its foundation the whole countryside might have been stabilized."

As it was, South Vietnam was an obvious

field for thoroughgoing land reform. According to Fall's figures, of 2,300,000 hectares of rice land owned by 250,000 landholders, 1,045,000 hectares, or 45 per cent of the land, was owned by 6,300 people, or only 2 per cent of the landholders; whereas 345,000 hectares, or only 15 per cent of the land, was owned by 183,000 people, or 72 per cent of all landholders. (Fall, p. 308)

The success of Diem's scheme for winning the loyalty of the South Vietnamese peasantry demanded that Diem would present those peasants who had experienced the Vietminh land reforms with a program which offered them the maintenance or improvement of their present conditions. According to Fall, "The Communist land reform...had been in effect in some areas from 1945-1955." (P. 309) If we begin with the previously cited American and French estimates of population subject to Vietminh influence or control, it might be conservatively estimated that the Vietminh land reform was experienced by 40 per cent of the South Vietnamese population. The Vietminh program consisted in the removal of those landlords who had not already fled and consequently the abolition of rent and the redistribution of the landholders' estates among the peasantry. The peasantry no longer were paying taxes to Saigon, but instead were paying a food quota to the Vietminh. Given the redistribution of land and the abolition of rent, the tax load imposed by the Vietminh was probably lighter than the sum of previous burdens.

The substance and effect of Diem's measures upon these peasants are described by Denis Warner: "In areas where lack of security had for many years prevented the landlords from visiting or collecting rents from their properties, the peasants regarded the land reform as an added tax, or worse. While the land reform programme proper was in the mill, Diem promulgated regulations governing the maximum rentals that should be paid by tenants to landlords. The rates were fixed at 15 to 25 per cent of the principal crop. Though this was meant to depend on the fertility of the land, the landlords gaining access to their family

estate after many years of Viet Minh control chose to interpret the 25 per cent as a legal minimum, and often charged much higher rate.

"The propaganda opportunities such practices presented to the Viet Cong were obvious enough. The political subtleties of the situation were beyond the peasants. All they knew was that Diem had brought the landlords back. To be sure, they had to pay taxes to the Viet Minh and were liable to compulsory service either as porters or as guerrillas, but they knew the money did not go to the profit of absentee landlords. Thus, in September 1957, when they discovered that in addition to the payment of what they regarded as exorbitant rentals they now faced the payment of high prices (from \$7 to \$428 a hectare) for land they had once all but regarded as their own, they did not often respond with the enthusiasm that Saigon and Washington attributed to them." (p. 140)

In effect the rent reduction was a rent increase for those peasants under Vietminh control and for the remainder of the peasantry it was an empty promise: a promise that recognized the illegitimacy of the prevailing situation while doing nothing to change it. The effect of such promises was to undermine social stability and thereby to promote revolution.

The land redistribution program of Diem had a built-in conservative bias—land was sold, and not given, to the peasants—and its enforcement was similar in character to that of the rent reduction. The peasants who had experienced the Vietminh reform felt robbed. The remainder was presented with empty promises.

"In marked contrast to the land reform programme on Taiwan...or in Japan,... South Vietnam's land reform was anything but radical. A landlord in South Vietnam may retain up to a hundred hectares of rice land and another fifteen hectares for burial grounds and ancestor worship. To have been cut down to this level may have been unpleasant for the rich; but it was precious little help to the poor in a country where half a million peasant families own farms of one hectare or less.

"The programme lacked regulatory machinery to control tenant-landlord regis-

tration, and all sorts of side arrangements were entered into to defeat its intention. In Central Vietnam, where there are at least a hundred thousand farms of one hectare or less, each village has public lands which, in theory, it rents out at reasonable rates to the poorest peasants. The idea is that the public lands should provide both village revenue and relief. In practice, the system usually works as yet another means for squeeze and graft by appointed village chiefs and one of the worst forms of land exploitation. No security of tenure is given beyond the crop year, and there is no incentive for crop or land improvement when the poor peasants are allowed on the land. More often than not they do not get a chance at all, and the land goes to the richest and most prominent landlord." (Warner, p. 139)

It was this land reform program, implemented by an authoritarian regime that could not provide enough food or jobs to keep up with population growth and accompanied by a government terror campaign in the countryside that produced the revolt of the Vietnamese peasantry and the Vietcong as the agency of that revolt. According to Devilliers:

"...the Diem regime, haunted by a strange desire to bring back into being the society of former days, when there were no sects and no Communists, and reckoning that it would itself be safe in the future, accentuated its authoritarian and repressive character....

"The Diem government...launched out in 1957 in to what amounted to a series of manhunts.... A considerable number of people were arrested in this way and sent to concentration camps.... This repression was in theory aimed at the Communists. In fact, it affected all those, and there were many—democrats, socialists, liberals, adherents of the sects—who were bold enough to express their disagreement with the line of policy adopted by the ruling oligarchy....

"In 1958 the situation grew worse.... The Communists, finding themselves hunted down, began to fight back. Informers were sought out and shot in increasing numbers, and village chiefs who had presided over the denunciations, village notables and members of the militia who took part, were frequently treated in the same way. The people of the villages, thus intimidated fell silent. Diem's police and army saw their sources of information drying up

one after another. To make good the lack, they resorted to worse barbarity, hoping to inspire an even greater terror among the villagers than that inspired by the Communists. And in that fateful year of 1958 they overstepped their bounds. The peasants, disgusted to see Diem's men acting in this way, lent their assistance to the Communists...." (Phillippe Devillers, "The Struggle For the Unification of Vietnam," as quoted in *L.F. Stone's Weekly*, October 28, 1963)

"Out in the more remote villages of mud and wattle, the government was identified as the man in uniform who came on a punitive raid, or with a heavy bodyguard, and they always wanted something — money, labour, or even those suspected, sometimes incorrectly, of working for the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong cadre, on the other hand, was barefooted and dressed in black like every other peasant. He made tax demands, but they were not excessive. He was meticulous about paying for food and lodging, and scrupulous, also, in his relations with village girls and with the villagers' property. To begin with, he did not talk Communism or Marxism, but exploited local grievances, and was at pains to implement the idea that the Vietnamese had overthrown French colonialism only to be saddled by President Diem with American colonialism. It was simple propaganda, but effective...."

"The people are not interested in Communism or in anti-Communism. Above all, they are interested in land, and what that means to their livelihood.... They are interested in schooling and in health. The Diem administration lost its following only when the landlords returned and the Communists exploited their demands." (Warner, pp. 32, 151)

"In December 1958 the death of some 20 Viet Cong detainees in the Phu Loi concentration camp served to fan the flames of anger of the guerrillas.... In the course of that December and the following January armed bands sprang into being almost everywhere...."

"What did the authorities of the Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam do in the face of these sad circumstances? They protested in diplomatic notes. The members of the Viet Minh cadre in the south, who had been promised by Hanoi that unification would be rapidly achieved, had to listen to the bitter remarks that were made to them about the inability of the North to do anything about the Diem dictatorship. The

overriding needs of the world-wide strategy of the Socialist camp meant little or nothing to guerrilla fighters being hunted down in Nam-Bo.

"It was in such a climate of feeling that, in 1959, responsible elements of the Communist Resistance in Indo-China came to the conclusion that they had to act, whether Hanoi wanted to or not. They could no longer continue to stand by while their supporters were arrested, thrown into prison and tortured...."

"The point of view of most foreign governments, especially in the West, is that the fighting going on in South Vietnam is simply a subversive campaign directed from Hanoi...it leaves out of account the fact that the insurrection existed before the Communists decided to take part, and that they were simply forced to join in. And even among the Communists, the initiative did not originate in Hanoi, but from the grass roots, where the people were literally driven by Diem to take up arms in self-defense." (Devillers, op. cit., as quoted in *L.F. Stone's Weekly*, October 28, 1963)

The State Department's White Paper is clearly an attempt to justify the unjustifiable by blatant falsehood. But the significance of the White Paper lies far beyond its relevance to the struggle in deceiving some Americans as to the nature of our policy, there is no doubt that the people of Vietnam, who know the bitter truth far better than we, will some day determine their own destiny. Americans, however, will continue to live with a government that to maintain its power has arrogated to itself the right to lie and consciously deceive in a manner unprecedented in our history. Democracy presupposes free discussion of the issues that determine the destiny of a nation, but this free discussion is meaningful only if the people are fully and honestly informed.

Many Americans have reacted skeptically to the White Paper. It is as if the very secrecy that shrouded the early stages of the war has left the people with a great, unvoiced suspicion that the U.S. role in Vietnam is unjust. We conclude this analysis in the hope that a sense of justice will prevail in our country and it will lead the American people to oppose our government and bring about the peace.

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