

817.304



THE CHANGING WAR IN VIETNAM

(IMPERIALISM RETOOLS TO MEET THE FUTURE)

*For me the world consisted of several dozen houses built in
the center
of green mountains.*

*My childhood was in harmony with nature among the gar-
dens, the fields,
and the mountains.*

I was part of my village which I would never leave.

*Night and day, in the light of the moon, in the fields, in the
forest,
with the natural music of the birds,
my friends would wander in the most perfect calm,
the happiest in the world.*

*We were convinced that in the evil world
there were too few people who were content with so few
things like we were,
and could call it happiness.*

*When the seasons of planting and sowing came, together
with my friends,
in high spirits,
we fought against every caprice of nature
and thus kept the traditional rhythm of our ancestors.*

Copyright © 1972 by Tom Hayden. This article is excerpted from **The Love of Possession Is a Disease with Them**, a new book on the Indochina war by Tom Hayden, to be published in April by Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Tom Hayden is currently living in Los Angeles and teaching a course on the war at Claremont College.

These are the poetic reflections of a twenty-one-year-old woman from the Plain of Jars, in Laos, who was interviewed in an American-controlled refugee camp. Her once harmonious life had been shattered by American bombs, she had been made a refugee like millions of others in Indochina, and her former homeland (and that of her ancestors) has been turned to wasteland.

Like most people of Indochina, this woman's roots are in an agrarian society of small villages. Their lives have been hard but, as her words beautifully explain, their universe and culture have been whole and satisfying.

The most violent disruption of these ancient cultures has come in the last century with the unwanted expansion of Western power into Asia—mainly the French from the 1860's to 1954, followed by the United States indirectly since 1949 and openly since 1961. Few conflicts could be more total than that between these Asian, predominantly Buddhist, communal rural societies and the competitive materialism and technology of the white West.



Where revolutionary communism has been successful in Indochina, it has arisen not simply as a "modernizing" force, but also in defense of the cultural traditions, the national spirit and accomplishments of those societies. The effect of colonizing powers, on the contrary, has been forcibly to graft alien values on the people under their control.

After a quarter-century of American military involvement, and although the pressure for American withdrawal has never been greater, peace in Indochina still seems distant. Even if peace came tomorrow, however, this will remain a fact for our conscience to absorb: the Nixon Administration has killed, wounded, displaced, or targeted under fire more people in Indochina than at any time in history, continuing a tradition of Western imperialism which, in America, began with the attempted destruction of the Indian.

My own sense of the historic scope of this conflict has evolved only gradually. In the mid-sixties I knew the escalating war was "somehow" structurally related to the civil rights and poverty crises in America, to our country's war economy and its far-flung system of trade and commerce. The connection then in my mind was: America is racist at home and abroad, and is protecting a status quo empire of property and privilege. These feelings were driven deep into me after two trips to North Vietnam and Cambodia (1965 and 1967) where I experienced US Air Force bombing and then returned to find American cities occupied by troops shooting down black people.

The immediacy, the urgency of these parallels caught me up; I did not yet see the historical dimension of the war. Through 1968 I believed the war could be ended by a crisis in which the conflict would come to a boiling point and the American governing class, being "rational," would decide that its interest was better served by withdrawal than by continued pursuit of control in Vietnam. The year 1968 provided the test: beginning with the extraordinary battle of Tet and ending with the embarrassing spectacle of Chicago, the costs of staying in Vietnam were raised higher than ever.

Like millions of other people I waited to see what the "New Nixon" government's response would be. That the Nixon administration, like its predecessor, took these costs of the war quite seriously cannot be doubted. The stated goals of peace, the withdrawals of American troops, the repeated acknowledgment of the unpopularity of the war, all indicated that in fact the government would cut some of the costs of the war.

But the fact that the government has not ended the war itself indicates the seriousness of America's official commitment there from one administration to the next. Though the level and type of violence may change from year to year, one point has not changed since 1949: US determination to prevent the rebel forces of Indochina from coming to power. This American stubbornness suggests that Vietnam is more than a marginal or "limited" conflict, that Vietnam is the defining conflict of our times.

We must face the likelihood that the United States government, if permitted, will continue its invasion of Indochina for another generation.

The people of Indochina know this very well because they feel the bombs, they feel the pressures disrupting their lives no matter what talk of "peace" there is in Washington.

It is the American people who have been deceived—as the Pentagon Papers show—for the past 25 years. Now we are in danger of being deceived again, lied to again, in the coming election year.

The lie is that the war is winding down.

The evidence that the Vietnam war, rather than ending, is being transformed and continued in a new form. According to the Nixon Doctrine, the Vietnam war under President Johnson was a "mistake" because it relied too heavily on American troops; the general thesis is that America's client states and protectorates, like the Republic of Vietnam, must take greater responsibility for their own defense as America limits its commitments and adopts a "Low Profile." In practice, this doctrine has six main tenets:

1. The use of massive American firepower and technology instead of American troops.

2. "Vietnamization": using US-financed and trained native troops against guerrillas, which a highly placed US official calls "changing the color of the corpses."

3. The forced disruption of people from their traditional lands into refugee camps and urban slums, where they can be better controlled, and the popular basis of guerrilla war (the people) can be destroyed.

4. The use of economic and political manipulation to sweep the refugees into a Western-oriented commercial economy, part of a "new international division of labor" in the Pacific.

5. Cultural destruction, the wiping out of the traditional national identity which is the strength both of the Indo-chinese nations and their anti-American resistance.

6. A cynicism toward the American people which assumes that we will not care if this is done in our name as long as the casualties are Asian and not American.

Cloaked in phrases about "self-determination," this doctrine posits that people in South Vietnam, for example would never "freely choose" socialism, and that, indeed, only US intervention affords the conditions for true freedom of choice. The doctrine is an imperialist one, aiming to penetrate, subdue, and reorient wholly different people, cultures, and nations within a value framework created in the United States.

We do not need the Pentagon Papers of the Nixon Administration. We already have them. We can already guess the plans for more years of US intervention by looking carefully at news dispatches, public statements, and at a series of semiofficial and semisecret documents which are already available.

On the Battlefield: No Winding Down for Asians

The Indochina war is "winding down" only for American GIs. After a decade (1961-71) in which American deaths were 45,000 and total casualties 400,000—more casualties than World War I, twice that of Korea, one-third that of World War II—the toll has declined under Nixon's policy. Here are the approximate figures given by the Department of Defense:

	US dead	US wounded
1969	9,000	70,000
1970	4,000	30,000
1971	1,400	10,000
	-----	-----
Total	15,000	110,000

There is little reason to be relieved by these figures. A total of 15,000 Americans have been killed and 110,000 wounded during the "winding down" of the war. Dying is the same during escalation or de-escalation. Few parents would accept the explanation from Kissinger that their son's death was necessary to impress other nations with America's "steadiness" in keeping promises.

Nor do these figures mean that the US will not suffer further casualties of a significant number in South Vietnam. The shrinking numbers of American troops in South Vietnam are at the mercy of the liberation forces in the South if and when the withdrawal of American troops fails to continue. Neil Sheehan suggested in the January 16, 1972, *The New York Times* that "the sharp drop in American casualties in Vietnam has been achieved to a large extent with the tacit consent of the enemy," and recalled that "in one attack on an American artillery base in the central region last March. . .the enemy killed 33 American soldiers and wounded 76 in one hour."

Nor does the fact that American casualties are going down mean that the United States is going to withdraw **all** its troops. Senator Thomas Eagleton reported on March 12, 1971, that US generals in Vietnam informed him that "the plans under which they were operating called for a **residual American force** indefinitely into the future and for a protracted period of massive American air power." There never has been an official revision of that position.

Above all, the ground war is not ending, not winding down, for the people of Asia, for the Vietnamese in particular. US figures show 470,000 ARVN and 715,000 enemy **killed** in the last decade: a total of **1.2 million** Vietnamese military personnel on all sides. Under Nixon, the ground war has expanded to Cambodia and escalated in Laos. The casualty figures today remain **constant** as fierce fighting continues all over Asia. By US count:

DEATH TOLL IN SOUTH VIETNAM, 1969-71

	ARVN (Saigon)	Enemy
1969	21,000	157,000
1970	23,000	103,000
1971	21,000	97,000
	-----	-----
	65,000	357,000



These totals under Nixon are about twice the numbers of Vietnamese killed on either side during any year of the Johnson Administration except the last; only the climatic year 1968 resulted in more Vietnamese dead, 27,000 ARVN and 180,000 "enemy." The total ARVN casualties, counting both dead and wounded, in Nixon's first three years has been approximately 250,000; the figure under Johnson, from 1966 through 1968, was far less, 170,000 (and was even less—a total of 130,000—during the first four years of Johnson, 1964-1967). The ARVN "body count" under Nixon, running between 200 and 300 deaths per week, is far more than the US government found politically acceptable when the corpses were white.

The Air War: Substituting Technology for American Troops

The air war is the primary form of direct American intervention in Indochina. US officials have said the air war will continue indefinitely, and be essentially unlimited, not only to protect American troops remaining in South Vietnam but also to protect the client regimes in Saigon, Phnom Penh, and Vientiane.

For the past two years, there has been a relative silence in the press about the bombing campaign. Then with the resumption of heavy attacks on North Vietnam during Christmas, 1971, public attention focused again on the nature of the air attacks. An absurd and depressing debate arose about how much the Nixon Administration was bombing Indochina. A study originating at Cornell University suggested that the level of bombing had not declined or wound down under Nixon. The Administration, clearly worried about public reaction to the strikes, quickly denounced the Cornell study, Secretary Laird claiming that "contrary to the impression that some have, we have substantially reduced the air activities in Southeast Asia." **The Wall Street Journal**, on January 15, supported Laird with the irrational insistence that the bombings "have helped cool the war rather than heat it" (could this have been the reason for the press silence on this issue for so long?). Expressing a contentedness which was missing during the Johnson bombing campaign, **The Wall Street Journal** advised its influential readership that "the Administration's success in winding down the ground war without debacle ought to earn it. . . a benefit of the doubt with respect to the air war as well."

It is difficult to imagine the scale of the air war because it is unprecedented in human history, the most concentrated bombing of civilian targets ever attempted. Not only is the air war distant and remote, and much of it secret, but we have neither the experience nor the language to grasp it. When the community of Guernica in Spain was bombed by the fascists thirty-five years ago, with eighty civilians killed in one raid, there was world outrage. Compare that fact to these:

A total of 11.5 million tons of air, ground, and sea munitions were detonated in Southeast Asia through 1970 (figures from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee). This was far more, even in 1970, than was dropped by the US during World War II. By 1972 the figure must be in the range of 14 million tons.

Of that total in 1970, six million tons were made up of air munitions alone: bombs, rockets, shells from aerial cannons.

In Korea, the US dropped one million tons of bombs; in World War II, two million tons on Europe and the Pacific theaters together.

Just since 1969, since the beginnings of the Nixon Administration, the US has dropped three million tons on Indochina: six million pounds per day; 4,000 pounds per minute. All this dropped in about 1,000 sorties per day by a low-profile airborne force of 10,000 men at ten bases and on two or three aircraft carriers.

The electronic battlefield even further depersonalizes a depersonalized war. This kind of war by machine makes the enemy less known to the American killer than ever before. Stationed on an aircraft carrier, the pilot never has to see the people he bombs. In the words of Eric Herter, son of the former Secretary of State, and a Vietnam veteran who opposes the war, "**gooks become blips.**"

Even though this technology appears invincible, the truth is that it is not working very well in Indochina. The reason for its failure is that the problem of revolution is not technical but political. The sensors and surveillance systems assume that the rebels are protected by the night, the jungle, and the rain, and that technical means will deny this cover. The more fundamental protection of the rebels, however, comes from the support and involvement of millions of people on their side in what they call a people's war. The electronic battlefield, or any military program that operates with such a murderous and indiscriminate effect from the skies, can only unite more people in resistance against the US Air Force. The current winter-spring offensive in Laos and Cambodia demonstrates the failure of the sensors to stop the other side's ground operations, just as the master offensive during Tet in 1968 showed that military attacks could be secretly planned and carried out at 150 points in South Vietnam, including the American Embassy, virtually under the nose of the most sophisticated US intelligence staffs.

Under Nixon, more Indochinese people have been made targets of firepower and bombardment than at any time in the twenty-five-year history of American involvement.

The Nixon Administration from 1969 to 1971 dropped more bombs on Indochina—3.1 million tons—than the Johnson Administration did in its last three years—2.8 million.

Nixon has not changed the nature of the antipersonnel weapons used by the Air Force in Indochina; if anything, their use has been increased and constantly is being "perfected." Napalm and white phosphorus are still used in vast quantities. Their effect was described in the following blunt terms by a US pilot to the Welsh photographer Philip Jones Griffiths:

We sure are pleased with those backroom boys at Dow. The original product wasn't so hot—if the gooks were quick, they could scrape it off. So the boys started adding polystyrene—now it sticks like shit to a blanket. But then if the gooks jumped under water it stopped burning, so they started adding Willie Peter (WP-white phosphorus) so's to make it burn better. It'll even burn underwater now. And just one drop is enough, it'll keep burning right down to the bone so they die anyway from phosphorus poisoning.

The most widely used bombs are the antipersonnel fragmentation variety. These are devised for flesh, they cannot destroy steel or concrete. Their effect, since they severely wound more than kill, is to create a massive medical problem: hundreds of thousands of people with deep slice wounds from tiny pieces of metal often buried deep inside their bodies.

One of the fragmentation bombs, the Dragontooth, which can be dropped in quantities of 8,000 in one sortie, is described this way by Air Force personnel: "If a person steps on it, it could blow his foot off. If a truck ran over it, it won't blow the tire."

The most common ones, innocently nicknamed the "guava" and the "pineapple," release ball-bearing-sized pellets. Others release flechettes, sharp-edged pieces of metal. Another releases jagged fragments. The quantities are staggering. The "pineapple" and "guava," both small enough to hold in the hand, each contain 250 pellets which are released on explosion. One sortie alone will drop 1,000 "pineapples," which spew horizontally over an area the size of three football fields. The "guavas" are dropped by the hundreds from "mother bomb" containers; they explode in the air and travel diagonally toward the holes and bunkers where people are hiding; a single sortie will release 500,000 pellets.



It took several years to establish that fragmentation bombs were being used although we pay for the bombs and they are dropped in our name. The US government is super-sensitive to publicity about its genocidal weapons, and clearly secretive about their nature. In fact, the government seems to be under no obligation to explain their experimental warfare techniques, much less present their weapons to the public for inspection. If it were not for the people of Asia upon whom these bombs are dropped, Americans probably would not be able to acquire and inspect them.

Since the technology of the air war is always developing, and since much of it is covered with secrecy, the public is never aware of the newest lethal systems being prepared or used. One which has been developed very extensively since 1969, about which we know very little, is the system of automated warfare known as the **electronic battlefield**. First conceived by Robert McNamara in 1966 as an "electronic wall" across the DMZ, the **electronic battlefield** finally came into full-scale use under Nixon.

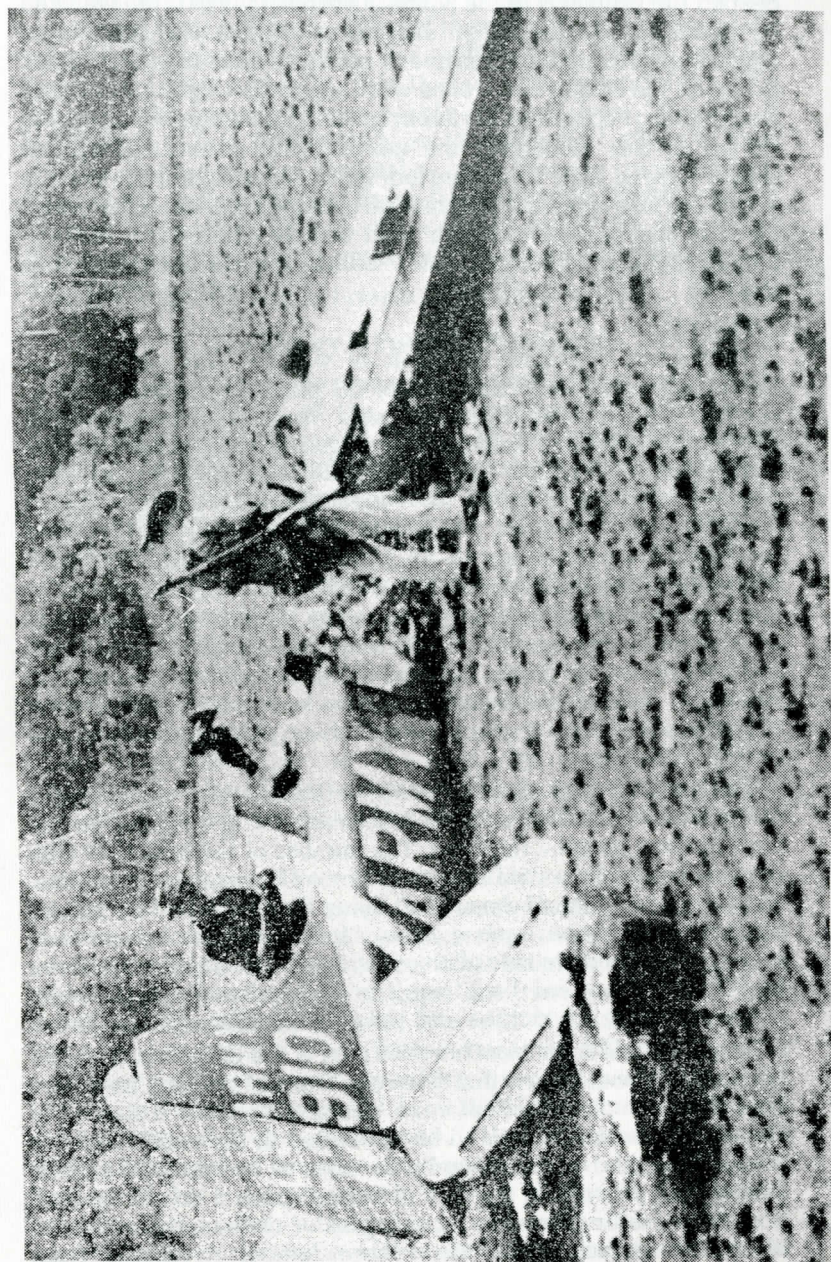
The new electronic system contains supposed answers to Nixon's two major problems: how to stop a people's war—by destroying the people; and how to reduce American combat casualties—by automating the killers.

The principle of the electronic battlefield, called the "greatest invention since gunpowder" by Barry Goldwater, is quite simple. The landscape, in this case the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the liberated areas of Southeast Asia, is covered with small devices called sensors, developed by corporations like Sylvania and Honeywell. These detect vibrations, sounds, smells, and heat. They are all camouflaged to look like branches, plants, human feces. They transmit the supposed presence of enemy forces (or whoever or whatever triggers them) to giant computer centers in Thailand which flash the information to aircraft which are then electronically tracked to the target to release laser-guided or TV-guided bombs, called "smart bombs." In the vernacular of one Air Force commander:

We wired up the Ho Chi Minh Trail like a pinball machine and we plug it in every night. Laos has gone bugged with the most efficient system ever. Warfare has gone electronic.

General Westmoreland explained the strategic significance in 1969:

On the battlefield of the future, enemy forces will be located, tracked and targeted almost instantaneously through the use of data links, computer-assisted intelligence evaluation, and automatic fire control. With first-round kill probabilities approaching certainty, and with surveillance devices that can continually track the enemy, **the need for large forces to fix the opposition physically will be less important.**



Not only will this air war fail to subdue the enemy, it is going to deepen the problems of the Nixon government. First, the war can be escalated by the other side to neutralize the Air Force. Apparently during the offensive in northern Laos in late 1971, for example, the Pathet Lao troops were using new light anti-aircraft weapons that could be carried in ground operations to offset the US air strikes. Secondly, the use of MIGs over Laos against slower-moving B52s was reported. By early 1971, the US had admitted the loss of about 8,000 aircraft, including 5,000 helicopters; the total cost of the fixed-wing craft was \$4.4 billion, for helicopters \$1.3 billion, a total loss of \$5.7 billion. Figures like these were **cited as** a major problem in several of the Pentagon Papers documents.

Even more explosive a result of the air war will be the continued killing and capturing of US pilots. Although fewer in number than American ground losses, these dead and captured pilots have become a major political crisis for the Nixon Administration, partly because the Administration itself has made it a fundamental issue. During the sudden bombing raids of North Vietnam over Christmas, 1971, seven pilots were captured and two killed (from December 18-30), bringing the total held by North Vietnam to nearly 350, a number which will increase constantly.

So the real question is not whether the air war will succeed in its own terms, but whether it will be politically effective at home in buying time for Nixon in domestic policies. Will keeping the rebels at bay in Southeast Asia while lowering US ground casualties sufficiently placate or confuse public opinion in the United States?

The human result of this neglect is thousands of unnecessary Asian deaths, while wounded American GIs are rushed to the most modern hospital facilities. The number of wounded GIs who die has dropped drastically with the new US treatment facilities, while helpless Vietnamese are left dying three to a bed for lack of doctors. In addition, among those "fortunate" enough to live, there is an incredible rate of amputation practiced because of the low level of medical facilities; and it is virtually impossible, without waiting for months and years, to obtain artificial limbs.

Somehow this is the most horrible part of the US policy, perhaps because of the evidence that lives are literally wasting away for lack of the simplest medical care, perhaps because it so utterly disproves America's claim to be interested in the welfare of the Vietnamese, and perhaps finally because of the absolute callous silence that prevails in the face of these crimes. I do not know of any Nixon major comments on refugees or civilian casualties, in his whole career, other than those famous "refugees from communism" in 1954. These were essentially Catholics and other

Vietnamese who had sided with the French colonialists in a barbaric war and been defeated, running to the South to regroup and reestablish their privileges; many of them still fight today or profit from their relationship to the still-Catholic Thieu regime. American fanatics like Dr. Tom Dooley, with support from Vice President Nixon, called these people refugees from "the rim of hell," when in fact, they were more like pathetic traitors to their country. Yet today when the US has quite literally created a hell, a sea of fire and napalm and flying flechettes and bomblets which blow off human feet, the official word still is that the refugees of Indochina are fleeing from communist terror and crossing over to the Western side.

The Theory of Forced Urbanization

All this disruption of life may seem aimless, insane, but actually there is a rationality to the whole process that makes it as deliberate a war crime as any that can be imagined. When the Air Force general made the infamous remark during the Tet Offensive that he "bombed the city to save it," he was speaking from an underlying philosophy that guides the American war effort at every level.

The destruction of the fabric of life in the liberated zones, the killing and displacing of so many people, is justified by the concept that it is all in their best interest. Their lives are thought to be backward, tradition-bound, and poor, lacking in middle-class possibilities altogether. Communism is said to feed on this backwardness; indeed, W.W. Rostow denounced it as the "scavenger" of the development process. The road to progress and a better life, even if it begins in a bombed village and then goes to a refugee camp, is the road to the city, to urbanization, to a world called "modern."

A name has been given to this process by one of those numerous intellectual servants of power, Samuel Huntington, a former chairman of the Harvard government department and a regular advisor on Southeast Asia policy. Most theories of the Vietnam War, like counter-insurgency, came not from generals but from the Cambridge (liberal) complex: Harvard, Huntington, Kennedy. The names sound like a law firm; it becomes difficult to realize their doctrines are, legally speaking, crimes against humanity. Writing in **Foreign Affairs** of July, 1968, Huntington invented the phrase "**forced-draft urbanization.**" Huntington describes the NLF as holding the "good Maoist expectation that by winning the support of the rural population it could eventually isolate and overwhelm the cities." And he says, ominously, the enemy will remain a "powerful force which cannot be dislodged from its constituency **so long as its constituency exists.**"



But the NLF hasn't counted on the "**American-sponsored urban revolution**" brought about by the "**modernizing instruments of bombs and artillery**" which are "largely, if not exclusively" the cause of the "movement of the population into the cities."

. . . if the "direct application of mechanical and conventional power" takes place on such a massive scale as to produce a massive migration from the countryside to city, the basic assumptions underlying the Maoist doctrine of revolutionary warfare no longer operate. . .

In an absentminded way the United States may well have stumbled upon the answer to "wars of national liberation." The effective response lies neither in the quest for conventional military victory nor in the esoteric doctrines and gimmicks of counter-insurgency warfare. It is instead **forced-draft urbanization and modernization** which rapidly brings the country in question out of the phase in which a rural revolutionary movement can hope to generate sufficient strength to come to power.

It sounds so charming, this "absentminded" solution! It is difficult to realize this man is talking about the dislocation of over 9 **million** of the 27 million people of Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam. Just to be clear that Huntington is not making an isolated and embarrassing comment on the true meaning of US policy, the same views can be found coming from two top officials. The first, John Paul Vann, one of the highest-ranked US advisers in Vietnam: "We inadvertently stumbled on the solution to guerrilla warfare—urbanization" (**Newsweek**, January 20, 1969). The second, Robert Komer, the official in charge of pacification under Johnson:

. . . at the low point of end-1964, only 40 percent of South Vietnam's population was under government "control"—a sometime thing is those days. . . a high percentage in this increase in "relatively secure" population in 1965-67 (to 62 percent) **did not occur because of increased security in the countryside, but rather as a result of refugee movements and the accelerated urbanization taking place.**

This is yet another case of dull and dulling words masking an indescribably awful situation. Since 1962, Sa'igon's population has grown from 400,000 to four million; Panang, from 120,000 to 450,000; Hue from 104,000 to 200,000; Phnom Penh, from 600,000 in 1970 to two million in 1972; Vientiane, from 80,000 in 1968 to 160,000 in 1969, as Nixon doubled the bombing.

When John Kennedy came to office, South Vietnam was a 90 percent rural country; today it is 60 percent urban. Cambodia and Laos are going in the same direction faster.

Saigon was designed to accommodate 300,000 people by the French. Now there are over three million people within the twenty-one square miles of Saigon proper, and another million in bulging growths on the edge. It is the most densely populated city in the world, with approximately 150 persons per acre (Tokyo has 63 per acre). After 1966 there was not even room for squatters. In some cases, squatters had to be moved because their "homes" (little mats in the street) were blocking transportation. Once lovely shade trees are described now as "grotesque amputees." Garbage, never before a problem in Vietnam, has become an immediate hazard to life. The sewer system has collapsed, and the garbage-filled canals are no longer even dredged. Fully one-fourth of the city's electricity is consumed by foreigners for air conditioning; several blackouts per week are ordinary. To the eyes of two American city planners, the city appears this way:

The squatters build their shelters from scraps of wood, metal, thatch, cardboard, and poles they have been able to buy, scavenge, or pilfer. The means of access in these settlements are labyrinths of narrow alleys about three feet in width. Mud, rancid cesspools, stagnant canals, rotting garbage, and human excrement make up the environment of the inhabitants. Around everything there is the constant buzz of flies. Empty artillery shells are used as stoves, and napalm containers are fabricated into family pots and pans. Periodically, fires sweep through these squalid settlements, wiping out forty to fifty shelters at a time. Fire-fighting facilities are too limited and ineffective to assist.

Plans for the Americanization of Vietnamese Economics, Politics, and Culture

American plans for the Vietnamese do not end with depositing them in the congested cities. For the Vietnamese who have been driven into the US-controlled zones, a new system of domination awaits them: a growing Western-oriented consumer market economy.

As early as March, 1966, **Fortune** was claiming that "a South Vietnam preserved from communism has the potential to become one of the richest nations in Southeast Asia":

It is not a bit too early for the US, which has sent some of its finest military minds to the Vietnam war, to send eminent experts on agriculture, transportation, education, and industry to prepare plans for South Vietnam's postwar economic development.

Almost on signal, this is what has happened. Japanese and American corporations are moving rapidly into South Vietnam. Economists and technicians are studying the economy, its natural resources, manpower supply, and quality of labor force, and drafting plans for the future. Even though investment is a high-risk proposition because of the war, and even though (as one planner says) "**the Anglo-American concept of the corporation has not made much headway,**" the official plans are piling up, which point **not so much to an American withdrawal but to at least a decade of economic Westernization.**

The reports which provide the basis for this conclusion are: **The Postwar Development of the Republic of Vietnam**, a joint US-Saigon study directed by David Lilienthal (former New Deal head of TVA) for President Johnson, completed and presented to Nixon in early 1969; RAND corporation reviews of the Lilienthal Report; a several-volume study entitled **Southeast Asia's Economy in the Seventies**, done in November, 1970, for the US-controlled Asian Development Bank in Manila; economic projections by Columbia University economist Emile Benoit, published as part of the Asian Development Bank study; an economic report on South Vietnam for the Institute of Defense Analysis (a branch of the Pentagon) by Arthur Smithies of the CIA, RAND, and formerly of the US Budget Bureau; a study, connected to Lilienthal's, by Japanese economist Masataka Ohta for Japan's Federation of Economic Organizations; another by Smithies, with Allan Goodman, another RAND consultant, on "The Possible Role of the United Nations and Other International Organizations in the Economic Rehabilitation of Vietnam," on a 1971 State Department grant to Columbia University; and various articles appearing in journals like **Fortune** and **Le Monde**.

These reports are all official in the sense that they were done as advisory studies for the US, Japanese, or Saigon governments. What they say is not necessarily reflected in policy, but they certainly shape or influence final policy. None of them are secret, although as little publicity as possible seems to be given them by either the government or the press. What is most significant about them as a whole is the general insight they give into US plans for the future of Vietnam and the arrogant way in which US officials and planners think about their roles.

The reports, to begin with, make it clear that the South Vietnamese economy on which the US hopes to build is now a catastrophe. The roots of catastrophe lie in the fact that the economy is entirely artificial, a creation of American military, economic, and political institutions. This economic artificiality parallels the military artificiality of the ARVN, and both stem originally from the diplomatic artificiality of the South Vietnamese "state" itself, which was devised by the 1954 Geneva Conference as a temporary state but transformed into an American protectorate immediately afterwards.

Yet the same reports which contain this evidence of catastrophe outline a bright future for South Vietnam through a series of fantastic projections. The war, it turns out, has been progressive for the people of South Vietnam, though somewhat damaging, for it has now placed them in the takeoff stage just prior to prosperity and happiness. All the maimed and widows and orphans should be reassured with these prospects:

Southeast Asia can expect to enjoy rapid economic growth through export expansion provided she pursues economic policies to link up her abundant national resources with the expanding world market demand for their products. (**Asian Development Bank**)

Physical destruction is minimal. . . and the economic wealth of the country has increased. . . It is true that large numbers of citizens have been displaced from their homes, but others have acquired new skills which will be valuable to the growing economy (**Lilienthal Report**)

[the Mekong Delta] is the most valuable piece of real estate in the world. (**Lilienthal to the press, 1968**)

The war has changed the situation in ways which are distinctly favorable to development. (**Arthur Smithies**)

As the imagination wonders at the twisted optimism of these statements and struggles to understand what they mean, at least two possibilities appear.

First, the physical infrastructure created by the war is now "the best in Southeast Asia" according to **Fortune** (if for no other reason, one realizes, than that North Vietnam's infrastructure has been so heavily bombed). American planners glow at the thought of the 2,400 miles of highway, the countless bridges, the 600 miles of railroad line, the 200 airfields (five large enough for passenger jets), and the six major ports which have been built in the ruins of South Vietnam.

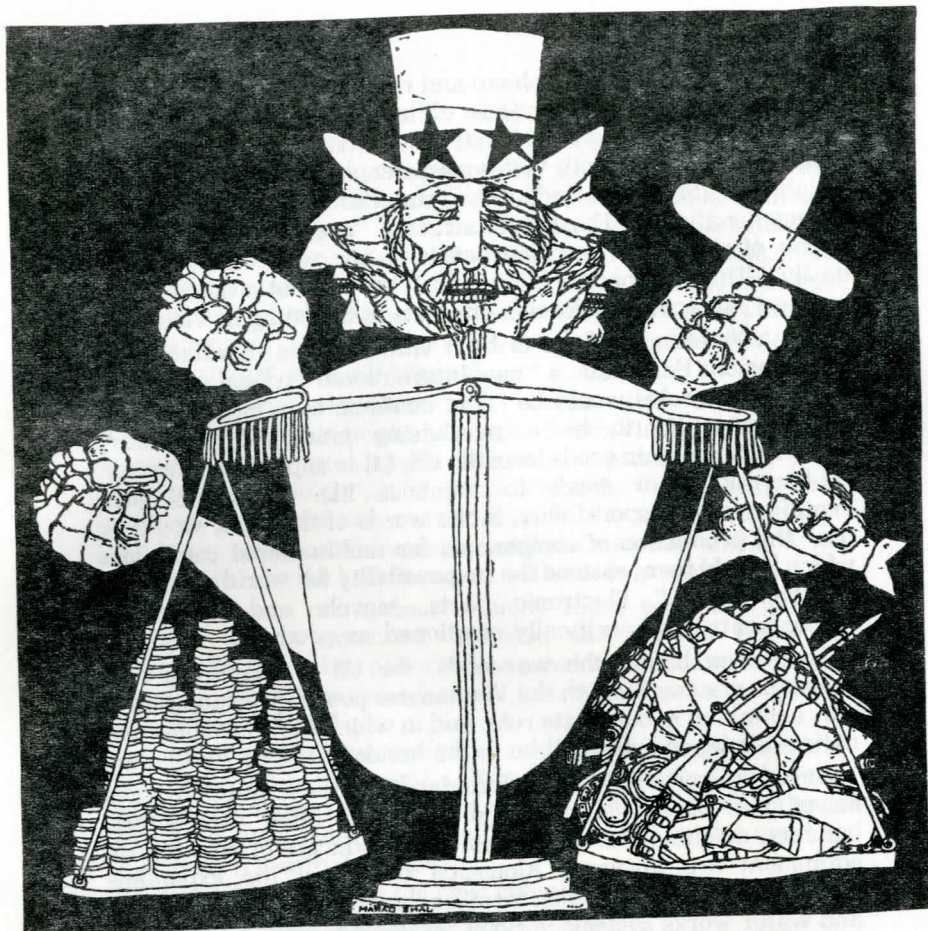
Second, the growth of a cheap and relatively skilled labor force "trained in the basic routines of industrial life" excites the planners. This is a "social infrastructure." The Japanese business study analyzes the South Vietnamese people "from the viewpoint of labor quality," and finds them "superior to the inhabitants of adjacent nations." The report stresses "ensuring an adequate supply of high-quality and inexpensive labor, which does not quit easily." This "supply of cheap labor" is "without a doubt. . .the greatest attraction for foreign interests in investing in Vietnam."

South Vietnam's role is to be a vital subarea in what Asian Development Bank calls a "new international division of labor." Its economic roles would be (1) to continue as a market for US investments; (2) to be a purchasing point for subsidiary companies to obtain goods from the US; (3) to supply rice, lumber, rubber, and other goods to countries like Japan. Its own manufacturing responsibility, in the words of the ADB, would be the **"the production of components for multinational companies which [would then] assume the responsibility for world marketing of the output."** Electronic parts, bicycle and motorcycle components are specifically mentioned as products.

Thus even before the war ends, the US is shaping a new economic system in which the Vietnamese people are supposed to play a vital but subordinate role, and in which their economy and national independence will be in the hands of the US and Japan.

American corporations like Standard Oil, Shell, and Ford have moved into South Vietnam, and dozens of other contractors, builders, machine tool companies, and producers of agricultural equipment are involved. Alongside them are the expanding Japanese business interests: farm machinery factories, telephone and water works systems, a Sony assembly plant; and Toyota is rumored to be coming. Japanese business investment in Saigon was only \$4 million from 1960-69, but since the Nixon Doctrine, Japanese investment has jumped to \$32 million. "As the Americans withdraw, the Japanese are becoming more visible here," reported **The New York Times**, December 12, 1971. Motorcycles, television, radio, rice cookers, fans, refrigerators, and phonographs—all Japanese-made—"are all commonly found in Vietnamese middle-class homes."

The potentially most important questions about economic exploitation of South Vietnam and Indochina, however, revolve about neither countryside nor city but about the vast stretches of the South China Sea—where **oil** is said to lie in abundance. With the greedy excitement of the British seeking ivory in Africa and the Americans seeking gold in California, US oil companies are



becoming involved in Southeast Asia. There have been persistent reports of secret negotiations between the State Department, the Saigon government, and the oil companies. Although all sides now minimize the oil issue because of public protest ("You won't find anyone here willing to talk about it and be identified. It's become a real hot potato," said one oilman in the April, 1971, **Journal of Commerce**), there is undeniable evidence of the growing "oil stake" in Vietnam.



cps

stake" in Vietnam.

In May, 1970, David Rockefeller predicted \$35 billion would be invested by oil companies in Asia, especially Southeast Asia, over the next twelve years. That same spring the US **Journal of Commerce** declared that South Vietnam "may contain the richest petroleum deposits in Southeast Asia. And the influential **Petroleum Engineer** in June, 1970, tied the oil issue to a satisfactory settlement in Vietnam:

If and when the US wins its objectives there, oil exploration conceivably could be successful enough to turn that part of the world into another south Louisiana-Texas type producing areas. This would be one of the biggest booms in the industry's history. It all depends on the Vietnam war, how long it takes to get the job done and how well the job is done. (The evidence

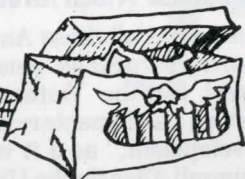
The evidence dictates the conclusion that the US, instead of withdrawing, is constantly probing and deepening new interests in Indochina. The only question is the degree. The cost figures, for example, vary. The Lillenthal Report proposed \$2.5 billion of direct military and economic aid to Saigon for the decade ahead. RAND's Albert Williams, writing after the Tet Offensive, criticized Lillenthal's figure for being too low. Williams suggested twice as much for ten years. Williams also cautions against a negotiated settlement and advocates a policy "not very different from the present one" as being best for insuring foreign investment.

Emile Benoit goes beyond all these figures to propose in the Asian Development Bank report a total of **\$13 billion** in economic and military assistance for only a **five-year period, 1970-75**. This amount, \$9 billion of which would be military aid, would nearly equal the entire US investment of \$16.5 billion for the whole decade of the sixties.

Who has informed the American people that after spending more than \$100 billion to win the Vietnam war so far, they are about to support a rotten Saigon dictatorship for another ten years? When we recall that such planning goes back to 1956 when US propagandists were proclaiming the "economic miracle" of South Vietnam, we see the way these seemingly unreal reports form a crucial part of the justification and guidance for the ongoing US machinery in Indochina. While the assumption of economic miracles or winning the war by 1973 is as much a fantasy as all previous victory claims of this generation, another assumption of these economic reports has a more ominous and corrosive present reality for the people of Vietnam. A root assumption is that a **cultural** transformation in the attitudes and psyches of the people of South Vietnam can be wrought by the introduction of the American market system and material values there.

IT'S STAIN-RESISTANT
SOIL-PROOF, SHRINK-PROOF,
COLOR-FAST, WARM IN
WINTER, COOL IN SUMMER
AND APPROPRIATE FOR
CHURCH, SCHOOL, AND
FOOTBALL GAMES.

**IT DON'T
FIT.**



DENNIS HARPER

The economic and political reports speak of the backwardness of the people which American industry can help them overcome: Smithies sees the necessity for attitudes of "industry" rather than "idleness" to develop in the Vietnamese character. He sums up the process in one statement:

A Honda-riding generation may be more capable of economic development than a buffalo-riding one.

A common attitude among American planners is that of V.L. Elliott: "**we can WHAM [Win Hearts and Minds] the Vietnamese with our Hondas and motor pumps**"; among military it is "get all Vietnamese males on a Honda and the war will end." A million of the Honda moterbikes, in fact, are said to have been imported to Saigon in the last four years.

The October, 1971, issue of **Fortune** states the long-run perspective, as usual, in a class-conscious way:

In the end, perhaps the most important legacy of US involvement in Vietnam will be the **introduction of modern industrial organization. Exposure to Western ideas and technology has profoundly changed traditional Vietnamese attitudes. More than highways or ports, these trained people could be the most valuable part of the new infrastructure being left behind in Vietnam by the US.**

These statements mean essentially that the people driven into the cities as refugees will be absorbed into a materialistic value system, will become turned on to Sony transistor radios and Honda motorbikes, to the whole Western consumer culture, and therefore leave behind their traditional and communist ways. In the process, the basis of the national identity and ability will be eroded. North Vietnam's leading poet Tho Huu has said the American target in South Vietnam is not simply military slaughter but "the poisoning of people's souls."

The Truth Most Hidden: America is Fighting Whole Peoples, Whole Nations, Revolutions Which Already Have Happened

If it is difficult to summarize all these American strategies, it is because of their staggering arrogance. Americans simply assume they know what is best for the Vietnamese; Huntington, for example, calls his Western parliamentary system "a **natural** next step in **Vietnamese** development," as if it was indigenous to Asia and he a Vietnamese himself. Clearly the US war on Vietnam (and in all Indochina) is not only a matter of military force, but a **total assault on a people, a culture, a nation.**



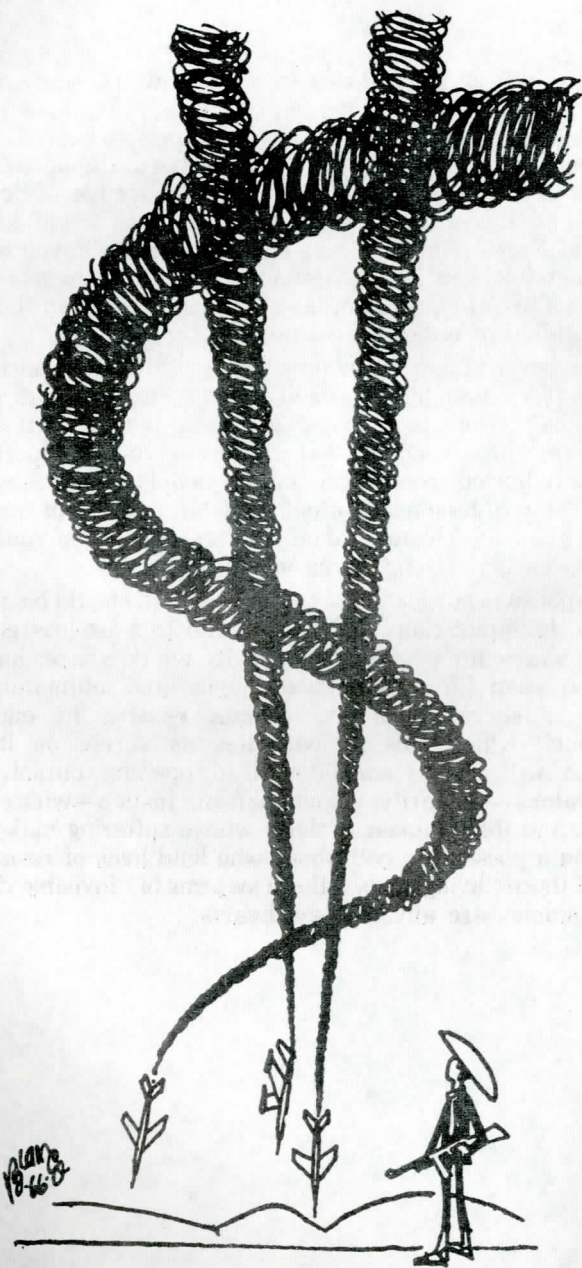
American planners may still believe in their ultimate triumph, but that is only evidence of their **hubris**, the ancient Greek curse for those whose fatal error is in stretching too far in pursuit of power. In Vietnam, the US is attacking a people with a powerful identity and culture going back for centuries. Many other people have long since been absorbed into larger nation states, but the Vietnamese are exceptional in the degree to which their national identity has been formed in successful resistance to outside aggression and imperialism for thousands of years.

The Vietnamese myth of creation itself glorifies resistance. In this myth a woman gives birth to a strange little boy, who is called Holy Giong, and who is silent for three years, until one day messengers come asking for volunteers to resist the country's enemy. Holy Giong's first words are, "I will fight the enemy," and so he goes forth.

Victims of racism and great power chauvinism for thousands of years, the Vietnamese find nothing essentially new in the arrogance of the Americans. Today they are called "slopes," "dinks," "gooks," no differently than 2,000 years ago when the Chinese feudalists called their colony Gao Chi, meaning "big toes pointed at each other," a sneering insult to Vietnamese peasants.

A deep tradition of communalism has existed in Vietnamese villages for generations. People live in the presence of their ancestors' graves, working their traditional lands, sharing their experience and making decisions in common with full knowledge of each other's ways. A Vietnamese saying, that the "laws of the king are less powerful than the laws of the village," testifies to this decentralized and consensus-oriented way. It was a whole life in which one lived in company with "the living dead" (especially memorialized were those ancestors who lived and died for the nation; they are venerated as **everyone's** ancestors) and in harmony with the land. Natural calamities were as much a part of the recurrent cycle as foreign invasions, and the karma of the Vietnamese was shaped by these two forces more than any other.

The Americans have tried to destroy this cultural foundation while communists and other nationalists in Vietnam have tried to build on it. The US, through Diem, abolished village councils completely in the fifties, and only reopened the facade of village government in the late sixties. American bombing and ground missions destroy the ancestral graves and move people from their traditional farms and homes. The US policy has always favored the Catholic minority against the Buddhist majority, on the grounds that the Catholics were the most anti-communist; which is only a way of saying the Catholics were the most colonized by the French. Above all, the American concepts of individualism, success orientation, and materialism are foreign to the culture of Vietnam.



Communism in Vietnam grows from this cultural and national stem, however. The most serious modern difficulties of the Vietnamese Communist Party, for example, seem to have occurred when "foreign models" of socialism have been attempted, as in the fifties when Chinese-style, large-scale collective agriculture was attempted, met with resistance, and was modified. The officials of North Vietnam, and of the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) in South Vietnam, many of them poets and intellectuals like Ho Chi Minh, lay claim legitimately to the long, proud tradition of national resistance.

That the cover of lies is only now beginning to be stripped from the reality of Vietnam by sources like the Pentagon Papers should of course be a cause for outrage. But more than that, it should raise the question of what other secrets have been hidden or conveniently buried from the American people about our whole history? The real lesson of Vietnam is what it may yet teach us about our genocidal history, about the real identity of American civilization as understood by its victims.

Our response to our history, as we discover it, should be neither to escape its implications nor to succumb to a useless guilt. It should be **shame** for whatever complicity we do share; **hate** for those who keep life-and-death decisions and ultimately our identities a secret from us; **solumn resolve** to end the "civilization" which kills us with lies as surely as it kills insurgence with force; **commitment** to opening ourselves to ancient values—solidarity, communalism, justice—whose time has come; and **thankfulness** to those whose suffering makes our redemption a possibility, both those who lead lives of resistance today and those "living souls," those swarms of "invisible dead," whose examples are alive in new hearts.