

## RE-EXAMINING OUR PERCEPTIONS ON VIETNAM

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As the post-mortems on Vietnam proliferate, and with the survival of an independent South Vietnam still uncertain, intelligence officers as well as policy makers and executors of policy have a compelling need to know what lessons the record of American involvement holds. Is it possible to identify a single aspect of this record stretching back over two decades which is likely to have overriding importance for *all* officers concerned with foreign affairs? Would this paramount aspect lie with the choices of action our leaders made, as compared with the alternatives available to them? Should one concentrate on re-examining the decision-making process itself? Or was the crucial factor the demonstrated need simply for *more* experience in dealing with traditionalist, non-Western societies?

A few voices have been warning that the proponents of these solutions are missing the main point. These voices are saying Americans are "tripping over it without seeing it"—that we must look within ourselves. The point is, most Americans either have not attempted to see "the world of the Vietnamese" as *the Vietnamese* do, or have perhaps tried and not known how to do so. Only in the past decade has an increasing minority of young Americans been educated and trained for developing personal awareness of what may be the critical factors: (1) the frequent and *unconscious* distortions in their—and everyone's—perceptions of worlds other than their own; and (2) the ways each person individually "constructs" the reality to which he is continually reacting. I might add that we also need to learn how to organize what we learn at random about a foreign people from our personal experiences in contemplating them or interacting with them. In sum, we must learn to perceive "other peoples' words" along a dimension which I shall call intercultural and psychological—and we must do so systematically.\*

I propose to test the finished intelligence concerning two periods of the Vietnam story—1954-1956 and 1961-1963—for presumptive evidence of analysts' attention or inattention to such an intercultural and psychological dimension of the data involved. Before arriving at this main task, we shall first prepare ourselves briefly by consulting some relevant observations and guidelines of prominent government leaders, educators, and researchers, as well as experienced journalists and outstanding Vietnam specialists. In addition, we shall need to sort out our ideas on *whose* perceptions must concern us as we do or do not find a text helpful for reflecting the intercultural and psychological dimension of the data discussed. This distinction will force us to examine conscious and unconscious influences in the work environment on an analyst's perceptions, as well as his possible and unintentional influence on his known and unknown readers. We will need practical indicators for spotting the kinds of evidence we are seeking in the reports. Finally, I will conclude with a brief outline of

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\*Princeton's Hadley Cantril, a policy adviser to four U.S. Presidents, called persistently for collection and coordinated use of the psychological information needed for this purpose. See his *The Human Dimension: Experiences in Policy Research* (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, N.J., 1967), especially pp. 152 *et seq.*

the means presently available for strengthening the capabilities of the analysts to cope with intercultural problems through education and training.

#### *The Chicago Conference, June 1968*

In June 1968, 26 distinguished scholars and foreign affairs officers met in Chicago to search out and discuss the lessons Americans should learn from the Vietnam experience, at a conference sponsored by the Adlai Stevenson Institute of International Affairs.\* Sharp splits appeared over the kinds of lessons on which Americans needed to concentrate. Harvard's Huntington warned of the "misplaced analogies" which that conference itself might bequeath to future policy makers. But Morgenthau rejected out of hand any implication that man can learn nothing from the record of his experiences because each one is unique. Schlesinger emphasized Americans' beliefs about their own peace-keeping role in the world and how they have been deluded thereby. Kissinger highlighted conceptual failures of American planners as sources of our difficulties in Vietnam. These conceptual errors persisted because the bureaucracies "run a competition with their own programs and measure success by the degree to which they fulfill their own norms." Hoffmann of Harvard presented in some depth this case for looking inside ourselves to find the heart of the problem:

Whereas the machinery has exhibited rigidities and shortsightedness characteristic of most modern bureaucratic establishments, the perceptions, conceptions, and criteria of the bureaucrats can be explained only if we look beyond the institutions into the American political style as it has been shaped by American history—if we move from the organization to the minds. The kind of changes we may want to introduce into the machinery . . . depends on whether one believes the heart of the trouble is mechanical, or whether one thinks, as I do, that the reasons go much deeper. . . . [A] part of the answer lies in a certain form of ignorance. . . . Our understanding of South Vietnamese society was poor, the expertise at our disposal limited. In such circumstances we tended to distort our analysis by reducing South Vietnam's uniqueness to elements that seemed familiar and reassuring, to features that we had met and managed elsewhere. . . . Our misreading of reality and our self-confidence have led one another in a vicious circle of ever-increasing delusions. . . .

The broader implications of our Vietnam experience can all be summarized in one formula: from incorrect premises about a local situation and about our abilities, a bad policy is likely to follow.\*\*

#### *Hidden Assumptions*

We shall be giving much attention to various types of analysts' "hidden" premises or assumptions as apparently reflected in the intelligence. These are the principal keys to a person's distortions of perception—the basis or guide for the meaning he gives to a current "happening"—as a series of stimuli act upon one or more of his senses. When he assigns a meaning to stimuli, he usually does so unconsciously. This is the way the almost instantaneous perception

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\*Transcripts of the oral and written contributions at this conference in June 1968 are available in Richard M. Pfeffer (ed.), *No More Vietnams? The War and the Future of American Foreign Policy* (Harper, New York, 1968). Among the participants were: Henry Kissinger, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Adam Yarmolinsky, Edwin Reischauer, Daniel Ellsberg, James C. Thomson Jr., Sir Robert Thompson, Richard Barnet, Hans Morgenthau, Samuel Huntington, Stanley Hoffmann, and Chester L. Cooper.

\*\**Ibid.*, pp. 115-121, 193, 197. Born in Austria and educated in France, Hoffmann is Professor of Government and also Research Associate in the Center for International Affairs at Harvard. In 1968 he published *Gulliver's Troubles, or the Setting of American Foreign Policy*, which he wrote at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford.

process\* works, and repeated assignment of the same meaning soon becomes habitual. Hoffmann cites the American military view of the relevance to Vietnam of "the Korean analogy" \*\* and the examples of successful counter-insurgencies in Greece, the Philippines, or Malaysia. For our purposes here, we may usefully cite some of his examples of the use by Americans of terms which for us have connotations prompting hidden assumptions that distort our perceptions of the political scene in Vietnam:

The tragedy of our course in Vietnam lies in our refusal to come to grips with those realities in South Vietnam that happened to be decisive from the viewpoint of politics. . . . We failed to distinguish a sect from a party, a clique from an organization, a group of intellectuals or politicians with tiny clienteles from a political movement, a police force, officer corps, and set of rich merchants from a political class. We tended to attribute South Vietnamese chaos to a combination of Communist disruptiveness and reversible South Vietnamese mistakes . . . [without realizing] that those "mistakes" were, so to speak, doubly of the essence.

In our examination of the finished intelligence about the political scene we will want to give special attention to the kinds of "elements that seemed familiar and reassuring" which Hoffmann cites. "Non-Communist parties," "political movement," "political development," "democratic practices"—these are examples of an unlimited variety of "mirror image" terms\*\*\* which are highly

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\*Research on perception phenomena has intensified in the past two decades, and the resulting theory for helping us understand these phenomena has been greatly expanded and refined. Consult Bernard Berelson and Gary Steiner, *Human Behavior—Shorter Edition* (paperback, Harcourt, 1967), p. 147; and Hadley Cantril, "The Nature of Social Perception," in Hans Toch and Henry C. Smith, eds., *Social Perception* (paperback, Van Nostrand, 1968). Berelson and Steiner sum up the function and significance of the perception faculty:

The facts of raw sensory data are themselves insufficient to produce or to explain the coherent picture of the world experienced by the normal adult . . . sensory information does not correspond simply to the perception that it brings forth . . . sensory impulses do not act on an empty organism. They interact with what is already "in" the individual, and what we immediately experience is the result of that interaction. We do not always see or hear "what is there," in the environment, but also what we bring to the observing situation.

Our perception faculty may be likened to a master switch directing and redirecting the formulation and coloring of our views of the world. *It may unconsciously bend or ignore reality in order to maintain consistency in our views of the world or to preserve our commitments.*

\*\*David Halberstam. *The Best and the Brightest* (Random House, New York, 1972) pp. 171-172, emphasizes that "even the best of the American military" as represented by General Maxwell Taylor drew analogies with Korea "without considering the crucial difference . . . the very nature of the war."

\*\*\*These are terms which can be expected to evoke "mirror images" in persons who have not trained themselves to check continually for the *differences* between the connotations of a given term in a particular foreign culture area and in the U.S. They are called "mirror image" terms because a person *using, reading, or hearing* them is apt to be really "seeing" in his mind as he would in a mirror; hence, he is likely getting reflections of the ways the terms are understood in America, and not in the other culture area to which he unconsciously assumes he or another person using these terms is making valid reference. The most elusive mirror image terms are those which hold connotations of our Western beliefs and values and notably those which Americans rank especially high. Examples of such terms would include: "national development goals," "efforts to reach a consensus," "search for a reasonable solution," "excessively cruel methods," "fair tactics." Hence, a vital step toward increasing one's awareness of the deceptiveness of such terms is to make a close and thoughtful inspection of "what is typically American or Western." Consult Edward C. Stewart, *American Cultural Patterns: A Cross-cultural Perspective* (Regional Council for International Education, U. of Pittsburgh, 1971).

likely to exert a deceptive and distorting influence on the perception faculty of most persons. Such terms instantly trigger powerful cues to this faculty as it invariably "reaches" for the meaning it will give to a current experience or an idea brought to the person's attention.

One final alert is in order before we move on: our habits, shaped by our personal past behavior and experience, so fill our waking hours that all of us quite commonly miss or forget the enormous implications of *habits* of perception for our future problems of understanding the world about us. Joseph H. DeRivera, in *The Psychological Dimension of Foreign Policy*,\* makes the point realistically:

It is difficult even to grasp intellectually the fact that *we construct* the reality in which we operate. We take our perception of the world for granted. . . . We know what is real. We live in this reality and we act accordingly. . . . If someone else points out that our perceptions may be wrong, we may intellectually admit the possibility, *but we continue to act as though our perceptions were true*. We are familiar with illusions but dismiss them as interesting playthings. Our reality seems so solid, and we feel so in touch with it, that it is impossible for us to act with the realization that in fact our reality is inferred by us and may not match the reality which future events reveal. It is precisely in this feeling of certainty that the danger lies. (*emphasis added*)

#### *Early Warnings of Americans' "Cultural Blindness" on Vietnam*

Only a few voices gained wide public attention in America in the 1960s by their emphasis on the hidden psychological and intercultural dimension of the Vietnam problem. One was the voice of the Frenchman Bernard B. Fall, who gave more than a decade and finally his life as well in Vietnam in a wide-ranging search for the hidden causes and meanings of the war.\*\* In the April 1968 *Atlantic Monthly* James C. Thomson, Jr., one of State's Far East hands who had joined the "Mac" Bundy team at the White House in 1961, contributed a 24-part answer to the question, "How Could Vietnam Happen?" At least half of his reasons bear directly on the psychological and intercultural dimension of American involvement in Vietnam. Some of these reasons tie into points we shall be discussing, for example: the leadership's preconceptions of China on the march and a monolithic Communist bloc; America's "profound ignorance of Asian history and . . . the radical differences among Asian . . . societies;" and confused perceptions of the kind of war we were fighting. Henry Kissinger, before joining the Nixon Administration, prepared an article for *Foreign Affairs* which gave prominence to America's record of neglect of the psychological dimension on Vietnam. On the results of the Tet offensive of January 1968, which "overthrew the assumptions of American strategy," Kissinger wrote:

What had gone wrong? The basic problem has been conceptual: the tendency to apply traditional maxims of both strategy and "nation-building" to a situation which they did not fit. . . . We fought a military war; our opponents fought a political one. We sought physical attrition; our opponents aimed for our psychological exhaustion. . . . The Tet offensive brought to a head the compounded weaknesses . . . of the American position. To be sure, from a strictly military point of view, Tet was an American victory. . . . But

\* (Merrill, Columbus, O., 1968), p. 21.

\*\* See, for example, Fall's *Last Reflections on a War* (Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1967).

in a guerrilla war, purely military considerations are not decisive: psychological and political factors loom at least as large. . . . Both the Hanoi Government and the United States are limited in their freedom of action by the state of mind of the population of South Vietnam, which will ultimately determine the outcome of the conflict.

As for the magnitude of our problem of understanding the Vietnamese mind, Kissinger cites the "vast gulf in cultural and bureaucratic style between Hanoi and Washington." Then he adds tersely, "It would be difficult to imagine two societies less meant to understand each other than the Vietnamese and the American."\*

Upon publication of the Pentagon Papers in the early summer of 1971, former Secretary of State Dean Rusk gave an exposition on television of his reactions to this event. At the outset of his talk, he made a highly revealing admission—the first to be made publicly on this point by a key policy maker of the mid-sixties—of a crucial misperception: "I personally, I think, underestimated the persistence and the tenacity of the North Vietnamese."\*\*

A few journalists had already begun to analyze how such fateful mistakes of judgment could occur at the policy level. As Stanley Karnow saw the problem:

A prime cause of America's setbacks in the Far East . . . has been the delusion of our policy-makers that they understood Asia. Two elements . . . contributed to this delusion. The first was the conviction that there must be measurable facts in Asia because, regarding ourselves as rational, we had to operate on the basis of facts. So in Vietnam, we proceeded to "quantify" situations with statistics and graphs and charts that told everything except the only important reality—what the people think. . . . Our lack of understanding has also led us to miscalculate our enemies, with the result that we have been unable to estimate their response to force or diplomacy or a mixture of the two.\*\*\*

Karnow as well as Kissinger points up a still more basic roadblock for intercultural analysis than mirror images pose, though it subsumes them: "seeing a foreign area in American terms," that is, weighing it into our calculations and evaluations as if it "ran on our time" or by our ground rules. We shall be looking at some of the better known kinds of local ground rules—traditional beliefs, values, and norms—which make such a practice wholly unrealistic in Vietnam as elsewhere in the traditional world.

But *what* the local people think is important is only one aspect of what we shall be calling "the hidden psychological dimension" of the scene in Vietnam. Equally vital for helping Westerners understand "the world of the Vietnamese" is *the way* they think—how they put data together and reach conclusions. This aspect of a traditionalist people's "differentness" can totally escape a Westerner's attention if he looks at only the measurable or tangible products of their thinking. For both the "what" and the "how" of Vietnamese traditional thinking we shall be turning to the French scholar and educator Paul Mus, who has been generally acknowledged to be the West's outstanding authority on the Viet-

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\**Foreign Affairs* (Jan. 1969), pp. 211-212, 214, 215, 217, 220.

\*\**The Washington Post*, 2 July 1971.

\*\*\**The Washington Post*, 20 July 1970.

namese society and culture.\* In 1966, writing at Yale in his article titled "Cultural Backgrounds of Present Problems" in *Asia*, he helps us to begin to understand the Vietnamese mind:

Happily I am addressing America, the country whose philosophy—native, genuine, "aboriginal"—is closest to Asia, the land of pragmatism. . . . When an Asian approaches us [Westerners] . . . he is astounded to see how we withdraw into our thinking. We remove the man. Look at Descartes . . . making total abstractions of everything and starting from scratch to rebuild the world on pure reason without putting anything of himself into it. Quite often, unfortunately, this is the view of the academicians in our part of the world. . . .

We think in terms of concepts. They think in terms of the complete man. Confucius was not interested in concepts because he was interested in the total man . . . the Vietnamese have not been trained in concepts and reasoning. They have been trained by a Confucian civilization which impressed upon the people the way they should behave. . . . Confucianism is not descriptive. . . . It is injunctive. It tells people how to behave.\*\*

### *Breakthrough by Frances FitzGerald*

Frances FitzGerald, daughter of former CIA Deputy Director Desmond FitzGerald and a former student of Mus at Yale, brought Mus and "the hidden psychological dimension" of the Vietnamese scene to the American people with éclat in August 1972. In her book *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam*\*\*\* she aimed to tell the story of America's involvement in Vietnam as it impinged upon and was seen by the Vietnamese. In doing so,

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\*Born in France in 1902, Mus was taken by his father to Tonkin (northern North Vietnam), as a small child. He had his entire basic schooling alongside the Vietnamese young people, became fully bi-cultural and came to know first-hand the workings of the Vietnamese mind. After Oriental Studies in Paris in the early 1920s, he returned to Vietnam where he was appointed in 1927 to the prestigious Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient in Hanoi, an appointment which led to research and study in depth of the historical background and the cultures of Indochina. During and after World War II Mus served Free French intelligence in several capacities in Indochina. In 1948 Mus left government service and Indochina, and took teaching appointments at one of the "grandes écoles"—the Collège de France—and at Yale. We will be consulting Mus repeatedly in this paper. His magistral work, *Vietnam: Sociologie d'une Guerre* (Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1952) has never been successfully translated. Its essential message is, however, found in a re-worked text brought out in English—following Mus' death in 1969, but with his blessing—by Princeton professor John T. McAlister, Jr., who was a student of Mus at Yale (McAlister and Mus, *The Vietnamese and Their Revolution*, Harper, New York, 1970). In addition, I have also used three articles by Mus in English, which embrace a host of his themes: "The Role of the Village in Vietnamese Politics," in *Pacific Affairs* (Sept. 1949); "Vietnam: A Nation off Balance," in *Yale Review* (summer 1952); and "Cultural Backgrounds of Present Problems," in "Vietnam: Evolution of the Crisis" (symposium), in *Asia*, journal of the Asia Society (winter 1966.)

\*\*For a discussion of the contrast between Westerners' logic and Vietnamese mental flexibility in resorting to four systems of thought, see the article by Tran Van Dinh, former Saigon chargé d'affaires in Washington and member of President Diem's cabinet. "The Other Side of the Table," in *The Washington Monthly*, Jan. 1970. Tran says:

"The Vietnamese, like most Asians, use a paradoxical logic which assumes that A and non-A do not exclude each other. Paradoxical logic emerges under the name of dialectics in the thought of Hegel and Marx. In that sense, Marxism is nearer to the Eastern way of thinking than [is] Cartesian logic. . . ."

\*\*\*The publisher is Little, Brown & Co. The review by Martin Bernal in *The New York Review*, 5 October, appears to me to be the most sophisticated and balanced. The subsequent quote from FitzGerald is taken from a description of her by Myra MacPherson in *The Washington Post*, 29 August 1972.

she highlights the contradictions and misunderstandings which have abounded throughout this story, as well as the contrast of cultural elements and mind sets which go far to explain them. The book made many best sellers lists, and almost all reviews were unstinting in their praise and approval of her work. Martin Bernal in *The New York Review* says "it is the first book I would recommend to anyone to read on Vietnam." She herself reportedly has said:

It's not a scholar's book. I make a whole lot of large generalities that no proper scholar would do. Some Chinese scholars would probably huff and puff about certain things. My idea was to sort of overemphasize the contrast [between their culture and Westerners'] if necessary.

While she spent a good part of 1966 in South Vietnam and travelled widely through the country, Bernal observes:

Quite rightly she has relied heavily on the work of others. Many sources are referred to both in the footnotes and in the text. But her book is largely dominated by the work of Paul Mus, Richard Solomon, Robert Shaplen, and Otare Mannoni. . . . In her chapters on the National Liberation Front (NLF) she makes brilliant use of American intelligence material. . . .

Appropriately, Chapter I is titled "States of Mind;" it strives to convey some sense of the vast psychological gulf between East and West. As the United States became increasingly involved in South Vietnam in the 1960s, the television pictures of the two countries' leaders were deceiving because "they did not show the disproportion between the two powers." Yet this "only began with the matter of scale." American officials spoke of supporting the Saigon government in order to defend "freedom and democracy" in Asia, while the GIs discovered that the Vietnamese "did not fit into their experience of either 'Communists' or 'democrats.'" Meanwhile, certain American analysts and officials did not see the United States as interested in the form of the Vietnamese government or in the Vietnamese, but rather as concerned "for containing the expansion of the Communist bloc" and preventing future "wars of national liberation" around the world.

FitzGerald identifies three distinct grounds for misunderstanding and miscommunication between Vietnamese and Americans: the incongruity of their aims; American ignorance of Vietnamese problems; and the disparity of Vietnamese and American frames of reference for giving meaning to general concepts such as "freedom," "democracy" and "national problems." As a result of these grounds for misunderstanding, both peoples necessarily had gross misperceptions of the other's aims, motives, viewpoints, and expectations. FitzGerald sums up her theme:

The unknowns made the whole enterprise, from the most rational and tough-minded point of view, risky in the extreme. In going into Vietnam the United States was not only transposing itself into a different epoch of history; it was entering a world qualitatively different from its own. Culturally as geographically, Vietnam lies half a world away from the United States. Many Americans in Vietnam learned to speak Vietnamese, but the language gave no more than a hint of the basic intellectual grammar that lay beneath. In a sense there was no more correspondence between the two worlds than that between the atmosphere of the earth and that of the sea. . . . To find the common ground that existed between them, both Americans and Vietnamese would have to re-create the whole world of the other, the whole intellectual landscape.

We shall turn to FitzGerald's text as appropriate for her vivid expositions of the "psychological worlds" of the Vietnamese and the Americans, the incongruence of these two worlds, and the resulting problems.

*Whose Perceptions Concern Us Here?*

Ideally, for the closest practical reading on analysts' perceptions of a given foreign situation or problem, we would probably want to identify and talk to the one or more analysts producing intelligence on each of the subjects or geographic areas involved. We might expect thus to determine quite accurately to what extent the person or persons did or did not "wear cultural blinders" with respect to the actual viewpoints, motives, aims, or expectations of the foreign individuals, groups, or societies involved. But for our broad discussion here we will necessarily take readings after the fact, based on written texts. In so doing, we can at best hope to establish only presumptive evidence of the degree of accuracy of Vietnam analysts' perceptions as these existed in the past, at the time a given report was written.

In practice, of course, more than one person's perceptions become involved in virtually all reports, by the normal functioning of the coordination process, the supervisor's review of the draft, or the final review and approval by senior officials. Yet the initiation and follow-through on a particular report are normally the responsibilities of a single analyst. Furthermore, those analysts who hold "area" or "country" assignments generally have the final say on what is characteristic of their area or country, or "what makes it tick." Hence, at a minimum we shall assume that: in most instances an individual report on Vietnam coming under our review will *on the whole* reflect the perceptions of a single analyst; and in virtually all cases, any statements of what is characteristically Vietnamese or Asian—or a consistent lack of attention to such data—will reflect the perceptions of country or area analysts with a direct responsibility for this aspect of the reporting.

Yet intelligence organizations need to go farther than simply to assess a given analyst's attention or inattention to the intercultural or psychological dimension of his reporting. In addition, they need to take account of the bureaucratic—sub-cultural—influences on analysts' perceptions which flow from the views and drives of peers, supervisors, approval boards, agency officials, and the nation's policy-makers. Considerable research on these influences has been published in recent years, and selected highlights can be helpful here. First we sum up some basic research findings on how *any* group can influence the perceptions of its individual members, and then we examine certain recent studies of how such influences work in U.S. Government bodies concerned with problems in foreign affairs.

Experiments publicized in 1952 by Solomon E. Asch showed that about three-fourths of the persons he tested went along with the majority in their respective groups on what they perceived to be going on in the room where they were. In subsequent tests with groups, Richard S. Crutchfield found that conformity on political questions was likely to be greater, more unconscious, and more permanent than conformity on visual perceptions. Ralph K. White, Professor of Social Psychology at George Washington University, has pulled together

lessons bearing on the Vietnam problem which may be drawn from such psychological research.\* He comments on the results of Crutchfield's experiments:

[The evidence] suggests that there is often a real change of attitude. Apparently, after being told that everyone else agreed with a certain attitude item, many of the subjects really changed their minds.

#### *Why Early Perceptions Persist*

White goes on to identify some basic psychological factors which in his view probably helped shape and prolong the early perceptions of America's leaders with respect to Vietnam:

1. "The virile self-image"—the view that, to ensure that one's image as a patriotic defender of freedom would be preserved, a person must not appear to be faltering on anti-Communism;
2. "Perceptual lag"—for example, for many persons the quite realistic view of the menace of Communism in Stalin's day was not modified in step with subsequent shifts of political alignments, leaders' intentions, and operating styles in Europe and Asia;
3. "Cognitive dissonance"—when actions are out of line with ideas, decision-makers tend to align the ideas with the on-going line of action (for example, in 1967 when Defense Secretary McNamara proposed a fundamental shift of policy objectives in Vietnam based on a re-examination of the premises of existing policy, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sharply disagreed and urged that McNamara's paper "not be forwarded to the President" because it implied such a sharp divergence from long-standing policy).\*\*
4. "Selective inattention"—a tendency, once an attitude or course of action is firmly adopted, "to retain thoughts that are in harmony with it and to discard others."

In White's view, the psychological significance of all these tendencies lies "in the nearly total absence of evidence-oriented discussion" of the assumptions behind *prior* policy decisions. The lack of analyses of such assumptions was a major factor in Secretary McNamara's order of 17 June 1967 for the Pentagon's study of the Vietnam War.\*\*\*

Since the late 1960s, a host of "revisionist" scholars have published articles and books, pressing either or both of the arguments that: the American leadership's shift in the late 1940s to a hostile stance toward Vietnam's revolutionaries gave a definite bias to the thrust of the United States' involvement in Southeast Asia from the mid-1950s; and "demonstrable" distortions in American popular and official perceptions of the potential roles of Communism in North and South Vietnam, and of non-Communist forces in South Vietnam, were a prime cause

\**Nobody Wanted War: Misperception in Vietnam and Other Wars* (Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1968) pp. 210-215; "Selective Inattention" in *Psychology Today* (Nov. 1971, pp. 47, 80).

\*\**The Pentagon Papers . . . as Published by the New York Times* (Bantam Books, 1971), p. 538. The Joint Chiefs' paper of 31 May argued that the "drastic changes" of policy advocated by the Secretary "would undermine and no longer provide a complete rationale for our presence in South Vietnam or much of our efforts over the past two years."

\*\*\*Among those who had earlier called attention to this critical need were Under Secretary of State George W. Ball and Assistant Secretary of Defense John T. McNaughton (*ibid.*, pp. 449, 510, 534). McNaughton had advised, ". . . the philosophy of the war should be fought out now so everyone will not be proceeding on their own major premises and getting us in deeper and deeper."

of America's failure to achieve its goals in Vietnam well into the 1970s.\* We shall want to test the intelligence reporting especially for any indications of such distortions in analysts' perceptions of the Vietnamese Communists' and non-Communists' roles, as these were perceived by the Vietnamese people.

### *The Dynamics of Bureaucracy*

Influences on individual foreign affairs officers' thinking flow also from the dynamics of the bureaucracy within a Government agency or group. A seminal study with this theme is Graham T. Allison's *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*.\*\* The author postulates three conceptual models—not necessarily mutually exclusive for any given situation—of how decisions in the foreign policy field are reached. The traditional view that a nation or government works toward a calculated solution of a strategic problem is labelled "The Rational Actor Model." This is played down in favor of two other models. "The Organizational Process Model" views governmental behavior "less as deliberate choices and more as *outputs* of large organizations functioning according to standard patterns of behavior . . . determined primarily by routines established in this organizations. . . ." Finally, "The Government Politics Model" goes further, looking within the leadership groups of an organization:

The "leaders" who sit on top of organizations are not a monolithic group. Rather, each individual in this group is, in his own right, a player in a central, competitive game. The name of the game is politics: bargaining along regularized circuits among players positioned hierarchically within the government. Government behavior can thus be understood according to a third conceptual model . . . as results of these bargaining games. . . . The Governmental (or Bureaucratic) Politics Model sees . . . many actors as players . . . who act . . . according to various conceptions of national, organizational, and personal goals. . . .

The differing responsibilities of the players "encourage differences in what each sees and judges to be important," and hence "priorities and perceptions are shaped by positions."

While Allison writes about decision making in the field of government policy, we wish to suggest here that the behavior patterns in his second and third models may well be characteristic also of the processes by which analysts, super-

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\*In addition to FitzGerald, see: Townshend Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention* (David McKay, New York, 1969), especially ch. 1, "Roots of Intervention," and ch. 5 "Official Optimism—Public Doubt"; and John G. Stoessinger, *Nations in Darkness: China, Russia and America* (Random House, New York, 1971), especially chs. 5 and 6, which are concerned with the French and American involvement in Indochina. Hoopes was Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Jan. 1965-Oct. 1967, and Under Secretary of the Air Force, Oct. 1967-Feb. 1969. Stoessinger has served as Acting Director and Director of the Political Affairs Division of the United Nations since 1967. His thesis (pp. 3-4) is that "the struggles between the United States and China and those between the United States and Russia were not waged solely on the basis of objective reality," but also "in the realm of imagery and illusion." For close-up glimpses of how preconceptions began to take shape in the minds of State Department officers in the mid-1940s, see the staff study for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (*The United States and Vietnam: 1944-1947*, Study No. 2—92nd Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 3 Apr. 1972—pp. 2-5, 15-22) which was based on the Pentagon Papers.

\*\*Little, Brown, Boston, 1971, pp. 13, 67-76, 144-146.

visors, and senior review boards reach decisions about the proper content of finished intelligence. He acknowledges:

Few specialists in international politics have studied organizational theory. It is only recently that organization theorists have come to study organizations as decision makers; behavioral studies of foreign policy organizations from the decision-making perspective have not yet been produced.

But he does not expect these gaps to remain unfilled. "Interest in an organizational perspective is spreading rapidly among institutions and individuals concerned with actual government operations." In 1972 Abraham F. Lowenthal built on Allison's study for *The Dominican Intervention*,\* which stresses how "naturally and consistently" this intervention flowed "from . . . established premises, widely shared within the American foreign policy-making apparatus, at least in 1965." Lowenthal asserts: "The power of preconception, reinforced by official rhetoric and bureaucratic repetition, to determine foreign policy perceptions and actions has rarely, if ever, been more conclusively demonstrated."

#### "Groupthink"

In 1972 and 1973, Irving L. Janis published the results of his study of four "major fiascoes" and two "well-worked out decisions" in American foreign policy in the mid-twentieth century. His book, *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, was followed up with an article titled "Groupthink" in the *Yale Alumni Magazine*.\*\* Janis' "groupthink hypothesis" postulates "a specific pattern of concurrence-seeking behavior" in face-to-face groups, "particularly when a 'we-feeling' of solidarity is running high." His definition:

Groupthink refers to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from group pressures.

Drawing on the results of psychological studies of group behavior, he finds that one's degree of susceptibility to groupthink depends on personality predispositions. The resulting deterioration of mental efficiency is marked by six major defects in decision making, some of which recur through this paper as contributing to distortions of analysts' perceptions. These defects include: failure to re-examine prior decisions which later become untested hidden assumptions; failure to "obtain information from experts who could supply sound estimates of losses and gains to be expected from alternative courses"; and neglect of information and judgments from persons whose views do not support "preferred policy."

Janis' analysis is closely corroborated by James Thomson:\*\*\*

. . . the banishment of real expertise . . . resulted from the "closed politics" of policy making as issues became hot: the more sensitive the issue, and the higher it rises in the bureaucracy, the more completely the experts are excluded while the harassed senior generalists take over. . . . The frantic skimming of briefing papers in the back seats of limousines is no substitute for the presence of specialists. . . .

\*(Harvard U. Press.) pp. 145-147, 151-152, 155.

\*\*The book was published by Houghton Mifflin, 1972, and the article appeared in Jan. 1973.

\*\*\**Atlantic Monthly*, April 1968, pp. 47-53.

Chester Cooper,\* former member of CIA's Board of National Estimates, confirms the relevancy of this point in the eyes of the intelligence world:

Second-echelon and working-level specialists . . . rarely have access to top policy-makers. . . . Searching analyses and mid-range projections, if they are made at all, are likely to shrivel and perish from neglect.

One additional category of persons—the *readers* of the finished intelligence—must be included among those whose perceptions concern us here. Is it possible that many finished intelligence reports run serious risks of miscommunicating critical aspects of the intended messages because intercultural or psychological differences in the understanding of terms are not pointed up? We must assume that most readers of a given reports series are not in fact known personally to the analysts preparing them, or to the review boards. In any event, it is unlikely that analysts are very often *certain* of the readers' awareness of the intercultural differences involved in particular aspects of a report.

Hence we propose the following basic guidelines:

*Any written intelligence message risks misinforming and misleading its readers if it does not alert them to the relevant local cultural and psychological contexts of the key data reported and judgments offered. At a minimum, this means that it should say how the local people involved see, or are likely to see, the actual or anticipated situations. Additionally, the message should warn readers against dangerous mirror images which particular English words, phrases, or language structures are likely to evoke unconsciously in their minds.\*\**

These guidelines may appear impractical, suggesting endless repetitions of burdensome "background" data and caveats. But unless we can demolish the above premise, we must work toward practical safeguards against miscommunication across cultural lines.

We shall be interested principally, then, in presumptive evidence of the perceptions of: *an individual analyst who, we can usually expect, drafted a given report and "saw it through" the coordination and discussion process, with violence done only rarely to his perceptions of what is characteristically Vietnamese; several analysts functioning as country and/or area specialists who would have reviewed or coordinated on Vietnam reports in the larger production offices, though we are not likely to be able to distinguish their perceptions from those of the originating analyst; and those unseen readers of the reports who for the most part are likely neither to be Vietnam or Asia specialists nor to have trained themselves to overcome the hazards of intercultural communication. We would be interested also in the various ways bureaucratic pressures work to shape or modify analysts' perceptions, but direct evidence of these influences\*\*\* will be rare in the texts of the reports.*

\**The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam.* (Dodd, New York, 1970), pp. 457-458.

\*\*See the excellent chapter titled "Language, Perception, and Reasoning" in Glen H. Fisher, *Public Diplomacy and the Behavioral Sciences* (Indiana U. Press, 1972), pp. 94-126. Dr. Fisher is Dean of the Center for Area and Country Studies at the Foreign Service Institute.

\*\*\*For an account of one such case, see Willard C. Matthias, "How Three Estimates Went Wrong," in *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. XII No. 1, pp. 31-35.

*Indicators of Analysts' Attention to "Hidden Psychological Dimension"*

As we turn toward our main task, we need clear indicators for spotting analysts' attention or inattention to the intercultural and psychological dimension of their tasks. The following will be useful indicators for this purpose; they are consistent with the relevant behavioral science literature which we have discussed or cited above.

*Indicators (positive or negative) of attention paid to intercultural or psychological dimension of analytical tasks involving local persons, groups, and populations in foreign areas*

*Set A—Full Indicators:* (Analysts show awareness of analytical problems posed by the differences between the local and the American cultures and psychologies)

- 1—*Discuss such differences* when they are a significant hazard to full communication;
- 2—*Sound alert to problems* such differences may pose—e.g., warn of need to reserve judgment appropriately until local perspective on situation is ascertained;
- 3—*Avoid mirror image terms* if possible—e.g., words, phrases, language structures, ways of thinking which reflect psychology of Americans but not of local nationals being discussed;
- 4—*Point up necessary corrections in readings* of such terms and language structures if better alternatives are not available for achieving more accurate communication.

*Set B—Partial Indicators:* (Analysts show concern for what is on the minds and/or what are known to be the cultural tendencies of the local persons, groups, or population figuring in the analysis)

- 1—*Cite the reported or assumed perspectives*, attitudes, views, concerns, motivations, and/or expectations of local people;
- 2—*Introduce or stress the "core forces"* of the culture and/or sub-culture concerned, i.e., the beliefs, values, commonly found priorities (rankings) of values, norms, and ways of conceptualizing reality which predominate within the culture or sub-culture concerned;
- 3—*Discuss the reported or assumed perspectives*, attitudes, views, concerns, motivations, and/or expectations of local people in relation to the "core forces" of the culture or sub-culture concerned.

In the context of this paper, the main task of the analysts is to point up *the differences* between the American readers' culture and way of thinking, on the one hand, and the relevant foreign culture and way of thinking, on the other hand. We therefore rank as "Full Indicators" evidence that the analysts are, or are not, pointing up such differences. Yet, partial "credit" must be given for introducing *only what is distinctive* about the local culture and way of thinking; by calling the readers' attention to generally unfamiliar foreign behavior patterns, analysts can often prompt the readers' own efforts to make the comparison with American ways and perceive at least some aspects of the differences. By the same token, the analysts' *own* attention to—or lack of attention to—what is on the minds of the local people or what "makes them tick" gives us clues to

whether they are, or are not, "on the right track" for handling the intercultural or psychological dimension of their task.

*Political Realities in Vietnam, Spring 1954*

To set the stage for our testing of the finished intelligence in the period 1954-1956, we summarize the political situation in the much-reduced portion of Vietnam which the French military were still successfully denying to the Viet-minh in the late spring of 1954. With the exception of the Hanoi enclave, the areas involved here later passed from the French to the independent regime in Saigon during and following the Geneva Conference on Indochina of 26 April-21 July 1954. We need to sketch the highlights of this scene, with emphasis on the psychological aspects. This will help us—in our subsequent references to the finished intelligence—as we seek to signal presumptive evidence of the analysts' degree of attention to the psychological dimensions of their tasks.

Ngo Dinh Diem arrived in Saigon from France on 25 June 1954 under fairly favorable international auspices but with formidable handicaps burdening his internal tasks. With support from French and American officials, he was soon appointed Premier of the State of Vietnam by Emperor Bao Dai, who had just won French assent to "treaties of independence and association" on 4 June.\* The Emperor had accepted Diem's terms, which included full civil and military powers as well as authority to determine the future status of the country and establish a representative national assembly. Furthermore, in French law, the State of Vietnam—i.e., "all of Vietnam"—had been a unified state since May 1949, when the National Assembly in Paris had ratified abandonment of colonial status for Cochinchina in the South. Now, only a "provisional military demarcation line" to facilitate regroupment of opposing military forces—not an international boundary—was to be drawn at the 17th parallel by the French and North Vietnamese military representatives at the Geneva Conference. Pending elections to be held in July 1956, political activities were not denied to either regime—the Communist-controlled Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in the North, or Bao Dai's Government in the South—in the area controlled by the other. For the moment, the psychological impact of the fall of Dien Bien Phu on 7 May and the continuing Communist pressure deepened the confusion and malaise in the few areas still under the control of the French Army, notably in the vicinities of Hanoi and Saigon. Before June was out, Diem flew to Hanoi to set up a Committee for the Defense of the North and urge the local population to rally to the South.

The Saigon regime's major campaign that summer for inducing hundreds of thousands of Northerners to migrate to the South reflected a major political problem facing Diem—that of creating a popular base in the South. He was an

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\*A gradual transfer of authority and power had been taking place since 1948. See Bernard B. Fall, *The Two Vietnams: A Political and Military Analysis* (Praeger, New York, 1963), pp. 212-223. Other principal sources utilized here are: "Lansdale Team's Report on Covert Saigon Mission in '54 and '55," in *The Pentagon Papers*, pp. 53-66; George M. Kahin and John W. Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (rev. ed., Dial, New York, 1967); and Philippe Devillers and Jean Lacouture, *End of A War: Indochina, 1954* (Praeger, New York, 1969, translated from French edition published in France in 1960), which provides a French perspective on the opening American period. On the background of Diem's coming to power, see Cooper, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-128.

Annamite—from Central Vietnam—and had virtually no support in the South upon taking power. The Frenchman Devillers writes:

He found himself isolated, threatened, and without resources. He could rely only on a close circle of friends—a virtual clan. The French and their agents, the police, the administrators, the soldiers, and the sects all hemmed him in. His only real encouragement came from a number of resident and visiting Americans, including both civilian and military officials. . . . [One] imperative was to recruit reliable and blindly loyal supporters who would meet with the approval of American officialdom. . . . His political constituents were the Catholics in the North who were about to come under the control of the DRV. He had to bring the largest possible number of these Catholics south, no matter what the costs. . . . They might be socially rootless, but they would owe him everything. They could be relied upon to be uncompromising because of their fear of the Vietminh, and their anti-Communism would recommend them highly to the Americans. . . .\*

In seeking political support from Southerners, Diem was severely handicapped by the French postponement until after World War II of active preparations for Vietnamese self-government. A major task was to create a viable alternative to the Vietminh in areas controlled by the French Army, especially the cities and towns, but also in pockets of the rural areas inhabited by people of the regional or "folk" religions, such as the Cao Dai. The base of this political alternative would be the small Vietnamese upper class which had been raised up by French colonial institutions. The French had already found, however, that this foundation was shaky; it lacked the coherence and strength of a well-established ruling class, and it was engaged in constant squabbling. In October, 1953, for example, in the absence of any elected legislature, Bao Dai had appealed to all major political leaders to attend a "National Congress" in Saigon which might strengthen his hand in negotiations with the French. Bernard Fall, who attended, writes: "That National Congress . . . became a monumental free-for-all in which nationalists of all hues and shades concentrated on settling long-standing scores and in outbidding each other in extreme demands on the French and on the Vietnamese Government." \*\*

#### *The Role of the Villagers*

The most ominous shortcoming of the Vietnamese upper class—which was shared by Diem, as we shall see—was its insensitivity to the need "to forge new political links with the village population," in the words of Princeton Professor John T. McAlister, Jr. It was a shortcoming which would fatefully handicap the United States' intervention in Vietnam and Americans' perceptions of their unending struggle with the Vietminh.\*\*\* As early as 1949, Mus had pointed up the critical importance of forging political links with the villages. In a journal article titled "The Role of the Village in Vietnamese Politics," Mus wrote:

The basic problems of Vietnam—whether they concern cooperation or resistance, nationalism or Communism, the programs and roles of the political parties, or similar questions—can be properly understood only if they have been appraised from the standpoint of the villages. Since the end of the war the French have succeeded in re-establishing themselves in certain of the cities of Vietnam, but not in the interior of the country, the stronghold

\**Op. cit.*, pp. 333-334.

\*\*John T. McAlister, Jr., *Vietnam: The Origins of Revolution* (Knopf, New York, 1969), p. 7; Fall, *Last Reflections on a War*, p. 41.

\*\*\*The steps by which the United States assumed the role of protector of the Diem regime in 1954—and American misperceptions of this task—are well detailed in Halberstam, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-154.

of the villages. Since time immemorial these villages have held the key to the social structure of the country and its outlook on life. . . . The conservatism of the villages used to be contrasted with the new aspirations of those relatively few urban intellectuals whose attitudes had been molded by contact with the French. In the present situation, however, it is chiefly the conservative elements that seem to have congregated in the French-held cities, while large areas of the countryside have resorted to armed resistance under leftist leadership. . . . It is essential to discard at once any notion that in Vietnam the French are dealing with nothing more than a mass of apathetic peasants who have been terrorized by their leaders. When the writer had occasion two years ago to travel behind the Vietnamese [Vietminh] lines, he found widespread evidence of an organized popular movement both at the front and in the rear.\*

We shall want to examine closely the presumptive evidence of analysts' perceptions of this pivotal role of the countryside in influencing the political dynamics of Vietnam. Perceptions of this role directly influence perceptions of Diem's views and aims, and also of the political aspects of the Vietminh program and activities in the South.

### *Diem's Background and Outlook*

A critical handicap for Diem in his political task was the clear incongruity between many of his principal beliefs, preconceptions, and biases, on the one hand, and the practical requirements of the task, on the other. Diem's view of the world and rationale for action were heavily influenced by several factors: his family background in the mandarin class of Hué—the Annamite Imperial capital; staunch Catholic beliefs; an unyielding opposition to French political pretensions in Vietnam; restricted personal experience as an administrator rather than a policy maker or politician; and a political philosophy from Europe called "Personalism." A brief survey of these roots of his personality will help us grasp the psychological world of this extraordinary but generally miscast ruler, on whom for a decade America relied as the mainstay of its growing commitment in Southeast Asia.

Diem's ancestors included some of the earliest Catholic converts in Vietnam, dating from the seventeenth century. His father was a high official at the court of Emperor Thanh-Thai at the turn of the twentieth century. This mandarin class had lingered on in Central and Northern Vietnam after the French had reorganized many institutions in the South for support of a plantation economy. Frances FitzGerald suggests traits of the mandarin mentality, with implications for our concern here:

The villages of northern and central Vietnam stood like small fortresses in the center of their rice fields, closed off from the world by bamboo hedges. When the mandarin rode out from the stone ramparts of his citadel, he traveled quite alone, a fish out of the water of the population. The mandarin was more an ambassador from the court than a governor in his own domain. He had only the authority to negotiate with the village council. . . . If the negotiations broke down, he had no resort except the final one of calling in the Imperial troops and burning down the hedges of the village.\*\*

In his extensive discussion of Diem's background,\*\* Bernard Fall emphasizes "a religious fierceness bordering on fanaticism, which must be fully under-

\**Pacific Affairs* (Sept. 1949), p. 265.

\*\**Op. cit.*, pp. 43, 81. The quotation is from Mus, *Sociologie d'une Guerre*, ch. 1, in a translation presumably rendered by FitzGerald.

\*\*\**The Two Vietnams*, pp. 234-252.

stood before one can understand Diem's view of his role in Vietnam's somber contemporary history." Fall elaborates:

His faith was made less of the kindness of the apostles than of the ruthless militancy of the Grand Inquisitor; and his view of government was made less of the constitutional strength of a President of the Republic [created October 1955] than of the petty tyranny of a tradition-bound mandarin. To a French Catholic . . . stressing "our common faith," Diem was reported to have answered calmly: "You know, I consider myself rather as a Spanish Catholic."

This religious militancy in Diem had obvious implications for his political role in a country whose population was only 10% Catholic, and where political dynamics were worked out to a greater extent by a variety of sects than by formal political parties.

Diem's paternalistic approach to relations between governors and governed comes through in several of our sources. Sympathetic as well as unsympathetic sources, according to Fall, quote Diem as saying, "I know what is best for my people." FitzGerald quotes Diem: "Society functions through proper relationships among men at the top. . . . The sovereign is the mediator between the people and the Heaven as he celebrates the national cult. . . ." A French diplomat who had many dealings with Diem compared him to the rightwing French nationalist Charles Maurras, "whose absolutist views were too extreme even for the pretender to the French throne." South Vietnam, concludes Fall, "was structurally a republic, mostly to please its American godfathers, [but] in terms of the actual relations between government and governed, it was an absolute monarchy without a king. . . . It should hardly be surprising that any Madison Avenue attempt to make a baby-kissing popular leader out of Diem would fail." Diem saw his role as one of consolidating a truncated Vietnam, establishing an unchallenged control by his government, and preparing the non-Communist areas for an eventual showdown with the Communist ones.

This view of his own role as Premier and later President of Vietnam was buttressed by Diem's political philosophy of "Personalism," which had developed in the 1930s in France, became identified with the liberal Catholic journal *Esprit*, and spread throughout Europe. One of Diem's brothers, Ngo Dinh Nhu, who served as Political Adviser and chief theoretician for Diem, had studied at the prestigious French Ecole des Chartes in Paris, where he had been in contact with Emmanuel Mounier, prominent among the founders of Personalism. Brother Nhu became much impressed by Mounier's ideas and transmitted his convictions to Diem, who likewise shone as a student. (Diem had finished first in his class at the French-run School for Law and Administration in Hanoi.) Here was a philosophy, the Ngo brothers felt, which was "capable of counterbalancing the type of primitive Marxism that the Vietminh was trying to 'sell' to the Vietnamese."

Fall provides us a fairly coherent sketch of Personalism, which suffices for demonstrating its intellectual and moral support to Diem and his entourage as well as its usefulness as a political tool. The heart of the concept is expressed by the Vietnamese term for Personalism—*Nhan-Vi*—meaning "person-dignity." Hence, it emphasized human dignity and the value of the human person, challenging Communism's concentration on the good of the "masses" and the producing classes, which often works to the detriment of the individual's "intellectual, moral, and spiritual life." Personalism, then, was a rallying call—con-

sistent with Catholic philosophy—against Communism. At the same time, Diem used Personalism to attack some Western concepts of democracy. "Democracy," he once said, "is neither material happiness nor the supremacy of numbers . . . [but] is essentially a permanent effort to find the right political means of assuring to all citizens the right of free development."

In sum, factors affording Diem political advantages during his early tenure as premier included: at least short-term military protection from the French; strong indications that the United States would continue to take a firm stand on preserving a Saigon regime free from Communist control; the Vietminh's general sense of satisfaction with their anticipated gains from the Geneva negotiations and willingness to bide their time before achieving political control of all of Vietnam; Diem's strong nationalism and consistent personal record of opposition to French political influence; and the absence of any strong, country-wide groups opposing his advent to power.

Political disadvantages for Diem included: the lack of preparation of the country, in the prior era of French control, for national political activity or national administration, particularly in respect to relationships between the countryside and Saigon\*; Diem's lack of both political experience and any strong inclination to organize a political apparatus for ensuring political support on a nation-wide basis; his lack of prior direct personal contact with the countryside; his strong identification with foreign cultural influences; and certain strongly-held beliefs and ideals which were not consistent with existing political priorities, yet at the same time preoccupied his attention to an increasing degree.

#### *Searching for Indicators in the Finished Intelligence*

My search was confined to three series of finished intelligence reports: the Intelligence Reports (IRs) of the Department of State's Office of Intelligence Research; the Current Intelligence Weeklies (CIWs—now the Weekly Summaries) of CIA's Office of Current Intelligence; and the National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) which the Director of Central Intelligence submits to the President.

Among these, only State's IRs are in depth, running in some cases to more than 50, even 100 pages. Hence the IRs should be the most likely of the three series to permit clarification of relevant differences between the psychological worlds of the American reader and a foreign community. Concerning OCI's CIWs, we have contrary expectations: each issue in this series covers only highlights of selected current events and their significance, and does so on a world-wide basis, with seldom more than two or three pages available for a given item.

Similarly, the NIEs are tightly compressed; those limited to a single country usually run five to 15 pages. But the NIEs are produced by senior analysts who have been—and usually still are—concerned with several countries. We anticipate that these officers have had in-depth experience with a variety of countries and cultures, and hence are well sensitized to the importance of communicating the closest possible approximation of a cultural context. Admittedly, in some cases it is difficult to detect whether the analysts are saying little or nothing concerning a local people's way of thinking about a situation in order to meet

\*An excellent study of both the political and the administrative aspects is Robert Scigliano's *South Vietnam: Nation under Stress* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1963), especially chs. 2-4.

space restrictions, or because data on the local viewpoint are unavailable, or because the analysts are not sensitive to the importance of that perspective.

*Ngo Dinh Diem, 1954-1956—CIWs' Perspective*

Ngo Dinh Diem first appears in the CIWs as prospective premier on 18 June 1954,\* a week before he arrived in Saigon. For the American government he clearly was an intelligence target of the highest priority. Back in early 1952 the National Security Council's comprehensive statement on United States goals in Southeast Asia had declared:

With respect to Indochina the United States should . . . continue to cultivate friendly and increasingly cooperative relations with the Government of France and the Associated States at all levels with a view to maintaining and, if possible, increasing the degree of influence the U.S. can bring to bear on the policies and actions of the . . . authorities. . . . Specifically we should use our influence to promote positive political, military, economic and social policies . . . [including] the development of more effective and stable governments. . . .\*\*

In 1954, as the French military position in Indochina deteriorated rapidly, the Eisenhower administration twice hinted to France that it was ready to intervene with American forces. More than two weeks before Diem's arrival in Saigon, the American Military Mission was activated with the arrival of its Chief, Colonel Edward G. Lansdale, on 1 June. Its task was to build a base for paramilitary operations in Vietminh-held areas. By mid-summer, however, Lansdale was advising Diem directly on the task of preventing a collapse of civil government. On 4 August, in their preconditions for U.S. military aid to the Diem regime, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stipulated:

It is absolutely essential that there be a reasonably strong, stable civil government in control. It is hopeless to expect a U.S. military training mission to achieve success unless the nation concerned is able effectively to perform those governmental functions essential to the successful raising and maintenance of national armed forces.

Thus, by 18 June, when we first encounter Diem in the CIWs, Lansdale had been in place in Saigon for more than two weeks, the existing Buu Loc government continued to be paralyzed, and Diem already had the nod from Emperor Bao Dai to take over shortly in Vietnam with sweeping authority. But the two-page CIW refers only cryptically to "one Ngo Dinh Diem"; he was considered to rate "well below Buu Loc in terms of political administrative ability." No clues are given to what kind of man Diem was or how he saw the world.\*\*\*

The CIW item of 23 July on the intentions of the French in South Vietnam cites Diem as a cause of concern to them because he insisted that Hanoi was "the cradle of the race"—to be retaken at all costs. This two-page report describes Diem only in the context of the French view of him as an "excitable and im-

\*Virtually all documents which we cite in the three series identified above are classified through SECRET—and are listed in the *Intelligence Publications Index (IPI)*, which was compiled and published by CIA on a continuing basis through the mid-1960s.

\*\**The Pentagon Papers*, pp. 27-30. The immediately following data are from the same source, pp. 1-21.

\*\*\*State's Office of Libraries and Intelligence Acquisition put out a three-page Biographic Report on Diem, also dated 18 June. Earlier reports on Diem also had been produced by the Department. These reports provided a fair number of clues to his viewpoints, including political ones.

pulsive nationalist" who should be removed from office. No additional glimpses of Diem appear in this series until after mid-August.

The CIW of 20 August carries the first evaluation of the prospects for developing a strong government in the South, and hence, for Diem to perform successfully as premier. These prospects were judged to be unfavorable. The analysts saw Diem as "rigid in his thinking and ill-informed on many matters of practical administration." But they did not comment on the core elements of his personality—his beliefs, values, and norms—or on his views of his overall task and problems, or on his motives and expectations. No references at all are found in the CIW series concerning his personal, social, or political background. The 20 August report notes, "Presumably on moral grounds, he has not yet taken into his government representatives of the Cao Dai and other war lord sects. . . ." But his thinking on this matter is not discussed in specific terms.

The 20 August report cites the conclusion of American officials in Vietnam that Diem's Government did have "a greater potential for winning wide popular support than any available successor." The reason cited for this view was that the leadership was "irreproachably nationalist," "unprecedentedly honest," and genuinely anti-Communist. The premier himself enjoyed "wide personal respect" for his integrity. But no hint is given of either the psychological or the technical factors which might bear upon an objective of winning wide popular support in *Vietnamese terms*. Furthermore, some of the adjectives intended to describe the Vietnamese leadership—words such as "honest" and "anti-Communist"—quite likely served as mirror image terms, thus misleading both the writers and the readers. The analysts give no indication that they were aware of this possibility.

Not until 8 December 1955—more than a year later—did a CIW again take an overall look at Diem's political prospects. Meanwhile, his "progress toward consolidating his regime and extending its authority" was cited only in passing in a report of 10 February 1955. This CIW fails to reflect the State Department's biographic report on Diem of 4 November 1954, which drew on the cables Ambassador Heath in Saigon evidently prepared for the purpose of briefing his replacement, General J. Lawton Collins. Heath had cast considerable light on the direction of Diem's political thinking:

It soon became apparent Diem had indeed lost touch with the real situation in Vietnam. . . . He was all but paralyzed by what he did find . . . [and] seemed unable to move "off of dead center." . . . He has a reputation for honesty and patriotism . . . [but] is scarcely capable of influencing people, making friends, or undertaking determined action. He seems to dwell in an ivory tower with a belief in his mission and leaving urgent political negotiations largely in the hands of others. . . . He has largely lost whatever support he enjoyed among Vietnamese political groups. It is difficult to establish how far from the premier's palace the authority of the government extends, but it does not extend very far.

In the 10 February CIW, the main focus is upon a rising threat to the security of the Saigon regime. The government would probably soon be forced to "deal with increasing dissidence on the part of the powerful politico-religious sects." Their ensuing intrigues, climaxed by the Binh Xuyen's attack on government installations and the premier's palace on 29-30 March, drew detailed and steady coverage in the CIWs through May 1955. The political issues in this struggle, however, are given only brief and piecemeal coverage. The term "politico-religious sects" is repeatedly used but with virtually no elaboration.

The term "gangster society" as applied to the Binh Xuyen could not fail to evoke mirror images.

Here was indeed a missed opportunity for the CIWs to shed light on Diem's problem of winning popular support. For the sects themselves played a fundamental political role in the regions of South Vietnam, which does not come through in these reports concentrating on the security aspect of the challenge to Saigon. As Fall put it later, in *Last Reflections on a War*:

Regionalism in Vietnam is a fact of life which no amount of centralization can paper over. For some unfathomable reason, the decision was made in 1954 [gradually] to replace what was on the whole a well-decentralized administrative system by a truly French-patterned, highly centralized administrative structure. More and more power was heaped on the fragile shoulders of Saigon's central bureaucracy, while such "natural" units of government as the region or the district either were abolished or lost all effective power. . . . In the absence of a broadly accepted government, people of necessity must fall back on the *one* structure of society they can trust—their religion.\*

The French, who had not attempted to extend the political base of Cochinchina—or, later, of the State of Vietnam—to embrace the villages, had instead subsidized the sects as regional centers of power. Diem's refusal to continue this system thus raised a question about his political views. What were his thoughts on finding some alternative route for winning support in the countryside? The CIWs of this period show no awareness of this major gap in U.S. political intelligence on South Vietnam.

By December 1955 Diem was preparing for popular election of a "Constituent" (Constitutional) Assembly. It was almost a year and a half since he had come to power. Yet no hint of his political philosophy appears in the brief report on the political situation in the CIW of the 8th. We learn only that "he considers it imperative at this juncture to have an assembly on which he can rely." Though opposition candidates were apparently to be allowed to run, "stringent electoral procedures" were calculated to prevent many from being elected.

The next CIW to report on political developments, dated 31 May 1956, provides an estimate that "South Vietnam's viability will be further bolstered by the adoption of a constitution" by late June. "Effective control" would remain with the presidency; "certain limitations" would be placed on the people because Diem was convinced "full democracy must be withheld until the danger of Viet-minh subversion subsides and an enlightened electorate develops." A follow-up report of 19 July gave two paragraphs to the political scene, one of which reported adoption of the constitution on 2 July and reiterated Diem's conviction that "some sacrifice of the democratic aspects of government" must be endured under present conditions. Again, terms such as "full democracy" and "democratic aspects of government" could not be expected to communicate political concepts which would be valid in the context of the Vietnamese scene.

What can we conclude concerning the OCI analysts' probable attention or inattention to the psychological dimension of their reporting on Diem's political outlook and policies as thus far reviewed? As we apply our criteria, we find only negative indicators concerning attention to the *differences* between the Vietnamese and the American ways of thinking (our set "A" of possible indicators on page 13). If indeed the analysts were aware of these differences, we can safely question whether they were being realistic to assume an adequate level of

\*Pp. 177-178. See also McAlister, *Vietnam: The Origins of Revolution*, p. 356.

awareness also in their readers. As for analysts' awareness of *what was on the minds* of local groups or individuals, or "how their minds worked" (our set "B" of indicators), we find a few positive indicators, all falling under the heading of reported views, attitudes, concerns, motivations, and/or expectations. The attention even to this category is intermittent and casual. We conclude that the "psychological world" of the local individuals and groups discussed was given minimal attention in the reports reviewed.

*State's Reporting on the Diem Regime, 1954-1956*

The first State Department IR which analyzes the Diem regime and its prospects is dated 15 September 1955 and runs 76 pages.\* Approximately one-half of this report is devoted to the political scene. There are numerous positive indicators of attention to "What was on the minds" of significant individuals and groups. But, as was the case with CIA's CIWs, we find almost no discussion of fundamentals of Diem's personality, or of his views of his overall task, or of his motives and broad expectations.

What inspired and drove this virtual dictator of South Vietnam, whom Washington had come around to backing fully,\*\* is thus left to the imagination of the reader. The *unconscious* result of the reader's perception process can be to interpret the reported decisions and actions of Diem in the light of the reader's *own* culture-bound preconceptions and assumptions. This result is all the more likely because the report concentrates heavily on Diem's strategy and tactics for strengthening the regime and overcoming threats to its security—factors which in themselves are commonly rated important by American foreign affairs officers and can sound deceptively familiar to them.

One qualification must be added concerning the State analysts' neglect of Diem's views in the IR of 15 September 1955. "One of Diem's greatest handicaps," they wrote, "has been an almost pathological inability to trust leaders who had previously been associated with administrations under French control." The analysts' attention to why he distrusted many prominent figures provides a more balanced perspective for understanding Diem's patterns of decisionmaking.

Had the IR of 15 September provided a sketch of Diem's perspectives on the new State of Vietnam and on his role as premier, this would have served to guide the reader toward the premier's approach to policy decisions. Instead, the brief statements of his policies are made for the most part in general terms and raise risks of evoking mirror images. The stated policy objectives were to:

- 1) demonstrate the independence of Vietnam, its potential for democratic growth and a degree of popular support sufficient to justify his claim to leadership;
- 2) restore national unity;
- 3) establish the authority of the national administration;

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\*IR 7045, "Probable Developments in South Vietnam through July 1956" (SECRET). No IRs on any aspect of South Vietnam are cited in the IPI for the second half of 1954, and my efforts to find any such reports through contacts with State/INR were unproductive.

\*\*Gen. J. Lawton Collins, serving in Vietnam as President Eisenhower's personal representative, had reported to Washington in December 1954 that Diem was unequal to his task and urged that he be removed. Should Washington be unable to accomplish this, Collins recommended as the alternative "re-evaluation of our plans for assisting Southeast Asia." Lansdale stood behind Diem, and a counterattack brought victory over the sects on 28 April 1955. *The Pentagon Papers*. pp. 19-21.

- 4) divide and conquer with respect to those whose loyalties were parochial and whose activities limited the internal sovereignty of the state;
- 5) prepare for election of a National Assembly as evidence of the democratic orientation of the regime; and
- 6) accomplish reforms of administrative procedures and agrarian policies.

In each case, we find one or more abstract terms—standing for generalized concepts—without reference to specific examples of objectives or methods. Such uses of abstract terms are notorious occasions for complete breakdowns of communication across cultural lines. Only if abstractions are accompanied by detailed explanations of the personal frames of reference of the writer or speaker can we hope to deter the reader or listener from “constructing the reality” of the message as *he* perceives it. The IR under consideration does provide some specific examples of the actual accomplishments of the Diem regime which relate to its generalized policy objectives, but without giving us his exact goals.

Before leaving this in-depth IR of 15 September 1955, let us note what attention the analysts give to how the population, political groups, and French advisers in South Vietnam saw the Diem regime. Though treatment of this aspect is no doubt thinner than was desirable, the State report provides critically important clues to these views—a type of clue which we missed in CIA's CIWs:

A tremendous chasm remains . . . between governors and governed. The Vietnamese people, war-weary and for the most part still village-oriented, continue to regard government largely in terms of its impositions rather than of its opportunities for participation, distrust leadership until shown that it can be trusted, and avoid all unnecessary responsibility.

In essential respects, the political base of the national administration remains un-broadened. . . . French interpretations of a desirable “broadening” of the government have differed from the view of Diem and, to some extent, from that of the U.S. French advisors have stressed the importance of including representatives of the long-standing political parties in Vietnam and of the religious sects. Diem has refused to do this as long as these groups failed to give undivided loyalty to the national administration. His efforts to strengthen the government have resulted largely in the introduction of essentially nonpolitical technicians on whom he believed he could rely. Such measures may have contributed to increasing the competence of his administration but have not appreciably widened the base of Diem's political strength.

Here, albeit in capsule form, is an analysis of Diem's basic vulnerabilities on the political front, which were a major contributing cause of his violent end eight years later. These weaknesses sprang from his political strategy and policy objectives, which clearly called for serious intelligence analysis.

Moving forward now to 1956, we find that the major IR of that year on Vietnam covers both the South and the North, is dated 23 May, and runs 105 pages.\* About 15 pages focus directly on the political scene in South Vietnam—less than half the space which had been given to this topic in the shorter IR of 15 September 1955. While an analysis of Diem's perspectives on his task is still wanting, we note increased attention in general to the current views of individuals and groups concerning issues and events.

In a fair number of instances in the 23 May 1956 report, the analysts' conjectures and ways of expressing such views and aspirations evoke mirror images. A prime instance is the reference at the outset to Diem's “apparently deep democratic convictions stemming from his education and experience under

\*IR 7256, “Probable Developments in Vietnam through Mid-1957” (SECRET/NOFORN).

Western influence," which served to moderate the regime's movement toward "paternalistic authoritarianism." We have already reviewed some of the strong evidence for the proposition that Diem had no commitment to Western concepts of democratic processes.\* Furthermore, in the absence of any general discussion of Diem's political philosophy in the IRs, we have no hint of what the analysts themselves understood by the term "deep democratic convictions" or by another expression, "deviations from these democratic principles," appearing nearby in the same context. We speculate on how much consumers of finished intelligence concerned with the support of Diem's regime may have read into this and similar generalized references to his "democratic" convictions. A limited warning against unwarranted assumptions which might be drawn from this term does follow in the same paragraph:

In the face of surviving problems, and particularly in the context of the traditionally conspiratorial nature of Vietnamese politics, it is virtually inevitable that the government [will] not conform to Western ideals of democratic behavior for a period of years.

But do we also catch a hidden, culture-bound assumption here? Are the analysts implying that the Saigon Government might conform to these Western ideals eventually? We may infer at least that this was a goal which the analysts believed was taken for granted by some readers of their reports.

Such inferences bring up a crucial question for America's goals and *modus operandi* in the global role which it undertook beginning in the late 1940s. The question can be put: how realistic is the common expectation of Americans (and Westerners) that they can produce fundamental change in the life patterns of non-Westerners? This expectation began to be challenged seriously in the early 1960s but still lingers on as a hidden assumption in many official and unofficial programs. Broadly speaking, this assumption has been present for two decades behind the far-flung efforts of Americans to advise and guide the South Vietnamese on building a viable economy, society, and political state.

The assumption itself has sharply limited viability, as was forcefully stated in 1962 by George M. Foster in a text for the general public:

Americans wear cultural blinders, of which we usually are ignorant, which prevent us from fully understanding the needs and desires of the people we wish to help, and which make us insensitive to the full range of economic, social, and cultural consequences resulting from narrowly conceived developmental programs. Technological development is a complex process. . . . Perhaps . . . the term *sociotechnological development* would clarify our thinking, for development is much more than the overt acceptance of material and technical improvements. It is a cultural, social, and psychological process as well. . . . [including] a corresponding change in the attitudes, the thoughts, the values, the beliefs, and the behavior of the people . . . affected. . . . These nonmaterial changes are more subtle. Often they are overlooked or their significance is underestimated. Yet the eventual effect of a material or social improvement is determined by the extent to which other aspects of culture affected by it can alter their forms with a minimum of disruption.\*\*

\*Westerners may be misled by the focus of the philosophy of "Personalism" on the dignity or high value of the human person; they may assume this extended into politics, but the adherents of Personalism appear to have limited its connotations largely to the moral sphere.

\*\**Traditional Cultures: and the Impact of Technological Change* (Harper, New York, 1962), pp. 1-3. See also *The Conflicted Relationship: The West and the Transformation of Asia, Africa, and Latin America* (McGraw, New York, 1967), by Theodore Geiger, Chief of International Studies at the National Planning Association.

The literature on this broad problem in the fields of overseas planning, negotiations, and operations points clearly to a helpful two-part ground rule which has been derived empirically from Western experience throughout the "developing" world over more than two decades:

- 1—*the members of any cultural group tend to resist change in their culture, particularly in the core elements;*
- 2—*when the members do take new goods or procedures or concepts from abroad which bring along foreign beliefs, values, or norms, they usually manage to modify and adapt the imports to "fit into" or harmonize with the existing culture.*

This ground rule can serve analysts well for guiding readers concerning the likely impact of policies which entail cultural changes abroad.

In sum, we find that State's reports, as anticipated, do give considerable attention to what is on the minds of the individuals and groups involved in the events discussed. But we conclude, on the basis of these reports concerned with the Diem regime, that this attention is confined largely to "the surface level" of the actors' thinking. We find only rare references to their deeper frames of reference—such as preconceptions, values, beliefs—which would serve as basic guidelines for understanding their present and future behavior. The most serious gap is in the references to Diem himself, whose role was critical for the success of American policy concerning Southeast Asia. Finally, mirror images have been noted, which in some cases risk encouraging entirely unrealistic expectations concerning the outcome of American policy decisions for that area.

#### *The Diem Regime as Reflected in the NIEs—1954-1956*

In the National Intelligence Estimates, once again we search with care for references to Diem and clues to analysts' awareness of the critical need in 1954-1956 for America's leaders to understand his "psychological world." Such clues are rare in the nine NIEs available to us for the period from April 1954 down to 17 July 1956. The only details to be found which are descriptive of the man himself touch on behavior traits—"his honesty and zeal," his being "rigid and unwilling to compromise"—or on job effectiveness. The statements evaluating Diem's performance during his first year in office rest for the most part on tactical considerations. Such a statement concerned his quite unexpected success in overcoming the Binh Xuyen organization's direct challenge to him in Saigon between late March and early May 1955. The NIE of 2 May reflects the optimism of the moment in Saigon and Washington:

The success of Premier Diem in operations against the Binh Xuyen, and in his stand against Bao Dai, the French, and General Vy, has created a new and potentially revolutionary situation in Vietnam. . . . Diem appears to hold the initiative in the phase that is about to begin. . . . The French and Bao Dai will have to adapt themselves to a radically new political situation dominated by Diem or by more extreme nationalist elements. . . . The virtual expulsion of the Binh Xuyen from Saigon . . . has increased Diem's prestige throughout Vietnam. . . . If he were forced from office, many of his followers would probably undertake revolutionary opposition. . . .\*

\*SNIE 63.1-2/1-55 (SECRET). *The Pentagon Papers* shows (pp. 20-21) that Lansdale stiffened Diem's spine in this affair and provided strong organizational support.

The ONE analysts' apparent inattention to the deeper forces that "made Diem tick"—his beliefs, values, norms, and perspectives—may well explain the position they took on his hostility toward the French:

Prime Minister Diem's blatantly nationalistic and openly anti-French attitude has caused many of the French on the scene . . . to assume a hostile attitude toward Diem and work openly toward depriving him of . . . support. If Diem had the full support of the French, he might be able gradually to create a sense of national will and purpose in South Vietnam. . . . However, the French are not likely to provide Diem with full and positive support. Therefore, Diem will probably not be able to reestablish the authority of the government throughout South Vietnam and tackle effectively the multitude of pressing problems now facing the country.\*

The implication seems to be that Diem should and could abandon this behavior, and that "it was news." We have seen that considerable biographic data on Diem had long since been made available by State's Office of Libraries and Intelligence Acquisition. His adamant stand against the French *présence* in Vietnam had been publicly known and had been sustained since July 1933, when he resigned as Minister of the Interior after only two months of service and publicly accused Emperor Bao Dai of being "nothing but an instrument in the hands of the French authorities." \*\*

Besides Diem's "psychological world," South Vietnam's "world of political realities" was of critical importance for the success of the Saigon regime. By "political realities" we mean how the traditional system worked in practice—e.g., how power was shared, exercised, and retained. Such methods are necessarily imbedded in the local culture and hence are consistent with the local psychology. An awareness of these underlying and largely hidden factors is scarcely reflected in the four short NIEs produced between 21 May and 15 September 1954.\*\*\* These papers do make the points that: extreme factionalism was increasing the chances of a military coup in May and June; the incoming Diem regime appeared to have the "passive support of the leading nationalist organizations and individuals" in July and August; and by September it appeared to retain considerable unorganized popular support despite the crush of problems to be met. But what were the power relationships between the factions and regional sects, and between these and the military? What were the precedents and the power factors involved when a national leader sought to win strong support from the leadership groups? And, above all, where had the small urban elites and the rural masses traditionally placed their allegiance and their confidence? A correlation of the reported events with the broad framework of local political dynamics is needed in order to grasp the significance of developments *in Vietnamese terms*.

The next NIE, dated 23 November 1954, is the first in-depth analysis in the series which followed Diem's advent to power. Now local factors are pointed up which hindered development of a strong state in the South: geographic, ethnic, social, cultural, and political differences throughout the area are methodically itemized. But little guidance is given for readers to establish the relative

\*NIE 63-7-54, 23 November 1954, pp. 4, 8.

\*\*Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, beginning p. 235, provides many indications of Diem's anti-French bias, which apparently can be traced back to his mandarin father.

\*\*\*NIEs: 63-3-54, 21 May; 63-4-54, 16 June; 63-5-54, 3 August; and 63-6-54, 15 Sept.

influence of the individual forces or to understand *how* they worked to slow the unification effort. Furthermore, in an apparent effort to explain why the people had not rallied to Diem's call for unity, the analysts state:

The mass of the South Vietnamese have seen such a succession of crises in the last decade that they have become in effect inured to political developments and unresponsive to appeals.

Inasmuch as we find no evidence for this statement of a cause and effect relationship, the presumption is strong that the analysts were under the influence of a mirror image. The statement implies that *prior* to the last decade the masses *had* given attention to the country's crises and *had* been responsive to appeals from the central government. The analysts were probably "seeing" a political community with a fundamental rapport between the rural population and the center of power, like the communities which had developed historically in Western countries—but not in Southeast Asia.

Is this another instance of Americans' general lack of knowledge concerning things Vietnamese? One of the first Americans to call attention to this deficiency was Dolf Droge, the White House specialist and briefer on the Vietnamese who has been addressing audiences throughout the country for almost a decade. His plea for action on this public education front was strong during the war years:

If life views have a great deal to do with people's attitudes and your ability to reach them, then it is high time we begin to take a look at the essential element in this war and that is the Vietnamese. Now, the Vietnamese people, in this sense, have been so poorly described in our public discussion of them that you literally have fantasy operating on one side and reality operating 10,000 miles away.\*

From late 1965, an excellent nine-page report by U.S.I.A.'s Research and Reference Service was available on the Vietnamese peasant's beliefs, values, and living patterns.\*\* But for American intelligence officers the general dearth of information in English, as well as in-depth understanding concerning Vietnamese society and culture, was a severe hazard. This made it increasingly difficult to assess the outlook for a more effective regime in Saigon and a decline of the Communists' power and influence in the South. A crucial unknown quantity in assessments of both major questions was "the psychological world of the peasant."

Thus far, the indications in the NIEs of attention to the cultural and psychological dimension of analysis are indeed meager. Neither Diem's political philosophy nor the behavioral patterns characteristic of the Vietnamese political process are discussed or reflected. Local ethnic and societal differences are cited but are not tied in with the political process and outlook. In one instance we encounter a misleading implication that the political horizons of the rural population had once extended to Vietnam's power center.

But, one may well ask, did the NIEs' shortcomings in these respects really matter? Wasn't their primary function *estimative*—to come up with the outlook and timely warnings for the policy makers and not to provide a thorough analysis of how and why these estimates were determined? Indeed, the Pentagon Papers, according to the editors of *The New York Times* edition, "reveal that

\*From a tape recording of a talk titled "How the Vietnamese Sees the American," which Droge presented at C.I.A. on 27 March 1970.

\*\*R-138-65, titled "The Vietnamese Peasant: His Value System," October 1965 (UNCLASSIFIED).

the American intelligence community repeatedly provided the policy makers with what proved to be accurate warnings that desired goals were either unattainable or likely to provoke costly reactions from the enemy.\* The Estimates of 1954 and 1955 support this statement. The Estimate of 3 August 1954 warns that the Vietminh administrative cadres in South Vietnam "have been in firm control of several large areas of Central and South Vietnam for several years . . . and will probably remain in place." On 15 September 1954 the estimators see growing prospects of an eventual extension of Communist control in the South without large military operations. By 2 May the next year, they present what they perceive to be the significance of such a development for United States support to Saigon over the long term:

We believe it will be extremely difficult, at best, for Diem or any Vietnamese government to build sufficient strength to meet the long-range challenge of the Communists.

The Estimate of 11 October 1955 states that the Communists in South Vietnam have now concentrated on methods of political struggle.

So far so good. Yet the major Estimate of 17 July 1956\*\* raises some questions. Did the estimators indeed have a solid enough grasp of the political realities at work in South Vietnam, to be able to place *new and changing forces* in proper perspective? The Diem regime is pictured as having greatly strengthened its political position in South Vietnam after reducing the sects to political impotence and making a strong showing in the first elections for a national legislature on 4 March. "No openly anti-Diem deputy" was elected, and 80 percent of the eligible voters participated. Despite efforts by the Communists and other resistance groups to disrupt and sabotage the voting, the elections were calm and orderly. Yet Fall selects data on this event which give it a disquieting cast in terms of its long-term significance. The winners "did not, needless to say, include a single candidate who could be construed to be a representative of the 'loyal opposition'." North and Central Vietnamese candidates "with no popular following whatever" were given newly created "refugee constituencies." Two representatives of old-line nationalist and non-Communist parties ran against government candidates, were elected despite heavy interference, but were disqualified and replaced by government candidates in a run-off election. Fall concludes that the South Vietnamese legislatures elected in 1956, 1959, and 1963 were, in fact, "as homogeneous as those elected by the Vietminh in 1946 and 1960."\*\*\*

What, then, of the *actual* viewpoints and convictions and desires of the mass of Vietnamese? What clues to these bedrock forces beneath the surface of the political scene did the analysts draw from the composition of the legislature or from open sources describing the people? The 14-page Estimate of 17 July 1956 barely touches on the problem of delineating popular views:

Diem's success in by-passing the July 1956 election date without evoking large-scale Communist military reaction will reassure many Vietnamese and encourage them to cooperate with GVN programs to expose and root out Communism. If the Communists were to undertake large-scale guerrilla action in South Vietnam, they probably would

\*Pp. xx-xxi. The editors refer also to "some lapses in the accuracy of reporting and intelligence."

\*\*NIE 63-56, "Probable Developments in North and South Vietnam through Mid-1957."

\*\*\**The Two Vietnams*, pp. 258-259.

not be able to develop wide-spread popular support. Public confidence in the GVN combined with a general war-weariness may have already reached the point where any effort to upset the government by force would lead to a strong popular reaction against the guerrillas.\*

No other references to popular attitudes are to be found in this paper; we can only guess at the basis for arriving at the estimative conclusions cited. Clearly they rest on certain assumptions about the state of mind of large numbers of Vietnamese. Many are assumed to be already disposed to help in rooting out Communists, provided only that Hanoi shows itself indisposed to retaliate against Diem's refusal of nation-wide elections. No widespread popular sentiment in support of any major guerrilla action by the Communists is assumed likely. And an increase of public confidence in the GVN as well as an increase of war-weariness is considered already under way.

But how realistic were such assumptions in 1956? Americans had little hard information on current attitudes in Vietnam, but hoped fervently that the new South Vietnamese nation would succeed in knitting itself together. Was this the beginning of a national habit of relying on unexamined assumptions about Vietnam, which hardened in the early 1960s when the policy makers began to escalate America's commitment to Saigon? How critical for the future were the favorable but undocumented assumptions of the intelligence community about "the psychological and political worlds" of the Vietnamese masses in 1956? We turn now to the reliable data which for the most part were available in 1956 in open sources, concerning the villagers' basic perspectives on politics and political developments. These data will help us gauge the analysts' shortcomings in attempting to reflect popular viewpoints of the Diem era.

#### *The Vietnamese Villagers' Perspective on Politics*

Our line of inquiry takes us into some of the most controversial problems of perception which Americans have faced in their entire experience with Vietnam. Just how have Vietnamese villagers traditionally viewed the world of government and politics? To what extent and for what reasons have the Southern villagers been attracted to either the Saigon or the Hanoi regime since the Geneva Conference, and been open to ideological or material inducements from either side? And—the most subtle distinction of all—must it be assumed that Southerners or Northerners who are cooperating with Communists in the military or the political field are necessarily led more by Hanoi's control measures than by nationalism or other issues? We turn to the outstanding scholars on the Vietnamese people's "psychological world" in a search for fundamental clues to "realities" in these matters.

McAlister and Mus\*\* lay an ample foundation for understanding the Vietnamese villagers' traditional perspectives on matters political, in chapters titled "Sources of the Vietnamese Political Tradition" and "The Mandate of Heaven: Politics as Seen from the Vietnamese Village." In the village one finds "the

\*P. 14. "The July 1956 election date" refers to the stipulation in the Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference, July 21, 1954, that "general elections shall be held in July 1956" in both "zones" of the State of Vietnam. Neither Diem's Foreign Minister nor the American Under Secretary of State signed this Final Declaration.

\*\*Here we are drawing mainly on *The Vietnamese and Their Revolution*, chapters 2 and 3.

essence of Vietnamese culture" and also the "key answer" to this people's historic problems. This answer lies in "that spirit of resistance" which once enabled the culture to "resist the model [China] it was patterned on." The villages for centuries preserved "a deep-rooted autonomy." Their councils of notables prevented the state's authorities from knowing and dealing with the individual inhabitants. The state—directed by the Emperor, the court, and the mandarin system—was centralized and authoritarian, but the villages successfully preserved broad freedom of local action well into the twentieth century. By Confucian tradition, the villages were believed to possess a "virtue"—an inherent power—which preserved them from the state's encroachments. Thus the "real world" of the villagers traditionally was limited to their local world, and their customary freedoms were safeguarded by certain beliefs and shrewd tactics for dealing with the Emperor's mandarins.

The First Indochina War—the struggle against the French—led to drastic changes of form in the villagers' relations with the state. In all areas of Vietnam controlled by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV)—which did not assume control of Hanoi until October 1954—the village councils were swept away by the August Revolution of 1945. In these areas, the Communist leaders laid the foundation for "a modern political community which they hoped would lead Vietnam into the postcolonial world as a united as well as independent country." The customary councils of notables were replaced by "a new type of village committee." In support of these new committees, village society was regrouped along radically new lines by creation of unions of workers, peasants, women, the aged, tradesmen, former military, and other social strata. The Vietminh, replacing the Indochinese Communist Party, became the umbrella organization for the mass membership groups, which for the first time in Vietnam "provided a stimulus and a rationale for popular participation in politics."

In those areas of the South which were under the control of the Saigon-based State of Vietnam after the Geneva Conference, Diem abolished local elections of village councils in 1956 and increasingly exercised his dictatorial powers.\* Robert Scigliano observes, in his in-depth study of political trends under Diem:

In certain important respects, the development of government institutions in South Vietnam since independence has been marked by a sharp break with colonial and pre-colonial tradition. . . . More important than the changes wrought by constitutional action have been the administrative changes produced by executive decree. The uniform direction of these decrees has been the strengthening of presidential power over the agencies of the national government and the centralizing of national control over a burgeoning local administration. . . .

With the abolition of village autonomy, the extension of central government controls into the villages, and the development of new government programs, the administrative system of the Republic of Vietnam has become more centralized than it ever was under the emperors or the French, and is surpassed only by the Communist bureaucracy created in North Vietnam.\*\*

Scigliano concludes, "In a limited sense, Diem did effect a revolution after coming to power." But the author perceives Diem's actions to have been "essentially negative," calculated to strengthen him vis-a-vis his rivals for control of Vietnam. His efforts were "hardly revolutionary" in the sense of infusing the system

\*FitzGerald, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-120. For a broad discussion of the villagers' view of the world and Diem's treatment of the villagers, see also beginning p. 105.

\*\**Op. cit.*, pp. 29, 31, 33.

with a new spirit and new personnel. The flag and the anthem remained those of the former Emperor Bao Dai. "A general orientation of government administration away from the people and toward Saigon" took stronger hold from 1956, and was accompanied by "a commensurate break between the government and the Vietnamese population."

### *The Village View of the Central Government*

Now we are ready for a question which was pivotal for America's mission in Vietnam but apparently was not raised by our policy makers or intelligence analysts. *How do Vietnamese villagers traditionally view a central government's moves for revolutionary change in its relationships with the local governments and communities?* Outside the less traditional Mekong Delta, where patterns of land tenure and social structure have long since broken with ancient custom, the mass of rural Vietnamese view such drastic moves in the light of timeless beliefs about the nature of society and the "true" auspices of revolutionary change.\* Society is considered to rest, not on a Western-style social contract among men, but on a pact or bond among heaven, the land, and the ancestors. The spirit of this bond is believed to be embodied in the living generation. The instruments or executors of the bond are, simultaneously, the Emperor—the image of heaven—the provincial governors, and the heads of families. All of these prestigious figures in normal times are seen as being in harmony with "the reason of the universe." Individuals have "to function within the system." There is "no reality" for the individual apart from the social contract. In traditional Vietnamese society, he has "only relative rights."

Moments of sweeping change in social conditions are viewed as the result of a rupture of the harmony normally existing among the executors of the social bond and "the reason of the universe." At these times, the traditional Vietnamese is "apt to interrogate fate and the adaptation of men to that fate." He wants to learn whether the leaders are moving "in accordance with that indescribable something which has no name in our language but which in Vietnamese is called *Thiên mệnh*, suggesting for us 'the will of heaven' or 'the heavenly mandate.'" McAlister and Mus tell us:

The only revolutions that Vietnamese political wisdom considers authentic are those that effect complete change. The main proof of a party's right to power is a program that provides new solutions for everything, and in East Asia this conception has forever been familiar to the simplest countryman. . . . It is an odd mistake to believe that the Vietnamese common man is concerned with nothing but his bowl of rice. . . . For centuries, even in the poorest villages, there were a few local literati who progressively familiarized the national consciousness with the principles of Chinese political thought. . . . An unerring instinct assures [the people] that in crucial times their own reaction is what in the last resort determines the fate of the nation. . . . The common man chooses between systems. . . . It is up to him through that choice to sanction the system, or "virtue," that is in harmony with fate. . . .

To appear before the people, the supreme judge, with any chance of success as a messenger of fate, a revolutionary party must show them all the signs of its mission. *In this case the people expect the sign of signs: the ease and fluidity of success.* The revolutionary party must succeed in everything as if miraculously. . . . [emphasis added]

\*A comprehensive treatment of the traditional Vietnamese beliefs and attitudes cited here is to be found in McAlister and Mus, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-69, 88-89.

The Vietminh's social and political revolution profited first from the villagers' long-standing opposition to French policies. This stand caused the villagers to view their communities as endowed with a "virtue" antagonistic to the monarchy, of which the French posed as "protectors." The repressive policies carried out by the French colonial authorities prepared the minds of the people for a type of "cosmic or climactic" revolution that was included in their tradition. Hence, in 1945 when the revolutionaries became masters of the situation, "they were expected to eliminate all the elements of the former system; compromises were not anticipated."

The victors' position was vastly reinforced by unmistakable signs that they *had* received the mandate of heaven. On 24 August 1945, the "Son of Heaven," Emperor Bao Dai, remitted his "seal and his sword" to the representatives of the Vietminh and Ho Chi Minh. McAlister and Mus highlight "the astounding scenario presented by the advent of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam at Hanoi and the effect it must have had on the Vietnamese masses:"

This bid for revolutionary power occurred amidst a whirlpool that swept everything away—Japanese occupation forces, foreigners of all kinds, and the national dynasty. Yesterday's outlaws became on the world scene their country's leaders and proclaimed themselves heaven-sent in the most classical of traditions. Therefore, the state of mind, so to speak, of all Vietnam could not fail to transmit the great jolt all the way to the farthest villages. Everything was possible, indeed inevitable, in the countryside the minute heaven's decision was manifested in such an unimpeachable way in the capital.

Furthermore, the Vietminh leaders themselves very likely were intent upon strengthening this "scenario." It would serve as a powerful confirmation for the masses of the new regime's right to rule Vietnam, in keeping with the ancient beliefs of the Vietnamese. This theme is developed in some depth by Tran Van Dinh:

. . . the Vietnamese Communist leaders, besides being Marxist-Leninist, are predominantly Confucianist and supremely mandarin. In true Confucianist tradition and in conformity with the dictates of Heaven . . . they are seriously concerned about, and uncompromising on, matters they see as relating to virtue, morality, loyalty, and ceremony. . . . For them, elections are a process of formalization, a ceremonial to sanctify a Mandate from Heaven that has been conferred already upon them and their party. . . . Though the Vietminh had captured power in Hanoi on August 19 [1945], Ho Chi Minh waited until September 2, after the Mandate of Heaven had been ceremoniously transferred by the Son of Heaven in the imperial city [Hué], to proclaim the independence of Vietnam. Just as instructive as this timetable was Bao Dai's metamorphosis, after his abdication, from a "lackey," "a puppet," and a "traitor" . . . into a "Supreme Advisor" to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. . . . These events, and the attitudes that inspired them, go far toward explaining why Ho Chi Minh and his party have ever since considered themselves the legitimate rulers of Vietnam, the whole of Vietnam. . . . \*

The Diem regime scored poorly by the traditional Vietnamese criteria for an "authentic" revolution. "New solutions for everything," which McAlister and Mus emphasize as one sign of the Vietnamese heaven's approval, were not introduced. While radical changes were accomplished in the central government's relationships with the countryside, no sweeping modifications of the political role or the living conditions of the peasant took place.\*\* Furthermore, the mani-

\**Op. cit.*, p. 77. Department of State files show that Dinh has been in exile in the United States since 1963 and has followed neutralist and National Liberation Front (NLF) lines since 1968.

\*\*On living conditions, see Scigliano, *op. cit.*, ch. 5, "Economic and Social Development."

festations of the new regime at the local level gave too strong an impression of *déjà vu*.

Whether educated at home or abroad, the higher level civil service is heavily permeated with Western values. . . . French influence remains strong in the Vietnamese school system. . . . A Vietnamese government survey in early 1959 found that 36 per cent [of public employees] had been at least 10 years in government service . . . [back to] the period when French civil servants still dominated middle and upper government positions and were extensively found in many lower ones as well. . . . The prevalence of French influence in the backgrounds of Vietnamese civil servants has strengthened the continuity . . . between the institutions and practices of the colonial regime and those of the present regime.\*

Finally, "the ease and fluidity of success" which also would have been a sign of heaven's approval of Diem was conspicuously absent during his first year in office. Indeed, his refusal to share the responsibility for decision making beyond his tight circle of confidants and family collaborators had a congealing effect at all levels of government throughout his tenure.

But the truly critical failure of Diem—in the context of his and America's stand against the Vietminh—was his blindness to the fundamental need for the masses to gain a sense of belonging to the State of Vietnam which he headed, in order to feel moved to give it their commitment. Thus, he failed completely to perceive the rural population the way Hanoi did—as a vital ingredient of a new national power structure. At the same time, he left the door wide open for the Vietminh to win the loyalty of many villagers who had no prior commitment to either side. We cite some of McAlister's relevant conclusions in his epilogue titled "The future of Revolution in Viet Nam":

. . . The political changes that Diem brought to southern Viet Nam were deceptive. Though he had succeeded in crushing the power of the political-religious sects . . . , he had not created any political organization capable of integrating these groups into resilient governmental institutions. . . . It was thought that he had established a viable political order. In fact Diem had merely made his own narrowly based group . . . supreme over all the other non-Communist political groups in southern Vietnam. . . .

The revolution that Ngo Dinh Diem brought about had its effect in the super-structure of politics in southern Vietnam; it did not reach the village foundation of Vietnamese society. . . . Instead of political mobilization he saw his major task as political control of such effectiveness that it prevented anyone else from mobilizing power.\*\*

The growing political liability which Diem's local officials and ARVN represented in the mid-1950s is discussed at considerable length by FitzGerald. Their frequent contempt and abuse of the peasants stemmed from both the nature of Diem's centralized administrative system and the accelerating breakdown of the traditional society.\*\*\*

#### *Villagers' Perspectives as Reflected in Intelligence, 1954-1956*

We now return to the intelligence community's assumptions about "the psychological and political worlds" of the Vietnamese masses, which we began to examine with the major NIE of 17 July 1956. Clearly, these optimistic assumptions had little or no basis in the political realities of the countryside in

\**Ibid.*, pp. 48-50.

\*\**The Origins of Revolution*, pp. 354-361, *passim*.

\*\*\**Op. cit.*, pp. 106, 107, 118, 119.

South Vietnam, as could be ascertained by research on the deepest traditions and cultural mind sets of the Vietnamese people. Had our senior analysts overlooked the necessary research, or did they regard the available data as having an uncertain relevance to current popular attitudes? We cannot be sure today which alternative was the actual case in 1956. But the evidence suggests that mirror images and the then widespread wishful thinking of Americans may well have influenced the analysts' actual perceptions. Wasn't it quite typically American to perceive a new ruler's successful moves against his opposition, as well as his broad plans for economic and social reform, as evidence that he was a "go-getter" who would "hang in there" until he "got the job done"? At the height of the Cold War, weren't Americans predisposed to perceive a government's programs as more effective in winning popular support than irregular guerrilla forces were apt to be? Few American observers in the 1950s probably were prepared to conclude by their own insights just how the basic beliefs and cultural viewpoints of the rural Vietnamese would necessarily help shape the villagers' current political attitudes. The vast majority of Americans lacked the necessary specific training for this, and were likely to be unacquainted with relevant historical precedents.

The blind spot on political realities in the National Estimate of 17 July 1956 was crucial at that point in mid-1956, when Diem had refused to go along with all-Vietnam elections, and a revival of Communist insurgency in the South was likely. The intelligence community saw such a threat primarily in military terms, in part because it thought of Saigon as the center of control of political forces in South Vietnam. In reality, however, Diem's strategy of working "from the top down" in order to *control* the people left the field open for the Communists to work "from the bottom up" to mobilize political *support* for their revolutionary new order. Diem's approach was in the same direction the French had taken for three-quarters of a century, leading to their Wagnerian finale at Dien Bien Phu. The Vietminh proved to be the true revolutionaries, whose right to rule and strategy for uniting the Vietnamese people appeared the more convincingly authentic and promising through much of the countryside.\*

No doubt the senior analysts at the Estimates level failed to assign adequate weight to the political appeal of the Vietminh also because its threat to the internal security of South Vietnam was given priority attention. The NIE of 17 July 1956 takes the position that "the Communist underground represents the only serious threat" to that state's internal security. This paper goes on to say that the overall political influence of the Communists "appears to have diminished in the past year," even though the number of political workers in the South engaged in subversive and propaganda activities is unknown.

How do CIA's CIWs and State's IRs compare with the 1956 NIE in reflecting the villagers' political perspectives? As with OCI's reporting on Diem's political outlook and policies, the CIWs' attention to the villagers' "political world" is scant indeed. On 14 May 1954—a week after the DRV's victory over France at Dien Bien Phu—a two-page CIW titled "Vietnamese Government Paralyzed" concludes on the note of a "steadily deteriorating political situation" in the areas controlled by Saigon. Yet only a single reference is made to popular sentiments anywhere in Vietnam and this is a teaser without further explanation:

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\*FitzGerald discusses this contrast of approaches in considerable depth. *Op. cit.*, pp. 84 *et seq.*, and especially ch. 4, "The National Liberation Front," pp. 138 *et seq.*

the population in the Vietminh-held areas, "though opposed to the Ho regime," would rather revolt than continue with the corruption of Bao Dai's government, according to the Minister of Labor. But we are left to guess what basis in fact existed for this surprising generalization on opposition to the DRV regime at the moment of the Vietminh's triumph. Equally relevant would have been some reference to any positive attraction of the Vietminh-ruled population to the Saigon regime.

Indeed, the CIWs of the 1954-1956 period give no indication of the Vietminh's view of its political task in the South. And the first mention that Diem foresaw "a more subtle long-range problem" arising from the Vietminh's political and economic "subversion" appears in the CIW of 6 September 1956. In the previous reports the Vietminh's role in the South is viewed uniformly as a paramilitary one. On 15 December 1955, Diem is reported to have inaugurated "a village self-defense corps" in order "to counter Vietminh influence in rural areas." On 19 July following, the conclusion that Saigon's "concern over long-range Vietminh aspirations to gain control of South Vietnam is well founded" is not explained.

#### *State's Reporting on the Villagers*

State's IRs again reflect considerably more attention to the "psychological dimension" of analysis than do the CIWs. The IR of 1 February 1955 states that the Communists have "greater popular appeal in Vietnam as a whole because of their long identification with the struggle for independence." Such a reference to the Vietminh's popular appeal on nationalist grounds—as distinct from its coercive capabilities—is extremely rare in any of the three series of reports we have examined. Yet, as we have seen, from the Vietnamese peasants' viewpoint, many signs gave convincing evidence that the Vietminh leaders were now the authentic successors to Emperor Bao Dai and the French throughout Vietnam. The major IR of 15 September 1955, furthermore, clearly states that the Communists' military strength in South Vietnam posed a lesser threat to political stability than did "the political power of the Communist apparatus there."\*

All three series of intelligence reports, however, foster misperceptions by placing the influence of the Vietminh in the villages of the South almost exclusively in the context of secrecy and coercion—even before Diem's campaigns against this influence had begun in earnest. As the reader is given no clues to the basic political perspectives of either the Vietminh or the villagers, he cannot help but be misled by mirror images reflecting his own preconceptions rather than the realities in Vietnam. This is the inevitable effect of repeated use of terms such as "subversion," "infiltration," "terrorism," "rooting out" Communists, and "clandestine networks and activities." The IR of 6 April 1956 states:

Activities by the party itself were to be entirely clandestine. Popular front activities, however, were to be both clandestine and overt and to use legal as well as illegal means to achieve the objective of extending Communist rule over all of Vietnam.\*\*

Of 19 paragraphs under the heading "Current Organization and Activity," only four are concerned directly with overt influence of the Communists. And, what is more relevant here, the psychological context of the Communists' or front

\*IR 7045, "Probable Developments in South Vietnam through July 1956," p. 27.

\*\*IR No. 7197, "Communist Subversion in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos," p. 4.

groups' appeals to the masses is occasionally implied in part, but is nowhere presented explicitly. The report concludes that "in the cities, where national government control is strongest, the Communists do not appear to have been successful in influencing the majority of the population." No reference is made to the nature or extent of the Communists' influence in the countryside. The earlier IR of 15 September 1955 does take into account the whole population of South Vietnam, but without conjecturing likely or effective grounds for the Communists' appeal:

The Communist apparatus in South Vietnam forms only a small minority of the total population, and the political potential of this apparatus would seem to depend primarily on its capacity to intimidate local officials and to secure support or acceptance from the general population.

Both IRs we have cited reflect the existence—but only occasionally an awareness on the writers' part—of analytical problems concerning the political psychology of the Vietnamese. For example, questions about the attitudes and roles of local officials and villagers come to mind in relation to the judgment just quoted concerning the Communists' political potential, but these factors are not defined. Again, the 6 April 1956 report teases us with: "There were areas of Communist control and influence in every province south of the seventeenth parallel" at the time of the 1954 cease-fire; and furthermore, "Communist efforts to date have enabled them to retain much of the control" they exercised in the South prior to the cease-fire. We are left to guess, however, what manner of face the Communists presented to the populations of these many areas in the South where clandestinity would have had little point, and also what the population's responses were. Could it be taken for granted that the behavior patterns on both sides were the same in these enclaves of the South—where the Vietminh was at least to some extent still campaigning for acceptance—as in the North, where it had long since secured its main power base? No details or judgments on these basic factors are included, yet we do encounter a hint that the analysts were aware of—and perhaps curious about—certain Vietnamese habits of thought and action which later eluded the Westerner's understanding throughout America's long involvement in Vietnam:

It is possible that Communist military potential in South Vietnam has been increased in the past three months. . . . Communist cadres have undoubtedly maintained numerous hidden caches of arms and supplies throughout Vietnam . . . and, in the past, Vietnamese Communists have displayed ability to transform apparently peaceful civilians into trained guerrillas and suddenly to initiate large-scale guerrilla fighting in supposedly "pacified" areas.\*

#### *The Villagers' Views of the Communists*

In order to estimate the likely degree of distortion in the American reader's mind as a result of this skimpy reflection of the villagers' political perspective, we turn also to McAlister and Mus. Chapter 7 of *The Vietnamese and Their Revolution* discusses "Marxism and Traditionalism" in Vietnam, and some of the core elements of the Vietnamese culture which shaped the relevant popular perspectives. A sub-heading in this chapter, providing us a suitable point of departure, reads: "In the Traditional Language of Politics, Communism Has

\*IR 7045, 15 September 1955, p. 26.

Seemed More a Fulfillment Than a Break with the Past." The authors first take up the expression in Vietnamese for "socialism": *xã hội*, with a following word designating a political party. The ideographical sign *xã* by itself, however, can refer to the traditional village with all its spiritual and social connotations for the Vietnamese. *Hội* means "union," "assembly," or "society." If we keep in mind that village life is the most fundamental expression of Vietnamese society, "the modern program of 'socialization,' when expressed in a familiar idiom, does not give small landowners, either actual or potential ones, the impression of a break with their past." They perceive this program "to be a new fulfillment of their traditions. . . ." McAlister and Mus round out their point:

In the consciousness of the Vietnamese masses, the word *xã* has a central value. It unfolds a landscape—not a physical landscape but a sociological landscape. . . . Within [the Vietnamese] society the village, or *xã*, comes before all else; one belongs to the village before one belongs to oneself . . . *xã hội hóa* [to socialize the land] thus suggests not a spurious adventure and the disorder of social innovation, but the traditionally communal values that are most reassuring to the masses.

How did the Communist leaders in Vietnam, as well as in China, adapt their programs to suit peasant populations? These leaders were well aware that "the terminology of doctrinaire Marxist propaganda" had little meaning for villagers. There was "no proletariat in Vietnam prepared for a Marxist mission of any kind." McAlister and Mus conclude:

The practical consequences of this are of the greatest significance for a political perspective in Vietnam. The peasant as an instrument of politics is, by reason of his numbers, the only instrument that counts in Vietnam. If one goes against the nature of the peasants, they are difficult to manage politically. If heaven seems to question those in power at the time, an insurrection will follow no matter who is on top.

Hence, the Vietminh leaders posed as the people's champions against foreign rulers and as the founders of a modern political community which would become united and independent. The Vietnamese villagers could be expected on the whole to perceive Communism and the Vietnamese Communist leaders' program as quite consistent with their desires as well as their beliefs and traditions.

But would not the peasants nevertheless be alienated by the Communists' use of intimidation and other forms of pressure? Again, a mighty effort is necessary if Americans are to re-examine their deepest hidden assumptions. Are we assuming that the Vietnamese concepts of personal rights to freedom from coercion have some parallel with our concepts on this subject? Listen to McAlister and Mus on the subject, "Traditionally, the Individual Existed within a Collective Unit":

In traditional Vietnamese society every individual act carried out in a collective unit—family, clan, village, etc.—was governed and evaluated by relatives and neighbors. . . . The individual always had his assigned part to play. . . . The approval of the group was the invariable condition for action. . . . A reasonable being was one who became aware of this system and of his place in it. . . . Through a conviction of the truth of the system, the individual is permanently saved from himself; he realizes himself as others see him and not as he sees himself introspectively.\*

\*Pp. 95, 98-99.

Personal rights and personal freedoms in the Western sense are concepts which clearly must not be assumed to exist in the minds of Vietnamese traditionalists. FitzGerald elaborates:

Of all the aspects of the Vietnamese revolution, it was [the]domination of the individual by the state which Americans—even those most opposed to their government's policy in Vietnam—found most difficult to come to terms with. . . . The moral problem for the individual was to discover not what he himself thought or wanted, but what the society required of him. . . . The French invasion effectively destroyed the Confucian design for society and the universe. It did not, however, change the impulse to a social and ideological coherency. For the Vietnamese, "freedom" in the Western sense meant . . . a disintegration of the personality . . . [leading] only to social chaos and the exploitation of the weak by the strong.\*

In order to exploit this deep sense of conformity in the individual villagers, the Vietminh after 1956 organized terror campaigns which resulted in the murder of "the cream of village officialdom."\*\* The leadership held the keys to the local communities' political orientation and hence to the attitudes and conduct of the members. The widespread removal of Diem's appointees paid a double dividend for the Vietminh: the countryside saw further unmistakable evidence of their possession of heaven's mandate; and the successors of the deceased officials would be likely to pay increased attention to the Vietminh's intended lesson.

#### *Conclusions from Survey of Finished Intelligence, 1954-1956*

To summarize the findings, then, the Estimates of 1954 and 1955 realistically warned of Hanoi's growing capabilities for winning out in the contest for power with Saigon, but the major Estimate of 17 July 1956 swung sharply around to a strongly optimistic view of Diem's chances of blocking any Communist guerrilla offensive. The new elements in the picture, tipping the scales in the analysts' minds, apparently were: Diem's clear-cut successes in overcoming the challenges from South Vietnamese opposition groups in the spring of 1955; and Hanoi's failure to mount an overt retaliatory blow after Diem had successfully ignored the July 1956 election date. The analysts based their new position squarely on assumptions of probable increased popular resistance to any guerrilla offensive. They did not bring out any evidence to support these assumptions.

Consultation in some depth of well-qualified sources on the culture and psychology of the Vietnamese clearly undermines the assumptions of the estimators. Not only had *Diem failed* to "build a bridge" to the hearts and minds of the countryside, but the *Vietminh had given top priority* to the mobilization of political support in the villages. In addition, the villagers tended—by habits rooted in culture and history—to identify with the Vietminh and harbor suspicion of the bureaucratic and foreign influences associated with the Saigon regime.

American intelligence officers and policy-makers, for their part, were predisposed by their culture to "put first things first," and hence concentrate on the immediate and highly visible security aspects of Saigon's problems in the countryside, rather than on its less visible political tasks. The analysts' consequent discussions of the Vietminh in the villages in a context of secrecy and coercion tended to evoke mirror images instead of reflecting Vietnamese realities for the American reader. In terms of the psychology of the Vietnamese, the concept

\**Op. cit.*, pp. 208-210.

\*\*Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, p. 281; and *Last Reflections on a War*, pp. 198-199.

of Communism as expressed in their language was perceived as consistent with what was familiar and highly valued in their immediate environment, and any swing of local leaders toward Vietminh influence usually also brought over the individual peasant, who was under heavy social pressure to conform with group sentiment.

How may we sum up our overall findings in the finished intelligence for the period 1954-1956, and what conclusions may we usefully draw from them? What do our criteria or "indicators"\* tell us about the analysts' apparent degree of attention to the intercultural and psychological dimension of communicating foreign situations and their significance to an American readership? What are the implications of this record for the readers of the finished intelligence?

In respect to our Set "A" indicators—which focus on the *differences* between local and American perspectives and problem-solving—we must conclude that our findings are entirely negative. In none of the three series of intelligence reports we have examined did we find the analysts discussing such differences, or expressing a need to reserve judgment on a point until additional information about possible psychological differences could be obtained, or cautioning readers against the misperceptions which might easily be triggered by the "mirror image" terms employed.

We have pointed up the irrelevant "American-style thinking" likely to result from such terms as they appear in a variety of contexts. The allegedly strong honesty and anti-Communism in Saigon's leadership in 1954 were American but not Vietnamese criteria for supporting the new Saigon regime. Diem's thinking on "full democracy" in Vietnam may have extended to eventual provision of fuller rights for the individual, but not to Western concepts of a people's controls over its government. Prolonged conditions of crisis such as the Vietnamese saw from the mid-1940s might well turn Westerners' attention away from national political affairs, but could hardly have this effect on the Vietnamese masses, whose political concerns did not yet commonly extend beyond their villages.

Hence, the only positive indicators we found are relevant only to our Set "B" categories. These focus on what was in the minds of the local people without relating explicitly to the psychological differences between them and Americans. Furthermore, virtually all the positive indicators we have found fall within our first sub-category of Set "B"—references to the thoughts, viewpoints, attitudes, motivations, and expectations of the local people. Scarcely a reference has been found to their much deeper beliefs, values, and norms which shape and channel both their current concerns and underlying perspectives and motivations.

Indeed, almost all of our positive findings have been further limited within the first sub-category of "B" to what was "in the forefront" or "on top" of minds of local persons or groups at a given time. We have surfaced few references to the underlying and more enduring layers of thought frames, such as perspectives and attitudes. Thus, we found that analysts had seldom placed current views and intentions of subjects, or estimates of their future actions, in a broader perspective which would provide clues to either the importance of these elements for the individuals or groups involved, or the likely directions and magnitude of the anticipated actions.

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\*Above, p. 13.

*No Examination of the "Core Elements" of Personality*

The virtual absence of references to the matrix of the personality—composed of the individual's beliefs, values, and norms, as well as his personal rankings within these categories—leaves a serious gap in the analysts' communication of their messages. These elements may be thought of collectively as a major coordinate always to be reckoned with in plotting the probable course of a subject's thinking or actions. For example, these elements—when they and their relative importance to the local person or group are sufficiently known—may at times *preclude* any likelihood that the subjects will entertain particular ideas or plans which may "make good sense" to Westerners; or, conversely, such data may indicate that the local person or group is *quite capable* of harboring ideas or plans which might not be likely even to occur to Westerners.

Without benefit of data on the formative elements of the personality, some readers will draw analogies—whether warranted or not—from cultures or sub-cultures which they have learned do bear some similarities to a non-Western one in question. Other readers will unconsciously draw analogies—usually in gross error—from their own experiences with American or other Western cultures.

Furthermore, our findings also suggest that some analysts may not themselves have attached sufficient importance to the cultural and psychological contexts of the local situations and problems they must report and interpret. For example, State's warning in May 1956 that the Saigon government would "not conform to Western ideals of democratic behavior for a period of years" was accompanied by an explanation which only scratched the surface. The analysts pointed by way of explanation to "the traditionally conspiratorial nature of Vietnamese politics" but said nothing about the deeper cultural sets of mind which shaped the local perspective on politics. We conclude on the basis of the evidence reviewed that analysts' own attention to cultural settings was most likely neither consistent nor close, and hence must have left the way open for the distractions of mirror images in their own minds.

Thus, analysts producing finished intelligence on Vietnam in the period 1954-56 appear to have run grave risks on two fronts: first, in the attempt to communicate with readers—particularly those unknown to them—without for the most part placing the messages in cultural context; and second, in their own neglect of consistent and methodical attention to the cultural context, which they needed to grasp in order to develop personal skills for the interpretation of current developments and estimates of probable future trends abroad.

*Spot Check in the Twilight of the Diem Era—1962-1963*

The question arises at this point: how representative are our findings thus far concerning the intelligence analysts' perceptions of—and success in communicating—the psychological world of the Vietnamese? Given the non-involvement of American policy-makers in the internal affairs of Indochina prior to the Geneva Conference of 1954, do we not need to look beyond the first two-plus years of the United States' long subsequent involvement before we can draw sound conclusions about analysts' perceptions of the local Vietnamese scene? In response to these considerations, we turn to a brief examination of the finished intelligence six years farther down the road. We re-enter the scene toward the

close of the Diem era, when America had just begun to escalate its involvement in Vietnam.

The South Vietnam scene had changed drastically by mid-1962. The "ever-tightening controls over every kind of freedom long before Communist guerrilla warfare gave them a semblance of justification" had long since led to "an all-pervading air of capricious lawlessness" in South Vietnam. The institutional changes envisioned in the 1956 Constitution appeared to be indefinitely postponed. As a result, Vietnamese paratroopers attempted a *putsch* on 11 November 1960, which apparently was aimed at persuading Diem to share power on a basis broader than his family circle. The resulting official announcement of a "sweeping reform program," however, did not produce more than promises. The long-awaited establishment of local self-government, which later was considered to be essential to the success of the "strategic hamlet" program, became "a meaningless distortion." Diem's re-election on 9 April 1961, even though rigged, showed that he had lost a million votes since 1955 despite "a far larger total electorate." Within a month, the new Kennedy Administration reportedly decided to link offers of increased military aid with stronger pressure for internal reforms in Saigon.\*

Diem's policies, meanwhile, had spurred the rise of a South Vietnam Liberation Front which called attention to itself by clandestine radio as early as 1958. Ex-Vietminh groups, under the name of Resistance Veterans, issued a declaration early in 1960 purporting to express Southern impatience with Hanoi's policy of peaceful struggle for unification. At a meeting of the Vietnamese Lao Dong Party in September 1960, Hanoi sanctioned a United Front and called for the violent overthrow of the Diem Government and liberation of the South. The National Liberation Front (NLF) of South Vietnam was formed in December and was publicly recognized by Hanoi in late January 1961. It was clearly dominated by Communists from its inception, and came to be called "the Vietcong" (meaning Viet Communists) by the Saigon regime and the Americans. A strong case is made by Fall and other non-Communist sources, however, in partial support of the NLF's claims to be speaking its own mind in condemning and challenging the Diem regime.\*\*

The insurgency in South Vietnam developed rapidly during 1961; by mid-year, Saigon had "lost control over large areas" of the country. The "resurrected" Vietminh came to overshadow completely the non-Vietminh groups. Diem, meanwhile, "did not perceive that the war was first of all a political problem, and could only be solved through primarily political means." He did not appreciate the extent to which the insurgency "was a response to his continuing repression." For him, the violence resulted from Communist subversion and made his recourse to authoritarian measures essential.

Even while the Bay of Pigs invasion was still President Kennedy's prime concern on the foreign scene, his attention was drawn to Vietnam on 12 April 1961 by Walt Rostow, senior White House specialist on Southeast Asia. Rostow asserted that, with Diem re-elected, the time had come for "gearing up the whole Vietnam operation." On 20 April the President ordered a prompt review of the Vietnam situation. On 11 May he approved the deployment of only a

\*See Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, pp. 268-278, and Kahin and Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-108.

\*\*Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, ch. 16; Jean Lacouture and Philippe Devillers as quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 357-358; Kahin and Lewis, *op. cit.*, ch. V.

400-man force, but stated the American objective with increased clarity: "to prevent Communist domination of South Vietnam."\*

### *Moving Toward Larger Commitments*

In the following six months, a conflux of events and decisions pushed the United States toward much larger commitments in support of this objective. Whereas Diem had been cool in May to Vice President Johnson's feelers on sending combat troops and working out a bilateral defense treaty, by October "he was appealing to the United States to become a co-belligerent." The switch was due to an accelerating rise in the Vietcong's offensive capabilities. Larger units up to battalion size, equipped with heavy arms, could now carry out major raids in urban areas. These forces, estimated at 17,000 men, nearly tripled the level of attacks in September. By early October, several proposals within the Washington administration called for major inputs of American ground forces, with some emphasis placed on dangers of possible infiltration of Communist forces into Vietnam from Laos.

A Special NIE of 5 October, however, provided partially reassuring data. It reported "that 80-90 percent of the estimated 17,000 VC had been locally recruited, and that there was little evidence that the VC relied on external supplies." The editors of *The Pentagon Papers* comment: "The intelligence estimate also included a warning about the kind of enemy shrewdness and tenacity that became reality." The President, faced with conflicting advice, decided on 11 October to send General Maxwell Taylor to Saigon on a study mission. One of the alternative strategies to be considered by this "Taylor-Rostow Mission" was a "bold intervention to 'defeat the Vietcong' using up to three divisions of American troops." Saigon's urgent request for troops and a treaty arrived in Washington two days later. Following his meetings with Diem, Taylor proposed sending 6,000 to 8,000 troops, both logistical and combat. The President accepted all the major recommendations of the mission, and the formal announcement of the American decisions came on 14 December 1961.

As immediate background for our exploration of the finished intelligence commencing at mid-1962, we must consider what *The Pentagon Papers'* editors term "A Spurt of Optimism" in the official American thinking on the war through the spring and summer. A major root of this optimism may be found in Taylor's reporting in the previous autumn. Taylor's point is highlighted by Halberstam,\*\* who was just coming to national prominence in 1962 by his reporting from Vietnam. Moving on from Taylor's frank identification of the dangers of escalation, Halberstam writes:

Yet for all these drawbacks, Taylor reported, nothing would be so reassuring to the government and the people of South Vietnam as the introduction of U.S. troops (a crucial departure, the American assumption here, that the government and the people of South Vietnam were as one, that what Diem wanted was what "the people" wanted; a quick assumption which haunted American policy makers throughout the crisis).

\**The Pentagon Papers*, pp. 79, 88-91, 118-125.

\*\**Op. cit.*, pp. 170, 172. He calls the final Taylor-Rostow report of 3 November "an extraordinary document" which provides "a great insight into the era." He adds: "It shows a complete misunderstanding of the nature of the war (there was no discussion of the serious political problems of the war in Taylor's cables)."

Here again was the powerful mirror image of many Americans in and out of government who tend unconsciously to see a government as "based on the consent of the governed" and "created by the people and for the people."

Other grounds for optimism were found in the development of the strategic hamlet program "as an all-embracing counter guerrilla strategy in rural Vietnam." \* This was a program to regroup the population into fortified hamlets in which the government would undertake political, social, and economic measures "designed both to weed out Vietcong sympathizers and to gain popular allegiance through improved local services and better security." Diem adopted the strategy for the Delta in March and for the rest of the country in August. The Pentagon study observes, however, that Saigon and Washington had conflicting objectives: while Washington saw this as a way for Saigon to win greater allegiance and squeeze out the Vietcong, "Diem saw it as a means of controlling his population." The study concludes that the program "failed dismally" like previous programs tried by the French and the Vietnamese "because they ran into resentment if not active resistance" from the peasants. The peasants had both practical objections to abandoning their fields and powerful beliefs rooting them to the lands and tombs of their ancestors.

Finally, according to *The Pentagon Papers'* editors, "the Pentagon study lays a principal responsibility for the unfounded optimism of U.S. policy in 1962 and early 1963 on inadequate and relatively uninformed American intelligence and reporting systems." Indeed, the Administration's decision to put in ground combat troops was reached "without extended study or debate" or precise expectation of what it would achieve. The official optimism peaked with the plans which Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara ordered begun in July 1962 for a military phase-out in Vietnam keyed to a victory over the Vietcong by the end of 1965. Yet White House staffer Michael V. Forrestal told the President in February 1963 "to expect a long and costly war." He explained:

No one really knows how many of the 20,000 "Vietcong" killed last year were only innocent, or at least persuadable, villagers, whether the strategic hamlet program is providing enough government services to counteract the sacrifices it requires, or how the mute mass of villagers react to the charges against Diem of dictatorship and nepotism.

Forrestal's report, which is included with the Pentagon study, adds that Vietcong recruitment inside South Vietnam was so effective that the war could be continued even without infiltration from the North. Of major concern to us will be indications that intelligence analysts did or did not provide adequate data on the Vietnamese peasants' political perspectives and the relationship of these to the fortunes of the belligerents.

#### *CIA's Current Intelligence, August 1962-October 1963*

CIA's weekly publication, which in the intervening period had been renamed the Current Intelligence Weekly Summary (CIWS), carried nine pertinent items in the 15-month period beginning in August 1962, according to the IPI Index. In addition, two Special Reports on the Buddhist crisis of 1963 have been examined—the first by the Office of Current Intelligence and the second by the Directorate of Intelligence. The nine items on Vietnam in the CIWS reflect no appreciable increase of attention to the intercultural and psychological

\**The Pentagon Papers*, pp. 111-113.

dimensions of the reporting problems, by comparison with the CIWs of the 1954-1956 period. The two Special Reports do reflect an effort to place a major political force of 1963—the Buddhists—in local cultural context, a reporting tactic which apparently had no parallel in the earlier CIW reports on Vietnam which were available to us.

The four-page item titled "Strategic Hamlets and Counterinsurgency in South Vietnam" in the CIWS of 3 August 1962 will serve to illustrate the first of these conclusions. Reviewing the first five months of the strategic hamlets program, the analysts weight their discussion heavily on the side of "the mechanics" of its operation, with only a rare reference here and there to the psychological aims and problems. The lead sentence places the program in the perspective of Saigon's military efforts against the insurgents. These efforts aim at "isolating Vietcong troops from the peasantry, tightening security and expanding government control in the countryside, and releasing additional army troops from static defense duties." In the second paragraph, concerned with effectiveness of the program, this report states:

It suffers from lack of well-defined geographic priorities, and from failure to be integrated into regional and provincial military planning. Steps are being taken to overcome some of the weaknesses in the program.

The first mention of a psychological consideration appears on the second page: regroupment of peasants in new villages "is to be by persuasion if possible," using "information programs to explain to the peasants the reasons for the regroupment and the advantages to be gained. . . ." On the third page we read that the Diem government "is displaying a growing awareness of the need to enlist public cooperation. . . ." Now we encounter the first mention of peasant reactions:

Although some hamlets are virtual fortresses and the inhabitants are reported enthusiastic, in others peasant resentment has been aroused by arbitrary requisitions of labor and money, by curfew systems which reduce the time spent working their fields, and by suspicions that district chiefs are extorting hamlet funds. A recent government communiqué invited the hamlet populations to submit complaints, and the Interior Ministry has set up a committee to ensure remedial action. One assistant district chief has been arrested for abuses.

It is strong evidence of the analysts' lack of an adequate intercultural perspective on the reporting task at hand. They omit any mention of the strong resentment felt by the peasants because of the extreme violence being done to some of their deepest beliefs and values, involving their lands and the tombs of their ancestors.\* No mention is made of the likely indifference or disdain of many peasants with regard to directives from the Saigon bureaucracy. The somewhat extreme language used at the beginning of the first sentence of the quotation may readily be associated with the extreme optimism of the reporting in 1962 and 1963 by the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV).\*\*

The short concluding paragraph provides sound points of overall interpretation by the analysts. Saigon's purpose—to control the countryside—is frankly stated. The peasants' resulting hostility "may encourage cooperation with the

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\*FitzGerald, *op. cit.*, (pp. 429-431), writes movingly and from personal observation of the effects of the peasants' dislocations on their cultural sensibilities—notably their views of the land and the family, which "were the two sources of national as well as personal identity."

\*\*For a detailed treatment of this reporting and its consequences, see Halberstam, *op. cit.*, pp. 183 *et seq.* and especially 186-187, 200 *et seq.*

Vietcong." There is *no* statement, however, concerning the peasants' general failure to undertake a commitment to Saigon or concerning their fundamental perspectives toward the rival revolutionary forces. Nor is there any evaluation of the reported expectations of Diem's brother Nhu, who was personally in charge of the strategic hamlets program.

#### *An ARPA Report*

In the same month this CIA report was issued, the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) published "The Vietnamese 'Strategic Hamlets': A Preliminary Report," which was prepared by John C. Donnell and Gerald C. Hickey.\* Both writers had previously spent several years in Vietnam, and Hickey's work had been the study of a village in the Mekong Delta. More than six pages of this 30-page report deal frankly and from first-hand experience with the rural people—their views, needs, and roles in the strategies and tactics of the counter-insurgency effort. The authors disagree with the view of "some Vietnamese and American officials [who] . . . say, or imply . . . , that the rural population is basically hostile to the Vietcong, and that it requires no more than the hamlet fortifications themselves [and] . . . the regular military forces . . . to make the people grateful for these islands of security and turn them into solid supporters of the Vietnamese government." To villagers with no personal complaints against Vietcong terrorists, "the strategic hamlet presents no visible advantages and may indeed . . . appear to them as having distinct disadvantages." The authors admit that the subject matter involved in probing for such insights into the peasants' minds is "extremely sensitive," permitting them to obtain "only fragmentary" data. Hence they recommend acquisition of "much more specific information than is now available on the rural population's attitudes toward the Vietcong and the national government."

Equally crucial advice in this report was related to the implementation of policy as well as to intelligence targets:

Ways should be explored that would permit people to take a more active and meaningful part in the political life of their country. The government's political and social mass movements . . . suffer from popular indifference and lack of identification. . . . The people themselves . . . do not receive a real sense of participation from their often sterile propaganda functions. . . . They want to participate in other, more substantial ways.

Here indeed these field researchers touch the Achilles' heel of the American effort in Vietnam. Nhu told one of the Rand writers in August 1961:

People say that our cadres should go out, work with the peasants, and establish a relationship of affection and confidence with them to learn their needs. But if the cadres do this, they are overwhelmed by the people's claims and demands. The only thing for the government to do is issue orders and back them up with force.

I infer that the CIWS analysts in 1963 probably had not had access to either the long-existing open material on the Vietnamese psychology and culture or the related field work being conducted by Rand.

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\*Memorandum RM 3208-ARPA, August 1962 (SECRET), produced by the Rand Corporation. Hickey was an anthropologist who went to Vietnam in 1956 with a Michigan State group advising Diem. He tells his story in *The Washington Post*, 4 February 1973, p. C 5. Mus wrote, in an article in *Asia* in 1966: "I strongly recommend that you read . . . Hickey's *Village in Vietnam* [Yale U. Press 1964]."

*The Buddhists*

The first of the two Special Reports on the Buddhists, six pages long, is dated 28 June 1963—a month and a half after government forces touched off Buddhist hostility on Buddha's birthday in Hué, the revered imperial capital. While this report includes statements on how the Buddhists related to some themes of interest to American intelligence, much attention is perhaps justifiably given to factual information on the history, organization, leading personalities, beliefs, and practices of Vietnamese Buddhists. But distortions of perception are facilitated in readers' minds—and may be presumed to have been present in the analysts' minds—by reason of the particular comments they made in an effort to place the Buddhists in the perspective of Vietnamese politics.

What we find running through these comments are unconscious efforts to categorize the Buddhists and their societal roles according to American criteria. The analysts appear to have been guided by their American frames of reference, which therefore evoke mirror images rather than images of Vietnamese realities. For example, Buddhism is described through the report as a distinct religion, though "flavored with ancestor cults and with Confucianist and Taoist ethics and beliefs, and . . . modified by traditional Vietnamese animism." The analysts concern themselves at the outset with the number of South Vietnamese "who actively practice the Buddhist religion," estimated to total no more than three million and said to be "preponderantly women." A "long Vietnamese tradition of religious freedom" is cited. But Western-type distinctions among the basic institutions of Vietnam are thoroughly misleading, as FitzGerald succeeds admirably at explaining:

Americans, and indeed most Westerners, have lived for centuries with a great variety of institutions—with churches, with governments, with a patriarchal family, with industrial concerns, trade unions and fraternities, each of which offered a different kind of organization, different kinds of loyalties—but the Vietnamese have lived with only three: the family, the village and the state. As the family provided the model for village and state, there was only one type of organization. Taken together, the three formed a crystalline world, geometrically congruent at every level.\*

FitzGerald comments, with reference to the same period we are discussing, that the American journalists in Vietnam wrote "long and somewhat puzzling analyses" of the Buddhist demonstrations, in which they attempted to explain how much the rebellion against Diem owed to "purely religious motives" and how much to "purely political" ones. She adds, "Like most Westerners, these journalists . . . could not imagine the Vietnamese might not make the distinction;" prior to the arrival of the European missionaries in Vietnam, "there was never such a thing as a church" there.

For the very reasons FitzGerald gives, the Special Report of 28 June 1963 falls short on a major objective—to explain the basic role of the Buddhists on the Vietnamese political scene. At the national level, according to the OCI analysts, most Buddhist leaders reportedly had hoped "to keep the religious issues isolated from broader political discontent" in the 1963 crisis, and had avoided collaboration with Diem's opponents. But we must begin with the deeper and historic political role of the Buddhists in Vietnam. According to

\**Op. Cit.*, pp. 14-15.

Fall, this was to be found at the regional level where the various sects had long played a fundamental political role with the help of French subsidies. The *National Intelligence Survey: South Vietnam—General Survey*\* adds that "Buddhist leaders project themselves as the guardians of the Vietnamese masses" and have the advantages of being more numerous than other groups and representing "a cross section of all levels of society." Fall sums up the basic explanation of the Buddhists' dramatic intervention on the political scene in South Vietnam in 1963:

But what made such Buddhist institutions as the Vien Hoa Dao (the Saigon Institute for the Implementation of the Dharma) and religious leaders as the Venerable (Thich) Tri Quang emerge as a political force was not so much their "hunger" for power as the total absence of any kind of coherent political entity in the country, outside the National Liberation Front. . . .\*\*

Thus, the Buddhists' struggle with the government in 1963 was significant particularly because they led the first truly nation-wide protest of the masses against the narrowly-based regime of Diem. This crucial point does not come across in the Special Report of 28 June, which touches on the historic context briefly and inadequately by stating:

Buddhist organizations, not unlike governmental administration in Vietnam, have tended to develop around regional ties. Mass loyalties often focus even more narrowly on highly autonomous pagodas. Nevertheless, some Buddhist associations have a centralized, national framework with parallel clerical and lay hierarchies.

Much attention is given in this report to the divisions among Buddhists and the question of Communist exploitation of their protests. But on the overriding political significance of these events in the eyes of the Vietnamese people the reports states only: "There seems to be little doubt that the intensity of the Buddhist protests reflected general discontent over the entrenched, autocratic rule of the Diems as well as specific grievances against their religious biases."

The second of the Special Reports mentioned above was dated 27 September 1963, almost exactly three months after the first, and was only three pages long. It was clearly intended only to add to the first report and to modify certain details. We quote two points from the lead paragraph which are of interest here: "it is impossible entirely to separate Buddhist political aims from Buddhist religious motivation"; and "many otherwise apolitical Vietnamese Buddhists were forced to the conclusion that only through a change in the regime could they win religious equality." The first point appears to square with FitzGerald's description of the Vietnamese world of congruent organizations and loyalties. The second point however, appears to imply that, in the minds of *some* Vietnamese Buddhists, the political and religious worlds were normally distinct. Perhaps the analysts were now on the right track, but they obviously were still handicapped by their Western preconceptions about the need for categories and clear distinctions.

\*October 1969 (SECRET in part), p. 72.

\*\**The Two Vietnams*, p. 284. Fall comments on "how totally meaningless" Diem's and Nhu's Can-Lao organization "and other pseudo-political groups" turned out to be, as shown by the failure of any of them to come to the help of their besieged leaders on 1 November 1963, during the coup which felled the Diem regime.

*State's Reporting, December 1962-September 1963*

The Department's re-titled Bureau of Intelligence and Research produced one major Research Memorandum (RM) in this period, which is dated 3 December 1962\* and was prepared as a contribution to NIE 53-63. This RM reflects considerably more attention to the psychological dimension of the analytical task at hand than did the IRs we examined from the earlier period. We now encounter much more guidance than we received in any earlier reports concerning Diem's outlook on politics and the Communists' view of their task in dealing with the peasants. The peasants' views, however, of politics and the political ploys of both sides in the military conflict are still sketchy or missing entirely. The strategic hamlet program, for example, is given almost two pages, yet the only clue to the peasants' attitude toward it is a brief reference to the "improving peasant morale" due to "the benefits of security." Although an accurate evaluation could not yet be made, the analysts comment: "On balance, the program appears successful." But this RM bluntly states:

There have long been major gaps in our knowledge of rural conditions in South Vietnam. In view of the overriding importance that the Vietcong attaches to the countryside in its strategy, these gaps have now assumed critical proportions. Although our knowledge of rural conditions is improving . . . , any assessment of Communist political strength outside urban areas remains questionable and at best tentative.

On the other hand, State's analysts—as we found was the case with CIA's analysts—provide no clues which would indicate they were familiar with the relevant basic viewpoints of the Vietnamese peasants which were described in the available open literature.

We must be content here with a few highlights from the RM of 3 December 1962 which illustrate some of our generalized observations. Now more than a page is devoted to Diem's and Nhu's perspectives on politics in a separate sub-section captioned "Political Attitudes of Diem and His Family." A clear distinction is made between the family's acceptance of the concept of democracy as a goal and their "impatience" with democratic processes under the environmental conditions existing in South Vietnam. Diem and Nhu therefore were insisting that the people "must submit to a collective discipline until they develop a greater national consciousness and a better sense of civic responsibility." As for the distribution of power at the top of the society, the brothers were convinced "that government is effective and dynamic only when its power is closely held and exercised by a small, highly dedicated, and uncompromising element at the very top through a machinery founded more on personal relationships and loyalty than on formal or institutional chains of command."

The analysts note "some slight modifications" which have slowly appeared in these attitudes in the past year, as a result in part of the growing magnitude of the U.S. assistance "and its increasing orientation toward the needs of the countryside." They go on to cite psychological pressures—seemingly from American officials—behind the changes in attitudes:

More than ever before, they (the Ngo brothers) have been made aware that government must not only be served but must also serve, that the peasant and his active participation rather than his passive obedience may well be crucial for final victory over the Vietcong, and that a little more sharing of power at the top would probably improve administrative efficiency rather than lead to their ouster.

\*RFE 59 (~~SECRET/NOFORN~~)

But the evidence presented which might indicate that Diem and Nhu were indeed influenced by these precepts is scant and inconclusive. The analysts state there is no evidence from the record of past performance to indicate "that such are their real objectives and expectations," despite their intense protestations to American officials "that this has always been their basic approach." Yet, under the heading "Diem's Position in the Countryside," Diem is said to have "undoubtedly . . . become increasingly aware of the serious need to improve the public image of himself, his family, and his government:

He now travels extensively in the countryside, and his manner of talking with the peasant has become more relaxed and sympathetic than before; during the last half of 1961, for example, Diem made 18 known trips outside Saigon and visited 19 provinces. . . . Both Diem and Nhu have from time to time attended the inauguration of relatively small rural projects. . . .

Finally, GVN and American officials working at the local level reflected "some feeling that the popular appeal of, and support for, Diem and his government in the countryside was improving." But they, too, were warning against "any undue optimism" in view of the lag of social and economic measures behind military successes and their belief "that the positive identification of the peasantry with the government is still a long way off."

The Communists' approach to the peasants in South Vietnam is given more than two pages in this RM under the heading "Political Capabilities." The Vietcong appear to have had "considerable success in reducing or supplanting government authority in the countryside." Their political capability and strength there are seen as bound up with their military presence and power, yet the report gives an unusual degree of attention to their "non-violent, positive means" of appealing to the peasantry. Such means include the purchase of rice and other food from the peasants, taxing the wealthy, and even distribution of land to the landless. The Vietcong call attention also to their own achievements and power and Hanoi's record on keeping the North free of foreign control. Another ploy is to spread "bizarre stories intended to limit popular participation in government programs," thus exploiting the peasants' credulity and animistic beliefs.

#### *Three Shorter Research Memoranda, Summer 1963*

We shall take brief notice of three much shorter RMs which appeared in the summer of 1963.\* The report of 1 July titled "Strategic Hamlets" concludes that program "has already proved effective in stemming Communist successes." Admittedly, "mistakes will be made," but the government "has reacted quickly to remedy and improve the situation." For example, the physical defenses of the hamlets "admittedly vary in quality and, in some cases, leave much to be desired." Only Communist sources are quoted on the peasants' specific objections to the strategic hamlets program; the analysts refer to "the concern and hesitation originally shown by the peasants," but report that much of this has disappeared. We note here a markedly less critical approach to problems of communicating the local cultural and psychological context, by comparison with the major RM of 3 December 1962 discussed above. Again, as in the case of CIA's CIWS of 3 August of the prior year, one suspects the influence of MACV's extreme optimism in its reporting during the 1962-1963 period.

\*RFE-58, 1 July; RFE-75, 21 August; and RFE-81, 11 September.

The strategic hamlets program suffered a swift decline between mid-1963, when Sir Robert Thompson recorded more than 8,000 strategic hamlets completed under Diem's forced-draft schedules, and January 1964, when a joint American-British-South Vietnamese survey team "picked up the pieces of the shambles." Summing up, in 1963 Fall had considered that this program "was by far the most significant failure of the U.S. effort in Vietnam." Halberstam reported in considerable detail on a National Security Council meeting of 6 September 1963 at which CIA's Rufus Phillips, a protégé of Lansdale and head of the strategic hamlet program, attested to its failures from first-hand experience. Speaking also from many years of personal acquaintance with Diem and Nhu, he stated, "They had gradually lost touch with the population and with reality." \*

The RMs of 21 August and 11 September 1963 focus on the ballooning political crisis which began with the Hué incident of 7-8 May and climaxed in the 1 November coup overthrowing the government. The analysts' portrayal of the Buddhists and their political role concerns us here. Again we find Western-type preconceptions similar to those which were pointed out in CIA's Current Intelligence reports on the same subject. For example, State's analysts also appear to have the illusion that religious and political motives are necessarily distinct universally. The RM of 21 August states: "[among] at least the more activist leaders, some . . . may have been politically motivated from the beginning." Another preconception, which is typical especially of Western intelligence and military professionals, is the view that, regardless of the area concerned, one must identify ties and commitments among particular organized groups before one may surmise that they exert real and important influence on one another. Under the heading "Non-Buddhist Influence," the same report states:

We have no reliable evidence that the Buddhist leadership is in active collusion with the Vietcong or with non-Communist oppositionist leaders. Various oppositionists undoubtedly have made overtures to the Buddhists and have attempted to persuade them to continue their protests at all costs. Some oppositionists may even have sought Buddhist support to overthrow the government. However, so far the Buddhists seem to have avoided direct involvement, although the [Buddhists?] view that a change in government is necessary coincides with, if it is not influenced by, oppositionist views.

The 11 September report features a sizable paragraph on the spread of popular support for the Buddhists and on the "politically inactive" oppositionists' encouragement of Buddhist leaders to maintain an uncompromising position. Thus we find that State's reports, like CIA's Current Intelligence reports, fail to reflect the full political role of the Buddhists in the 1963 crisis, as the only nation-wide organization available to lead the mushrooming popular outcry against Diem. The analysts report: "Only one reliable report indicated any reaction in the countryside"; and "We have virtually no information on Vietcong activity on this point in the countryside." But they fail to show any awareness of the long-standing "political reality" cited above—the Buddhists' and other sects' long-standing role as *ad hoc* spokesmen for the mass of Vietnamese.

#### *The National Estimates, 1963*

NIE 53-63 dated 17 April 1963 bears the title "Prospects in South Vietnam" and appeared just prior to a number of challenges and re-examinations within

\*Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, pp. 382-383; Halberstam, *op. cit.*, pp. 275-281.

official circles\* of America's role in that country. Before testing this Estimate for evidence of attention to the "psychological world" of the Vietnamese, we examine a lesson it holds for us on the effects of the coordination process at this highest level of production in the intelligence community. We find here perhaps our best short and documented case study of how some senior CIA analysts with drafting responsibility adjusted to the differing and conflicting perceptions of their superiors, the contributing analysts, and the raw intelligence reports from overseas. Clearly these adjustments by the drafting analysts turned out for the most part to be concessions to others' blindspots concerning the political realities of Vietnam.

In the original draft of the conclusions, the Estimates Staff took an unflinching stand on its convictions that the United States faced a grave testing period in Vietnam:

- A. There is no satisfactory objective means of determining how the war is going. The increased U.S. involvement has apparently enabled the South Vietnamese regime to check Communist progress and perhaps even to improve the situation in some areas; however, it is impossible to say whether the tide is running one way or the other.
- B. On the South Vietnamese side, new strategic concepts, such as the fortified hamlet . . . have strengthened the counter-guerrilla effort. However, very great weaknesses remain and will be difficult to surmount. . . .
- C. The struggle in South Vietnam at best will be protracted and costly. The Communists are determined to win control, and the South Vietnamese alone lack the present capacity to prevent their own eventual destruction. Containment of the Communists and reestablishment of a modicum of security in the countryside might be possible with great U.S. effort; but substantial progress toward Vietnamese self-dependence cannot occur unless there are radical changes in the methods and personnel of the South Vietnamese Government. Even should these take place without mishap, this would only be a beginning; the Communists retain capabilities and support which will require years of constructive effort to dissipate.

Willard C. Matthias, a member of the Board of National Estimates who helped the Staff prepare this draft, discusses it in a short case study\*\* of the process by which NIEs may become modified before final approval. He considers this original draft to be "essentially correct." We find it consistent with the Vietnamese psychology and "the political realities" as we have been able to determine them, though we would probably qualify the first sentence of Conclusion B.

Before considering what violence was done to this product of the analysts' own perceptions, we may usefully sum up the "process of dilution," which began with the Board of National Estimates. Without changing the main thrust of the paper, the Board took the starch out of it:

With U.S. help, the South Vietnamese regime stands a good chance of at least containing the Communists militarily. However, the *modus operandi* of the Diem government, and particularly its measures to prevent the rise of contenders for political power, have reduced the government's effectiveness, both politically and militarily. We believe that unless radical changes are made in these methods of government, there is little hope that the U.S. involvement can be substantially curtailed or that there will be a material and lasting reduction in the Communist threat.

Matthias considers "the serious weakness" of this change to lie with its shift of emphasis away from "the inherent difficulty and long-term character of the

\*Halberstam, *op. cit.*, pp. 272 et seq.

\*\*"How Three Estimates Went Wrong" (~~SECRET~~), *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. XII, No. 1, pp. 31-35.

problem" to a close-range focus on the faults of the Diem regime. This led to trouble in coordinating the revised draft with State's representatives. The paper now "called into question the existing U.S. policy of working with Diem." Furthermore, this emphasis on a "here-and-now," manipulable element of the problem could raise visions of a handy solution over the short term; the original paper had gone to considerable pains to stress that the problem was complex and the end was not in sight.

The State Department's representative now reserved his position on this aspect of the paper, and hence the USIB was obliged to look at it carefully. Here are the highlights of Matthias' detailed account of what followed:

The DCI, then John McCone, was particularly uneasy about it, since it seemed to contradict the more optimistic judgments reached by those in policy circles who had been sent to Vietnam to make on-the-spot appraisals and recommendations. He therefore decided to postpone USIB consideration and ask the Board to consult with some of those who had been on such missions. The Board proceeded to meet with two high-ranking military officers and two civilians in key policy-making positions. . . .

None of these four consultations was particularly helpful. The witnesses seemed reluctant to make a frontal assault on the judgments of the paper but equally reluctant to endorse it. They showed a general tendency to take issue with a particular sentence purporting to state a fact, rather than an estimative judgment. This or that was "too pessimistic," but there was no clear line of argument why. . . . None of these consultants was attempting to mislead, but the simple fact was that each of them in some way and to some degree was committed to the existing U.S. policy, and none of them was intellectually free at that point or in those circumstances to stand back and look at the situation in the broadest aspects.

"Back at the drawing boards," the Staff members wanted to "stick to their guns." But Matthias tells how he became inclined to "shade the estimate in a more optimistic direction." In part his perception of the outlook appears to have changed, but he was motivated also by having "to get an estimate through to meet the DCI's new deadline." Matthias writes:

I began to think that perhaps we had been too gloomy. . . . If we stuck to the original draft, the DCI and other CIA components might not go along with it; even if they did, this draft might now evoke still greater departmental dissent than it had the first time (since high-ranking personnel had now become engaged); in short, if we were so rigid that we invited debate and amendment at the USIB, we might find ourselves with a paper more offensive to our judgment than one which moved slightly toward a less pessimistic view.

Thus this officer's mental process was one of testing and modifying his original perceptions under the influence both of the differing perceptions of colleagues and superiors, and also of practical production considerations.

We present portions of the revised text\* of the conclusions of this Estimate, which "rode easily through the USIB with the DCI's full concurrence":

- A. *We believe Communist progress has been blunted and that the situation is improving. Strengthened South Vietnamese capabilities and effectiveness, and particularly U.S. involvement, are causing the Vietcong increased difficulty, although there are as yet no persuasive indications that the Communists have been grievously hurt.*

\*The emphasis has been added to indicate points which are stated with markedly more optimism than in the original draft. The warning with which the Staff had opened its statement of conclusions—that there was no objective way to determine how the war was going—was dropped. So also was the crucial warning of the Communists' determination to win.

- B. Assuming no great increase in external support to the Vietcong, *changes and improvements which have occurred during the past year now indicate that the Vietcong can be contained militarily.* . . . However, we do not believe that it is possible at this time to project the future of the war with any confidence. Decisive campaigns have yet to be fought, and no quick and easy end to the war is in sight. . . .
- C. *Developments during the last year or two show some promise of resolving the political weaknesses, particularly that of insecurity in the countryside, upon which the insurgency has fed.* However, the government's capacity to translate military success into lasting political stability is questionable.

Laconically, Matthias contrasts the actual outcome in Vietnam:

Half a year later Diem was ousted, and the political and military situation degenerated to critical proportions by the end of 1964. . . . A year or so after the date of the estimate, Mr. McCone openly expressed regret for his own part in weakening what had been "right the first time."

Thus, in this case at least, "the system" by which national intelligence at the highest level is produced led to rejection of some ONE Staffers' perceptions which had been remarkably accurate. One may easily speculate that those perceptions, had they been reflected in the published Estimate, might have aroused serious second thoughts among American policy makers on Vietnam in mid-1963.

Before leaving NIE 53-63 of 17 April 1963, a brief look at the 10-page "Discussion" section which serves as back-up for the "Conclusions" is in order. Here, for the first time in the CIA reports examined to this date, we find several passages, including an entire paragraph, devoted to description of the political role, motivations, and concerns of the Vietnamese peasantry. "The primary aim of the Communists is to secure control of the rural population." After 1957, "perhaps most important of all, the government failed to develop a capability to protect the peasant and the villager." The people "have no tradition of loyalty to a government in Saigon." The peasant "has always accommodated himself to whatever force was best able to protect or punish him. . . ." Most peasants are "primarily interested in peace. . . ."

But we still note that virtually no attention is given to the Communists' methods and grounds for appealing to the peasants, or the peasants' actual viewpoints with regard to the Saigon government and the NLF. Indeed, we find an appraisal of the NLF, which—with respect to the initial point it makes—is at variance with accounts given by the highly respected open sources we have previously cited and—with respect to its last point—is irrelevant as far as political realities were concerned:

This organization [the NLF] currently has little following in Vietnam, is clearly a front for the Communists, and its ostensible leaders are political nonentities.

Furthermore, the passages bearing on the mass of the population provide our first persuasive evidence that analysts of a decade ago did not consider important what we have termed the "core elements" of a culture. For these elements—the basic beliefs, values, and norms which the people of a given culture share—are almost completely omitted from consideration here as indeed they have been in all the intelligence reports we have examined. As we turn shortly to the potential of available education and training methods for strengthening analysts' intercultural performance, we shall examine the key role these "core elements" of a culture play in the formation of attitudes, motives, and decisions of a people,

and some current techniques for identifying them and the order in which they are ranked by groups and individuals within a culture.

#### *Another 1963 Estimate*

One other Estimate on Vietnam was produced in 1963,\* examining the implications of the political crisis for the stability of the country, the Diem regime, and the relationship with the U.S. The first of the "Conclusions" reached in this Estimate was an expectation which the events of autumn bore out:

The Buddhist crisis in South Vietnam has highlighted and intensified a widespread and longstanding dissatisfaction with the Diem regime and its style of government. If—as is likely—Diem fails to carry out truly and promptly the commitments he has made to the Buddhists, disorders will probably flare again and the chances of a coup or assassination attempts against him will become better than even.

But a set of conclusions concerning the Communists' likely role in coming political events appears to reflect some of the same misleading Western preconceptions we identified in the CIWS and RM series. The lack of evidence of ties or cooperation between the Buddhists and the Communists is perceived as a setback for the latter:

Thus far, the Buddhist issue has not been effectively exploited by the Communists. . . . Nor do we think the Communists would necessarily profit if he [Diem] were overthrown by some combination of his non-Communist opponents.

The analysts' perceptions are made clearer in the "Discussion" section of the report:

The Buddhist issue would appear to be an obvious windfall for the Communists, but so far there is no evidence that they have been able to exploit it effectively. They may have penetrated the Buddhist clergy to some extent, but are not presently exerting any discernible influence. . . .

As we saw to be the case in the CIWS and RM series, the analysts here, too, clearly are preoccupied with a Western-style interplay of political forces and hence are unconsciously being misled by mirror images. There are no indications that these analysts perceive the truly national role of the Buddhists—as spokesmen for the nation—in the crisis of 1963, as the mass of the Vietnamese did. Had the analysts done so, it seems likely that they would have given much less play to what the Communists had been unable to do about exploiting the Buddhists' challenge to the regime. For, we may properly ask, in the Vietnamese Communists' eyes was there indeed a *need* to try to exploit this challenge? Did it not, for the Vietnamese, transcend the normal interplay of political forces which would characterize a state system already accepted by the people? Was not the crisis of 1963 in effect a grass roots challenge to the system itself which Diem had spawned, developed, and controlled? And did not his system lack any of the marks of a traditional and national one, by Vietnamese standards? If these assumptions based on McAlister's and Mus' findings are accepted, are we not led to adopt a key assumption: that a truly revolutionary situation existed in the eyes of the people of South Vietnam in 1963? Following this line of thought, it is not difficult to believe that the Communists saw no need—indeed,

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\*SNIE 53-2-63, 10 July 1963, "The Situation in South Vietnam" (~~SECRET~~/Controlled Dissem).

may have viewed it as counterproductive—to mount political operations which might have suggested that *they* were misreading the nature of the challenge.

Despite the more positive—although uneven—results of the search in the finished intelligence on the 1962-1963 period, as compared with the earlier one, I can scarcely take comfort from any record reflecting less than consistent attention and a systematic approach to the kinds of problems of intelligence analysis and communication which concern us here. Our overall examination of the finished intelligence has turned up virtually no indicators of conscious attention to psychological *differences* as such (“A-type” indicators), and only intermittent indicators of what was on the minds, or what gave direction and support to the thinking, of the Vietnamese (“B-type” indicators). Furthermore, the lack of a systematic approach to the problems created by psychological differences is evident throughout the reports we have examined. For example, when the estimators presented a methodical breakdown of the many cultures and sub-cultures of South Vietnam in NIE 63-7-54, they gave no hint of what this means in terms of differing attitudes, motivations, aims, and expectations, and what the possible implications are for the local political scene or international relations. When the estimators in NIE 53-63 provided their first description of the political role, motivations, and concerns of the peasantry, they still did not get to the bottom of “what makes the Vietnamese tick,” that is, their belief and value systems which provide congruence and rationality to their world. As previously noted, virtually no traces of these keys to the local culture were found in the reports examined.

#### *Training Theory and Techniques for Improving Analysts' Perceptions*

The lack of system a decade ago in analysts' approach to a local culture is clearly seen in Cooper's subsequently published reactions to the growing political crisis of 1963 in Vietnam. He had come up through the ranks in ONE to become senior staffer for the Far East and Chief of the Estimates Staff. In the spring of 1963 he was on special assignment in Vietnam to find answers to the question, “Can we win with Diem?” In *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam*, he alludes to his lengthy interviews with Diem and Nhu, inspections of strategic hamlets, and a visit to a Montagnard village. But he admits to a deep sense of frustration in his efforts to draw meaning from his experiences; he was “able to construct only a two-page telegram to record the sum total of seven hours of conversation with the President and his brother.” His perception of why he felt so helpless is typical of his generation of American foreign affairs officers:

I returned to Washington full of quandries [*sic*]. I was by no means sure that I had had enough exposure to the relevant problems, or of my ability to interpret what I had seen. There had been, typically, many explanations for any given situation. . . .

This was long the faith among many Americans working at overseas tasks: enough exposure to problem-solving on the foreign scene insured one's ability to handle the “local angles” involved. Even foreign area courses of the 1950s and early 1960s were usually limited to inputs of useful information and judgments about an area and its people. Any organized approaches to an understanding of *Americans'* problems of understanding them were rare.

With the mushrooming of behavioral science research and its application to practical human problems over the past two decades, a science-based approach

to solving the functional and personal problems of working cross-culturally has become feasible. Exciting advances are being made in a new interdisciplinary field of research, education, and training labelled intercultural or cross-cultural.\* Federal Government agencies have taken advantage of this new knowledge and experience in only scattered instances.\*\* The bustle and the results—both outside and inside the Government—have pointed almost exclusively toward the needs of the American working directly—"interacting"—with foreigners. But certain of the new techniques and programs show promise also for the intercultural education and training of analysts located in the United States, who must strive to understand the foreigner and his psychological world at a distance. I wish to sketch the existing potential for this kind of preparation against the overall background of on-going programs of instruction in the Government.

Let us keep in mind a "built-in" handicap we often encounter in seeking to convince others of this potential. The new field of Intercultural Studies has barely begun to be introduced into our public school system. Hence, the unconscious deceptions of man's perception faculty—particularly the ever-present peril of mirror image terms and thought processes—are not real, "here-and-now" concerns of most Americans above 40 years of age. It is not surprising that any intelligence officer beyond 40 who is worth his salt sees the world and himself through very different lenses from those now increasingly being acquired by the younger generation. The older officer is not usually very impressed—if he is not indeed "turned off"—by the theory utilized in the new and more systematic Intercultural Studies approach. Hence, his own perceptions of the new methodologies for solving perception problems on foreign affairs tasks can themselves hinder or even block his acceptance of the more scientific approach. Much good will and exposure to the new educational and training techniques will be necessary if our officers are to be better prepared for the intercultural dimension of their tasks in the post-Vietnam world than they were in the preceding decades.

Specifically, what are the basic learning goals of the analyst, and what teaching resources are available for improving his perceptions across cultural lines? What basic courses and modules of instruction for this purpose should be introduced into the Government's training of its foreign affairs officers? What have we already learned inside CIA about instructional problems in the field?

### *Learning Goals*

Two distinct kinds of learning by the analyst are possible for increasing his effectiveness in working across cultural lines: *intellectual learning*—learning about the problems, requirements, and resources involved; and *behavioral or skill learning*—learning how to do it, how to acquire the skills necessary for increasing effectiveness.

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\*Richard W. Brislin, *The Content and Evaluation of Cross-cultural Training Programs* (Institute for Defense Analyses, Science and Technology Division, Paper P-671, Nov. 1970). For the connotations of "cross-cultural," see D.R. Price-Williams, *Cross-cultural Studies* (Penguin, Baltimore, 1969), pp. 11-15.

\*\*In the military, three programs were operational prior to the 1970s: the Army's Troop-Community Relations Program; and the Navy's Personal Response, and Area Orientation/Overseasmanship, programs. Among the civilian departments and agencies, only the Agency for International Development and the Peace Corps have established broad and mandatory programs to the present time. Brislin, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

The ultimate, job-related needs of the analyst lie with the second category of learning, and we concentrate our attention on it. We begin with the priority objective in this category: *to learn how to acquire a habit of surfacing distortions in one's perceptions of other cultural and psychological worlds*. In general, the task here is first to acquire a skill of repeated introspections into personal past experiences. The purpose is to overcome unconscious assumptions that our views and convictions about the world, as well as our more basic beliefs, values, and norms, are held by reasonable and educated people everywhere. Reflections on the personal circumstances and group associations which helped shape one's own ways of perceiving his cultural and psychological world\* can help him to identify subjective elements of his personal perceptions. A person thus builds a more solid basis for conscious comparison between his own perspectives and those of people of a different culture. Jogging oneself repeatedly to make such conscious comparisons will root a habit of surfacing perceptual differences. In this way an awareness of the unreliability of one's own perspectives on the world and rational for action is strengthened. In turn, the motivation becomes stronger to acquire the new jogging habit in order to eradicate old habits of misperception which would otherwise continue to limit one's effectiveness.

#### *The HumRRO Technique*

The process of introspective learning we have described can flow from only a sustained program of *self-training*. The prospect is good, however, that many learners' progress will be speeded by a behavioral learning technique which has been under development since the mid-1960s at the Workshop in Intercultural Communication of the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) of Alexandria, Virginia. This "Contrast-American" technique\*\* has been used with most Foreign Service Officers at the Foreign Service Institute since late 1972, and was made available for use in CIA in July 1973.

The new technique centers on live analyses of videotaped encounters between two persons—one an American, the other a person who has been trained to reflect beliefs and values in complete contrast to those which are typical of the majority of middle-class Americans. Each encounter features a conversation between these two, playing the roles of an American government official on overseas assignment and a host country national. The live analyses are developed by a group of about eight or ten trainees discussing the videotaped encounters under the guidance of a qualified trainer.

The task of the trainee-participants is to identify the single and typical American cultural characteristic which the American in the videotaped encounter manifests in each scene of a sequence. This cultural characteristic is the only constant running through all the scenes of a particular sequence. Thus, the objective of the HumRRO Workshop's technique is "to develop the participants' ability to recognize the various subtle ways in which their *own* thought processes, feelings, and behavior are influenced by cultural factors," aside from the more familiar educational, occupational, and situational factors involved in such encounters.

\*See Herbert Kelman (ed.), *International Behavior* (Free Press, N.Y., 1965), pp. 588-92.

\*\*See Brislin, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-29.

HumRRO's technique was demonstrated for the benefit of CIA's Office of Training on 13 February 1973, with nine OTR officers and instructors serving as participants. A majority of these participants were favorably impressed by the results and recommended that the new technique be adopted for selected personnel assigned overseas. Several of the participants, including the writer, concluded that it would also benefit Agency staffers, such as analysts, whether or not they were being so assigned.\* A decision to acquire the necessary materials was taken, and a three-day "training-the-trainers" course was conducted by HumRRO personnel on 17-19 July 1973, with OTR and non-OTR personnel participating. A trial run with the new technique, for testing its usefulness for analysts in particular, is in order.

A second kind of essential skill-learning is to acquire skills for "getting hold of" *the perspectives, attitudes, motivations, and expectations of the people of a given foreign culture, as well as its still more elusive "core elements"—the people's beliefs, values, and norms.* These learning targets have long been widely—though not universally—recognized as highly desirable data for American personnel working in a foreign-culture area. In my experience, however, they have generally been given a lower priority by supervisors considering a person's qualifications for positions of foreign area analyst *at Headquarters.* In such instances, it may be that American-style assumptions are already at work—for example, that the important data for the analyst are "hard facts," and that "hard" is to be equated with "visible" or "tangible."

I submit that the targets for our second kind of skill learning are very much the proper business—are indeed priority requirements—for area analysts regardless of the type of specialized intelligence with which they work. Though we repeatedly looked for indications of these elements of the Vietnamese culture in testing the finished intelligence on Vietnam, we have not yet made the case for doing so.

#### *Targets for Learning about a Foreign Culture*

The first sub-category of learning targets here—a people's perspectives, attitudes, motivations, and expectations—focuses the analyst's attention on a people's *mind sets or mental postures for thinking about their world*—the persons, groups, organizations, activities, problems, situations, and anticipated outcomes which figure in their world of awareness. The second sub-category of learning targets, which we term the "core elements" or inner drives of a people's culture—their beliefs, values, and norms—focuses attention on a people's *preconceptions concerning the universe or "all created things," which things are important; and which human behavior patterns are "proper."*

It is in this second sub-category that we look for some of the strongest ethnocentric assumptions of a people, for these are the elements of their culture they unconsciously assume are universals or "best for everyone." Yet, people tend to articulate these core elements less than they do their immediate concerns.

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\*My memoranda to OTR's Special Assistant for Curriculum Development, dated 16 February and 14 March 1973.

We are further handicapped because these crucial core elements of "what makes a people tick"—which serve as both the foundation stones and the strands of consistency among all aspects of their culture—cannot be examined directly. We must be content to "study the shadows" of these systems rather than their substance; they have no substance which we can apprehend directly. We may think of the belief and value systems as the *reflections* of a culture's "world view and survival plan."

In a sense, however—even though seldom articulated—these systems permeate the concepts and behavior patterns of a people. Hence, while an analyst may wish to start off with someone else's list of the beliefs, values, and norms of culture, for a sure grasp of these systems the analyst must himself work at distilling the component elements from the people's expressions of their concepts and from their physical behavior. It is here that these elements are to be found with all the nuances of meaning they hold for the local nationals. Accessible sources may be the immediate every-day concerns of the people—including our first sub-category of learning targets—or their social organization, law, history, monuments, intellectual achievements, and other enduring creations of their minds.

Techniques for abstracting the core elements of a foreign culture from the plentiful activities and products of the people have multiplied in the past decade. Obviously, an American residing in a foreign area has the advantage—by reason of his direct contact with the people and their environment—over the headquarters analyst, in the quest for a sure grasp of these "keys to the culture." But I have stressed the basic advantage to be gained from a systematic and science-based approach to this task, regardless of whether one tackles it on site or at a distance. It is appropriate here at least to identify some of the new techniques for this purpose.

#### *The "Culture Assimilator"*

A device which is quite well adapted to the circumstances of the desk-bound analyst is the "Culture Assimilator," which thus far is available for five cultures: the Thai, Arab, Iranian, Greek, and Honduran.\* These take the form of self-study or programmed instruction texts presenting episodes of interactions between Americans and local nationals. The student selects from among four possible interpretations for explaining each interaction. The guidance concerning correct or "best" answers was validated in the countries concerned by informa-

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\*This device was developed in the mid-1960s, and has been undergoing evaluation by social scientists at the University of Illinois Group Effectiveness Research Laboratory with support from the Advanced Research Projects Agency and the Office of Naval Research. Brislin (*op. cit.*, p. 19) states that the technique involved "has been subjected to more empirical study than any other training method." I have encountered a consistently enthusiastic reaction to the Thai Culture Assimilator from a number of students with past experience in Thailand. While these Assimilators aim "to prepare trainees for specific interpersonal situations" in another culture, Fred E. Fiedler, the principal investigator, believes that they also should "expose members of one culture to some of the basic concepts, attitudes, role perceptions, customs, and values" of the other culture. I prepared an outline titled "Dominant Values and Behavior Patterns of the Thai," based on the Thai Assimilator, which is used in OTR courses.

tion supplied by host nationals who did not see the alternatives. The Culture Assimilator has the double advantage of presenting *information about a culture* and also developing *a skill in detecting what is consistent with a given culture*—what “makes sense” to the people of that culture. At present, this device offers the most efficient approach to development of this type of skill “at a distance.”

A storehouse of training concepts and ideas which can be utilized for this purpose is found in *Peace Corps Cross-cultural Training*,\* Part II, “Specific Methods and Techniques.” For example, worksheets titled “Cross-cultural Analysis” are designed to help the individual student learn about cultural differences: first, by estimating on a scale where he himself, the “average American,” and a given foreign cultural group stand with their attitudes or mind sets involving commonly found beliefs and values; and then by encountering in subsequent discussions the range of differing perceptions of the same rating requirements, within his discussion group. The beliefs and values introduced in this exercise relate to a well-rounded inventory of 32 major features of man’s environment and activities.

Two additional methods for building a skill or sensitivity with regard to the belief and values systems of a given culture will be mentioned here briefly. Neither of these methods has yet been systematized to the same extent as those we have cited above, but both have long had an ardent and respected following. The first method is to *work through the language of the culture concerned*. A people’s language is both a product and a bearer of their culture, and both their speech and their thinking bear the stamp of their culture for life. The individual has in effect learned to attribute those meanings to words which have come out of the experience of his group. Thus, abstract terms in particular always “lose something in translation.” That “something” is in effect the *sender’s frames of reference*—a part of his culture which *the receiver does not share*. This explains why we must dig hard to grasp what a people’s beliefs, values, and norms *mean to them*: a mere listing—even when rendered in their language—will not suffice *for us as foreigners*. Hence, many of the words and phrases of a foreign language can prompt us to search for local connotations, which necessarily arise from the local behavior patterns and especially the people’s mind sets and preconceptions about the world. Probing the thought patterns behind the proverbs and aphorisms of a people can be a fascinating and highly productive hobby in the quest for “how the mentality of a foreign people differs from ours.”\*\*

\*In 4 parts, sponsored by the Peace Corps’ Office of Training Support, and published by the Center for Research and Education, Estes Park (now at Denver), Colo., 1970. The authors and compilers of this extensive and imaginative collection of materials are Albert R. Wight and Mary Ann Hammons. Wight was an organizer of the Society for Intercultural Training and Research (SITAR) and has had much field experience in this branch of training. I found his one-week workshop for trainers well conceived and personally profitable. The reference which follows in the text is to pp. 717-721 of Part II of the manual.

\*\*I have found that this hobby could easily become an obsession. For useful theory and examples on the entire subject, see John B. Carroll (ed.), *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf* (M.I.T., Cambridge, 1969); Ralph K. White, “‘Socialism’ and ‘Capitalism’: An International Misunderstanding,” (*Foreign Affairs*, Jan. 1966); “Language, Perception, and Reasoning” in Glen H. Fisher, *op. cit.*; and Francis Hayes, “Sarcasm of ‘Don’ Juan Del Pueblo” [on proverbs as guides to a people’s beliefs and values] (in *Hispania*, V. 35, No. 1, Feb. 1952.)

A second method of skill-building in this quest is to *pursue a program of selective and in-depth readings*. This effort should focus on the following effective categories of readings on a people or cultural group:

- 1) *Psychological or sociological novels, stories, or "books of wisdom"* such as the Hebrews' Book of Proverbs, or works by the "great minds" of a people, best read in the original if possible—examples would be Balzac, Thomas Mann, Cervantes, Confucius;
- 2) *Descriptions and interpretations of a culture* by bi-cultural writers with social or behavioral science training; examples are Sania Hamady's work on the Arabic and Gilberto Freyre's on the Brazilian cultures;
- 3) *Documentary material*—with a minimum of filtering by the editor—drawn from a people's uninhibited expressions of their thoughts; examples are Oscar Lewis' books—including much original taped conversation—and the "Village Series" now being published by Pantheon Press.

#### *Available Courses—and Urgent Needs*

Now, what kinds of courses and instruction modules are being offered in the foreign affairs agencies, and what kinds are needed by the intelligence community, to help analysts reduce the distortions of perception of the foreign scene? Only two organizations—the Foreign Service Institute and the United States Information Agency—now have, in part at least, regularly scheduled courses for this purpose.\* Furthermore, neither of these courses lies in the field of skill teaching. CIA's Office of Training has experimented over the past five years with brief orientation modules of one day or less—in the intellectual learning category—which were inserted into both the introductory course for all new professional employees of the Agency and the Intelligence Production Course.

We see an urgent need for the foreign affairs agencies to provide instruction for both intellectual and skill learning for intercultural analysis. A broad orientation for new staffers on the critical implications of distortions of perception, job-related problems, and recommended self-study strategies is a reasonable minimum, for the function and limitations of the perception faculty are not yet included in the basic education of most Americans. Furthermore, a growing number of practical guidelines for improving intercultural communication are becoming available, and Government trainers can tie these directly to a variety of possible on-the-job requirements. Also, as we saw, the learner must train himself for the acquisition of the necessary skills, and an early introduction to self-training aids is timely. Finally, seminars like FSI's and USIA's can stimulate useful intellectual learning by analysts already on the job.

It is in the field of support for intercultural *skill* learning, however, that the government agencies should make their major effort. Proper guidance in the strategies for skill learning which we have identified clearly requires a course in some depth—easily two weeks or more—with heavy reliance on the use of case material and exercises. To my knowledge, no such course presently exists in government for use by intelligence analysts. I believe it is imperative to provide such a course at the earliest possible date.

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\*The respective course titles are: Psychological Dimensions of Diplomacy: Concepts and Approaches; and International Communication. A third organization—the Defense Intelligence School—plans to introduce an elective course in this category in the coming winter. Limited quotas of registrants from other agencies are admitted to the two presently existing courses.

My recent experience in mounting and running a pilot program of brief instruction for learning about the hazards of perception and their implications for job performance has taught me much about both the rewards and the hazards of this kind of undertaking. Disbelief and emotions often get in the way, as they commonly do also when one broaches this subject to analysts at the desk. The disbelief is of two basic kinds: occasionally individual students and analysts on the job are sharply defensive about a re-examination of their "personal ability to assess reality," even before they have taken a hard look at what intercultural training is all about; some remain unimpressed by the rationale for long-term efforts to improve perception—the problem seems theoretical, "not real," to them. On the other hand, some students, analysts, and supervisors cannot believe that very many professional personnel are not already working on the problem. This last group consists of persons who are already aware of intercultural communication problems, but they are often *not* aware of the *unawareness of others* on this score, or the benefits of the newer educational and training resources. This is perhaps because neither the psychological dimension of intercultural analysis nor the new teaching techniques are commonly discussed as such by analysts in the work-a-day world.

Hence, in the classroom both kinds of disbelief have at times engendered boredom in some students, and even resentment of a day spent with the subject. The provision for discussion groups in more recent years has reduced the number and intensity of these adverse reactions by demonstrating more clearly the needs of individual students. In the case of analysts and supervisors on the job, both kinds of disbelief have deterred support from the ranks for more methodical preparation of analysts for the intercultural dimension of their tasks. Yet I have identified an increasing number of students and older hands who are reacting to this situation with a growing ardor for forward action. It was in this cause that I found the incentive and the energy to research and write this paper.

