GUERRILLA-COMBAT, STRATEGY AND DETERRENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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South Vietnam's grim battle for survival continues one of the hottest parts of the world conflict euphemistically called the Cold War. To millions of Vietnamese, to families of American servicemen on duty there, the adjectives applied to that war spell anything but "cold." Yet the light from flaming hamlets dims across thousands of miles before reaching the fonts of U.S. policy. The fact neither disparages U.S. aid to stricken South Vietnam nor impugns the professional skills of U.S. military personnel.

Both public support in the United States and U.S. achievements in the battle area are hampered by the fact that the conflict is regarded as the sovereign nation of Vietnam's war. Consequently Americans may advise and assist, nothing more. Vietnamese commanders and officials can, and sometimes do, disregard our advice, decline our assistance. Concern is expressed that exercise of greater authority by the United States might alienate our Ally's people; provide the Communists with the club of "anti-colonialism" they skillfully used to drive out the French. These constraints, which handicap both military and non-military aid, are by definition normal to any assistance policy short of military intervention. A further complication for U.S. policy lies in the applicable, ancient diplomatic precept: never permit a weak ally to commit you.

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The situation could lead to a sardonic paradox, admission of
Communist superiority in guerrilla warfare by Americans whose history
includes highly effective operations on both sides of that form of
conflict. As colonists and later as "rebels", Americans gave their
English homeland lessons in fighting guerrillas on far more occasions
than the publicized exploits of youthful George Washington on behalf
of Braddock's army. Seventy-years of "small war" operations drove
the Indians back along our expanding frontier and guerrilla campaigns
had a role in our Civil War. Beyond our shores, U.S. counter-guerrilla
"pacifiers" included Leonard Wood in Cuba and MacArthur (senior)
in the Philippines.

However, during the past fifty years no Americans other than
a relative handful of professional soldiers and a few large corporations
with Latin American holdings had any experience in irregular wars.
It fell to an English archeologist, T. E. Lawrence, to become, unobtrusively,
the Mahan of guerrilla warfare and, like Mahan, discover that his gospel's
early impact was greatest in countries other than his own. First Russia
then, far more articulately, Communist China integrated with Marxist
political, economic, and ideological doctrine the brilliant military
precepts of Lawrence's "influence of guerrilla combat upon warfare".*
Strategies thus developed were used to further militant Communism
in regions where it dared not flaunt the glint of naked bayonets.

*Seven Pillars of Wisdom, T. E. Lawrence, Doubleday, Doran & Co.,
Britannica.
Guerrilla warfare entered a renaissance during the years of America's nuclear supremacy. A nuclear stalemate seems likely to enhance if to our disadvantage unless we revive forgotten skills and mesh them with our national objectives. Mao Tse-tung, Ho Chi Minh, and Che Guevara are neither the discoverers nor high priests of irregular warfare. The United States, could turn this weapon against Communist aggressors--if resolved to do so.

Today's guerrilla war in South Vietnam, like the Korean War, the Berlin Blockade, is one more campaign in the protracted struggle with Communism. The existence of limitations whether in the form of sanctuaries, area of conflict, weapons, size of forces committed or national objectives is inevitable in all phases of that struggle short of general war. By definition, the entire limited war spectrum recognizes constraints, both military and political. While we must accept the principle, we can, and should, haggle over the price; for example, where sanctuaries will be permitted; their degree of immunity, number and extent.

Communist doctrine seeks to manipulate these vital price tags to the disadvantage of the West. Per Kremlin pronouncements, limited wars, defined as capitalist attempts to destroy "proletarian-popular revolutions" are certain to expand into general war. Yet "national wars of liberation" are "just" and "good," to be supported by the Soviets. Such wars will not escalate unless, Communism warns, "counter revolutionary imperialists" intervene to "deny the peoples' will."

Accepting these Communist "rules" would barricade us in a one-way-street that leads to Communist victory. Evidence abounds of
Hanoi's guilt* in originating, promoting and maintaining Viet Cong resistance to the established government. Now is there any doubt that where Hanoi moves, ComBloc planners have charted the course. Limiting U.S. participation to passive advice and assistance inside the borders of South Vietnam while permitting Viet Minh interference with Saigon's internal affairs, closely approaches that one-way-street, precisely as foreseen by Communist schemers.

U.S. strategic choices in Southeast Asia still encounter the pitfalls of "eventually establishing a balance of power policy to ensure political stability in that region and the security of the United States without sacrifice of human freedom."** When General George C. Marshall enunciated that policy, only the United States could counter imminent aggression in that region. Two decades later, the source of the threat has changed; the burden of U.S. strategy has not. Strategy— an expression of national policy— exhibits the character of its origin. If policy be indecisive or ambiguous, the strategy devised to execute it can fail through insufficient application of resources or, made strong by overwhelming force, may be directed to ends at variance with long-term national interests.

Our degree of success in safeguarding South Vietnam will importantly affect the frequency and severity of threats to other free territory on the world periphery. Strong probability that we shall encounter more

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conflicts of the current category implies a need for testing and refining U.S. policy in this real-life laboratory.

The task involves many agencies of government. Sound national policy includes political-economic-psychological plans and action no less than military strategy in meeting the relatively low level, long range threats to U.S. security that are the hallmark of the Cold War.

Public understanding of national policy today leaves vague three critical aspects: (1) What constitutes the threat in South Vietnam; native insurgents who must be converted into loyal citizens or covert invaders from a foreign power whose will to continue the struggle must be broken? (2) How to enunciate our policy in terms likely to obtain the full support of the American people for what promises to be a lengthy effort? (3) What is being done to deter or, if necessary, defeat any escalation of "creeping aggression?"

I.

Developing an effective answer to the first question, the nature of the threat depends upon two difficult but feasible achievements: greater unification...doubtless through "unity of command"...among U.S. civilian and military agencies in Vietnam;* first-rate intelligence

*Col. E. F. Black, USA, "The Problem of Counter-Insurgency," USNI Proceedings, October 1962, suggests that the numerous, relatively disconnected, hard working agencies, notably the U.S. Operations Mission, the Military Advisory Assistance Group, the U.S. Information Service, and the Embassy might better appreciate and advance national goals if assembled as a "Country Team" within an organization resembling our Unified Commands in overseas theatres. That organization's "responsible commander" would be, at least initially, a civilian. A shift to military command would await Washington's decision to emphasize counter-guerrilla rather than civic action.
to guide both the "Country Team" and Washington's policy adjustments. Inadequate knowledge (or failure to recognize unpalatable truths) has led the United States astray in other trouble spots: supporting dictatorial misgovernment (Batista in Cuba, Trujillo in the Dominican Republic); failing to distinguish the greater evil, (Mac's camouflaged "agrarian revolution" and the inept Nationalist regime in China). We need intelligence coverage as desperately in this "sublimed" war as in any type of conflict; information of the enemy (what is likely to happen), information of the accomplishments--or shortcomings--of our own (SVN and U.S.) operations (what actually has happened).

Though less than perfect, our record in South Vietnam has avoided dangerous pitfalls. Despite French hostility and British disparagement we backed Diem in 1954 against immense odds, and reaped the amazing successes of his personalized administration during the next three years. How Diem lost his revered leader mantle to be hated as a tyrant is less our concern here than realization that enemy detail of that transformation was vital intelligence for U.S. policy formulation.

Villification of any efficient Vietnamese regime constitutes a keystone of Communist strategy. A free Vietnam endangers the Communist conspiracy in Southeast Asia just as West Berlin gives the lie to "peoples' democracies" in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, that does not justify a U.S. policy of blindly supporting every government, cause or institution that has been made the target of Communist aspersions.

In South Vietnam, intelligence materially influences the allocation of military effort between our dual objectives: ejecting covert invaders.
and "converting", heavily buttressed by "civic action,"* indigenous rebels. For the latter, operations could well emulate Ramon Magsaysay's brilliant conversion** of two million rebellious Philippine peasants, a "sea" that sheltered 25,000 Communist-inspired Huko.

Compared to the complex mixture of socio-military-economic programs for "winning the hearts and minds of the people", military campaigns against hard-core guerrillas, at least some of them foreign infiltrators, seem relatively clear-cut, however protracted and arduous. But effective tactics against guerrilla foes may involve strategic considerations, dependent as ever upon policy. A tactical decision to proceed against enemy sources of logistic support encounters ambiguity if those sources are discovered outside Vietnamese territory. Sanctuary designation with its implications regarding escalation transcends military responsibilities. The need for a unified American politico-economic-military strategy is at sharp variance with our traditional conduct of "small wars."

Even the resolute application of the Truman Doctrine in Greece (1947-49) managed to evade the issue of Communist sanctuary bases inside Yugoslavia and Albania. We now realize that success against combined Communist guerrillas and Greek rebels owed much to enemy errors. Defection of Yugoslavia from the Kremlin sealed off major guerrilla

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*In cooperation with civil agencies toward economic, social betterment...a major contributing factor to the elimination of insurgency." Official definition abbreviated.

**In contrast to ruthless, extermination tactics characteristic of totalitarian regimes.
sanctuaries and Cominform endorsement of an "independent Macedonia" as retaliation against Tito, alienated Hellenic insurgents by its threat to Greek nationalism. Thereafter the struggle terminated in a triumphal maneuver by the Greek Army.* No American military unit had been dispatched to Greece; no American soldiers engaged in combat. Happily U.S. economic aid and Greek governmental "cooperation"** seemed to alleviate (by a narrow margin) the basic causes that had put insurgents into bed with Communist Guerrillas.

In Southeast Asia we did follow the Geneva partition (1954) of Vietnam with Dulles' creation, SEATO, paving the way for the assistance we poured into Laos and South Vietnam as well as to SEATO members, Thailand and the Philippine Republic. But nowhere have we tried either to deter or punish external sources of guerrilla strength. Only once have we bluntly resolved the sanctuary quandary and that in a war already at such levels of violence that the President relieved a theater commander rather than risk further escalation.

True enough, we met the challenge of overt aggression in Korea squarely by, in Kremlin eyes, a shocking example of "capitalist perfidy," having recently denied any strategic interest in that unhappy peninsula.

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*The similarity of Greek and Vietnamese problems has not extended to Communist doctrinal errors that served our cause so well in Greece. Despite hints of Sino-Soviet disagreement, Laos' status falls regrettably short of true neutrality, Viet Cong support by Hanoi continues.

**Not always given ungrudgingly. However, the United States made concessions, too. The Greek immigration quota (300 per year) was raised several thousands by a special 1953 program to relieve Greek unemployment and earn foreign exchange by remittances home.

***Except for the briefly espoused "massive retaliation" doctrine.
So, too, must have appeared our reversal of policy between the "Bay of Pigs" and "offensive weapons" in Cuba.

Apparently we have not yet faced such questions as whether U.S. policy can ensure the desired power balance in Southeast Asia by strictly defensive strategy: are results of escalation always unfavorable to the U.S.? The inevitable link between perpetual defense and eventual defeat has long been recognized.* On the newer quandary there is some evidence, more alarm. Who would have prophesied either Soviet missiles in Cuba or President Kennedy's blunt reaction to their discovered presence? Yet that previously unthinkable strategy did not provoke our opponents' escalation even if free world enthusiasm over its initial success has somewhat diminished.

Two sharply contrasting examples of "escalation" featured the Korean War. In the fall of 1950, our advance to the Yalu was executed in a maneuver that permitted flank attacks on the widely separated** Eighth Army and X Corps. Not surprisingly, Chicom "volunteers" seized the opportunity to drive X Corps onto its shipping, push Eighth Army south beyond recently liberated Seoul. U.S. (and U.N.) good faith assurances that Manchurian soil would be respected were ignored.

A few months later, General Ridgeway's openly proclaimed series of vicious offensives (Operations Killer and Ripper) chewed up hostile

*A swift transition to the attack is the most brilliant point of the defensive. He who does not include it in his conception of the defense will never understand the superiority of the defensive." Von Clausewitz, "On War".

**X Corps was not under Eighth Army command. "Lateral communications" between the two fighting organizations was mainly through MacArthur's headquarters in Tokyo.
manpower at a rapid rate.* This obviously greater "provocation" elicited not Combloc escalation but Malik's request, on the floor of the U.N., for a "truce." That we accepted, allowing Chicom armies to dig in far south of the Yalu, does not obscure the moral. Limited offensive strategy, effectively executed, not appeals or treaties, "deterred" escalation.

Certainly Americans understand that flexibility in promoting limited objectives depends ultimately upon the relative ability to pose, meet, or deter the main (central war) threat, as exemplified in the recent blockade of Cuba. Should not that principle apply to all lower levels of violence as well?

The U.S. military has long experience in "restoring order" on behalf of the civil authority in troubled lands, applying a happy mix of force and civic action conversion. Hopefully it can similarly guide a reasonably competent ally. However, should intelligence and on-the-spot reports from a unified Country Team indicate significant elements of guerrilla strength infiltrating from an outside sanctuary the struggle has already "escalated"...by enemy option.

South Vietnam today lacks the means to close its remote, far-flung borders. It cannot eradicate guerrilla bases in "neutral" Laos;

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*Personal reconnaissance behind enemy lines by Brigadier General Crawford Sams verified reports that Communist troops were riddled by disease, like the North Korean civilians among whom some 50 per cent died for lack of medical care and sanitation. Communist resort to trumped up charges of "germ warfare" soon followed to obscure their patent inability to care for their sick.
retaliate against the "Democratic Republic" at Hanoi; compel Cambodia to expel Viet Cong bands. Apparently, U.S. assistance is needed outside, not merely within, Vietnamese territory. There is grave doubt that today's conflict is, as advertised, solely Vietnam's war.

But before examining potentials for exerting political-economic-military pressures upon foes presently granted the initiative in that region, consider, as all democracies must, the attitude of the American people and the implications of U.S. undertaking an offensive strategy.

II.

The second question U.S. public support, encounters the American tendency to exasperation, extremes of behavior diversely exemplified in isolationism and "unconditional surrender", when confronted by prospects of protracted conflict. Even the appalling risks of extremes in an age of militant Communism and megalom weapons seems inadequate by itself to effect so major a change in national character. Inspiring leadership will be essential.

Thus disturbing vagueness, if not implicit contradictions, in pronouncements from policy levels enhance American reluctance to make personal as well as national sacrifices for the cause of freedom in Southeast Asia. Most statements by senior U.S. visitors to Saigon voice an indefinite optimism regarding the outcome. None mention committing U.S. troops to combat or condemn Viet Minh support of the guerrilla-insurgents. Neither visitors nor important stay-at-homes clarify U.S. policy toward Laos (beyond passive reliance upon the toothless
neutrality pact) or acknowledge that country's strategic role* in South Vietnam's security.

Chicom incursions in northwest Laos were followed by the dispatch of soldiers and marines to Thailand, evidence of intent to defend the soil of our SEATO ally which neglected the critical territory of "neutral" Laos. An apparent policy void regarding Cambodia precludes even a routine warning that strict neutrality is expected in that quarter. Consequently Hanoi's direction of Viet Cong depredations proceeds untrammeled by any risk to the "Democratic Republic".

Military doctrine's adjuration: "Know your enemy" applies to civilians in today's world. We, nationally, had a lesson on that point a decade past. An early high-level designation of "police action" for the large-scale (even though "limited") war in Korea had long-term results, unfavorable to U.S. effort in that bitter struggle. Failure to clearly delineate both the full extent of the Communist threat in Southeast Asia and our national policy to thwart it may be even more deleterious.

To the American public, "police action" brought to mind recurrent, scarcely noticed interventions** to "restore order and protect U.S. citizens and property", involving little bloodshed and without effect upon the U.S. economy (though sometimes beneficial to certain oil or fruit company stock quotations).

*Although "Laos as a base and a route for the Viet Cong" was decried in the thoroughly documented Dept. of State Publication 7308 (Supra).

**The Marine Corps landed troops 180 times in 37 countries between 1800 and 1934. Its forces were engaged in "active operations in the field" some part of every year from 1900 to 1936.
The impact of past "police actions" upon U.S. foreign policy had also been minimal. A presidential order, sometimes originating from an obscure "desk" in State, dispatched the required force (usually determined by military commanders, drawing upon extremely meagre resources) for a stated mission whose accomplishment was left entirely to the expedition's senior officer. In this light, "police action," as a descriptive title for U.S. actions in Korea could scarcely have been more confusing: to civilians called from their jobs to engage in combat half a world away; to thousands of families where casualties were personal tragedies not a news story listing a few names (of unknown regulars).

Acknowledging (much later) the Korean Conflict as our "fourth largest war," in terms of casualties and men engaged, suggests the viewpoint of military leaders from the war's start. That it was America's first serious experience with "limited warfare" helps to explain the confusion engendered among these leaders (a confusion that an anxious public shared) by the unprecedented interaction of political considerations upon military tactics. Contrary to some

* The Navy's capture of Vera Cruz to avenge an "insult to the American flag" in 1914 occurred after President Wilson had requested Congressional approval for employing U.S. arms in Mexico but preceded the legislative branch's response.

** In certain cases the State Department has even dictated the size of the force to be sent according to "The Small War Manual" of the U.S. Marine Corps, 1940 edition.

*** The bare intimation that the United States might use atomic weapons tactically raised a furor of apprehension among the new NATO alliance. Britain's prime minister flew hastily to Washington to dissuade President Truman.
contentions, the U.S. military has always, if sometimes vainly, sought strategic policy direction from its civilian superiors.

Moreover, every attempt to meld "police action" concepts into the realities of a major war imposed handicaps upon military operations. Throughout the entire war, the "rotation system" played hob with unit efficiency in paying deference to democratic equality; the requirement to weigh each small tactical operation (after the first ten months) against anticipated casualties rather than its impact upon the campaign; the shock of finding a "primitive" enemy better equipped with armor and guns,* (in the early engagements); all these increased the burdens of fighting a nasty, not so little, war.

"War weariness," which impairs every war effort not borne wholly by regulars, set in quickly; worsened because neither U.S. people nor troops clearly understood our "war aims." If Woodrow Wilson initiated "police action" a trifle cavalierly, he waged war from the loftiest motives, widely publicized. ("War to end war--make the world safe for democracy..."). Our altruism and lofty motives in Korea matched those of any war we ever fought, but those truths, plus the necessity for limited objectives in limited warfare, were never clariioned like Wilson's Fourteen Points, Roosevelt's Atlantic Charter, or the latter's less sagacious "unconditional surrender."

Politicians and diplomats alike handled broad policy with a reticence suitable to a veritable "police action." Forseeable germ-warfare accusations were vouchsafed only dignified denials. Embarrassment

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*Some critics grant technical superiority in fighter aircraft also; attribute our ten to one victory ratio (Sabrejets vs MiG-15s) in air combat to pilot skill.
over a score of American "turncoats" in enemy prison camps received exaggerated attention while the thousands of Communist soldiers refusing repatriation went almost unnoticed until Syngman Rhee's high-handed action made them "news." Public apathy was apparently preferred to a "hate-the-enemy" reaction, both poor substitutes for a democracy's "informed, responsible electorate."

Reviewing Korean experience, we infer that support of the American people will be essential to our long-term success in Southeast Asia. Unless our national objectives (not our secret plans) are stirringly proclaimed and the full magnitude of the danger explained, such support is unlikely to be forthcoming.

III.

The third point, deterring or defeating creeping aggression, raises doubts that U.S. objectives to "insure political stability and establish regimes favorable to economic freedom and individual liberty"* can encounter serious setbacks in Southeast Asia despite our continued aid to South Vietnam; despite unflagging support by the American people. Essential as these are, effective prosecution of our regional objectives also depends upon integrated military-politico-economic-ideologic long range plans which recognize ComBloc potential to expand the struggle.

ComBloc capabilities in Southeast Asia obviously exceed their current commitments (a truism for all limited warfare). Progress toward "conversion" of SVN insurgents may not lead to the happy ending of Magsaysay's campaign against the Philippine Hiks where miles of open

*General George C. Marshall, supra.
see inhibited Combloc reinforcement and resupply. In South Vietnam, the Communists can cheaply administer a nasty check by an influx of guerrillas who either are or can be based conveniently just outside Vietnamese boundaries.

Should our current foes already be predominantly guerrilla invaders whom we are mastering (per optimistic pronouncements from government levels), Combloc covert incursions (more guerrillas) into Thailand, Burma or Cambodia could reopen the bitter cycle, again and again. More remote, but well within military potentials, Combloc invasion of one or more Southeast Asian countries, perhaps using "neutral" Laos as a spring board, could confront the United States with "another Korea."

What plans, preparations and, especially, resolve do we have for dangers real enough to merit forehanded precautions? The United States does not seem to fully appreciate that when an outside power undertakes to assist one party to a civil war (actual or incipient) it attempts either a risky bluff or accepts the prospect of an expanding conflict* involving other intervening states. Having definitely committed ourselves to assist in "SVN's war", we are left no honorable option than to oppose assaults upon free people anywhere in Southeast Asia.

The milieu of world-wide Cold War accentuates the risks in American tendencies to counter threats only after serious danger becomes obvious, and then on an ad hoc basis. American policy (though never so formulated) long seemed to couple deliberate neglect of national security with

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*The British and French withdrew their badly needed support from the Spanish Loyalists (1937) although neither Germany nor Italy were prepared to fight on a large scale had the democracies stood firm.
willingness to shoulder huge burdens, make great sacrifices in defeating any foe whose evil acts brought war to the United States. The first lead to extended, costly conflicts; the second, backed by American natural and industrial resources, secured eventual victory. Our paradoxical penchant to make foreign policy out of morality alone never accepted its concomitant thesis: providing the power to enforce beneficent world rule under a Pax Americana. However prudent this abstention may be, we can therefore, ill afford to balk at concessions to expediency necessary to maintain power balance, prevent power vacuums. We have placed our money--several billions of dollars--on freedom for Vietnamese; our soldiers have made down payments in blood.* An appraisal of potential, total investment in lives and treasure seems due. Are the chiefly reactive, defensive strategies we have applied in wider than strictly military fields adequate to attain our long range goals?

Continued without major change, those policies could result in an inconclusive, drawn-out struggle, the kind that exhausts American patience and may well break the morale of the newly emergent Vietnamese nation. Such a struggle places the lion's share of the expense upon the United States, unlike Korea where punishing air interdiction increased already heavy Combloc burdens of maintaining a million-man army in a land devoid of loot. To keep the fires smouldering in Southeast Asia, Combloc resources need provide only very small contributions of munitions and trained guerrilla manpower.

*Two hundred American service men killed in South Vietnam.
Logistic computations suggest about five pounds per man/day, more than half of it food, to sustain guerrilla operations in mountainous or swampy terrain, distinctly appropriate categories for the area under consideration. Overlooking captures from government forces but accepting indications that food is obtainable locally, (gifts or seizures from inhabitants) 20,000 guerrillas consume at least 20 tons of munitions and equipment (two pounds per man) each day of active operations.

These figures take on relative meaning when compared with experience data for U.S. ground troops, which average 37 pounds per man/day in forward areas, varying between 68 pounds for "active defense" and slightly less than 13 when in reserve with no combat. (Food alone totals six pounds.) Recognizing that a very nasty situation can result with only one-fourth of the guerrillas "active" at the same time, the minimum daily requirements for the Viet Cong could be as low as four to six tons of munitions and equipment. Almost trivial, viewed as two or three truck loads, this small amount poses problems when packed, by men* or animals, over long distances. Unless subsistence is available en route, the payloads of the human bearers diminish with increasing mileage.

Thus the tactical importance of closing South Vietnam's borders to guerrilla supply and reinforcement matches the task's enormity. Hundreds of miles of jungle wilderness and swampy delta are not susceptible to the mine-and-wire barriers constructed along Algerian

*Requiring for even a 200 mile round trip, 3-5,000 bearers to fill this austere "pipeline."
frontiers by French forces larger than Vietnam's entire military establishment. ComBloc supply and replacement has had little need to utilize the extensive Vietnamese coastline, difficult to guard against small craft intrusions.

Lacking measures to sever ComBloc reinforcement, success depends upon killing guerrillas faster than Communist sources are willing to replace them * or, equally unlikely, "converting" the entire populace into militant opponents of all guerrillas. Yet even those improbable achievements can be countered by fairly low level ComBloc escalation, either in scale of violence or area of conflict. Such a dim view is justified, however, only while U.S. policies continue to eschew all offensive action other than local operations by Vietnamese troops. **

The Cuban emergency furnished an instance of offensive policy which required no more than resolution plus preparation for, not the use of, force. Recent British confrontation of the Soviet Union in the U.N. accusing the latter of being the "largest colonial power" is, in a minor key, another. Who knows what a warning to the Viet Minh might achieve, couched in unmistakable terms? The "paper tiger" appellation can stem as readily from lack of resolution as from actual

* It is unrealistic to doubt Communist capability to replace casualties.

** The only hint of Clausewitz' "flaming sword of vengeance" strategically comes from vague reports like that of the London Economist (Nov. 30, 1961): "SVN counteraction in Communist territory north of the dividing line may be on a larger scale than either side has cared to admit."
weakness. The United States has in the past been drawn into wars that might have been avoided or at least fought under more favorable, to us, conditions because our foes underrated our determination.*

A forthright U.S. policy toward Laos offers promise as an earnest of our resolve to defend Southeast Asia against Communist aggression. Pledged to the Laotian neutrality agreement, we have demonstrated good faith. Are we not equally obligated to oppose Communist violations? Enforcement of the Laos "agreement" would interpose a formidable barrier of undeveloped terrain between the bamboo curtain and non-communist countries.

As matters now stand, the 30,000 square miles of southern Laos may conceal guerrilla forward bases, training areas and air strips. Strategically located Tchefone is occupied by Viet Minh troops. The eastern border of this region, 300 miles of mountain wilderness, provides a land route to South Vietnam for supplies and reinforcements from Hanoi. Northern Laos, much of it flagrantly non-neutral, Pathet-Lao country, less affects South Vietnam security although its potential threat to Thailand was recognized by the recent "visit" of U.S. combat units.

Thus far, the U.S. has apparently failed to exert pressure to terminate rather obvious infractions of neutrality. A policy shift might begin with diplomatic warnings, perhaps, a request for U.N. police. While

*From the record, Pearl Harbor to Cuba-based missiles, might be deduced a peculiarly American "principle of war": The larger the force an enemy openly commits against the United States the greater the probability of U.S. victory.
the probability of success is low, any amelioration of the current situation represents a clear gain; perhaps increasing Sino-Soviet frictions, encouraging SEATO nations, belatedly suggesting that Cambodia should protest all border violations, not merely those from east to west.

Should politico-economic moves, including appeals to "world opinion" (so awesome to certain Americans) prove insufficient, a unified U.S. country-team in Saigon could recommend modest, yet effective, military commitments. The Southeast Asia area, like the Caribbean, favors U.S. experimentation with "controlled escalation." Resort to force, if necessary, might, for example, be restricted to sending a small contingent of troops with air cover to liberate Tchepone, linking the town, along route 9, to the DMZ garrison. The consequent detour imposed upon Communist line crossers would delay agents, seriously penalize travel of porters or carts bearing munitions. Such traffic can be severed by extending U.S.-SVN surveillance along the relatively open valley (route 9 again) to Thakhek, cutting off southern Laos (and land travel to Cambodia) from the DRV.

Justification for our action could stress restoration of Laotian neutrality, as guaranteed by the Soviets; promise early withdrawal. Our troops would respect Laotian sovereignty, merely enforcing a blockade against "contraband" across the critical southern portion of that nation.

* Only one of a wide variety of feasible strategies. A bolder course might ensure the freedom of a much larger portion of Laos to protect from Communist revenge friends who trusted us at their dire risk. Greater caution might counsel only covert "unconventional warfare" operations inside the DRV to penalize Hanoi for its similar activities in SVN.
Those who recoil from such "escalation" might consider its belated challenge to Communist aggression in Southeast Asia; weigh the unfavorable prospects for rebuttal ("counter-escalation") available to Hanoi already precariously balancing its independence from Peiping and Moscow.

Unless the Chicom are allowed to develop roads across Laos (reminiscent of happenings on India's northern frontier) the "hordes of Chinese manpower" thrown into Korea as "volunteers" cannot reach the Mekong River in combat capable units. Invasion attempts would tax Cambloc logistics far more than in Korea. No U.S. nuclear weapons would be needed to rebuff a Chicom army and were Ho Chi Minh inveigled into a puppet effort his divisions would be still less dangerous. Chicom air posture is not conducive to a major commitment west of the rugged Chaine Annamitique.

Should Communist response take the form of occupying north Laos (already largely in their possession) the area is militarily of little value prior to the costly task of development. Even then the Mekong remains a natural barrier between it and Thailand. Such a response would moreover strip the mask from denials of aggression and could be dealt with as a separate problem. Meanwhile a truly neutralized southern Laos safeguards Vietnam, provides leverage for extension (political measures might suffice) to all Laos and isolates Cambodia from the Cambloc.

Evaluation of this hypothetical "campaign" suggests another Lebanon, plus some initial skirmishes which we would do well to settle decisively--not another Korea; still less the likelihood of explicit nuclear threats inherent in the October 1962 crisis over Cuba. Of
course this sketchy outline covers but one of many retaliatory
offensives open to the U.S. under a policy of controlled escalation
to oppose actual, though covert, aggression. The narrow strip of
the "Democratic Republic" between the mountains and the South China
Sea is open to harassment by air and naval power if it be traversed
by armies marching south. Sea blockade can vitiate guerrilla sanctuaries
in Cambodia should politico-economic measures fail. Who knows to
what extent an encouraged Thailand might participate, once the United
States leads the way what beneficial influence upon affairs in Indonesia
and the emerging Malayan Federation?

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Ample maneuver space between "sabre rattling" and purely defensive
"reactions" to hostile initiative may be found for U.S. national policy
toward Southeast Asia. No set of strategies should sensibly be advocated
prior to full evaluation of both military and non-military pros and
cons, a wholly feasible undertaking for policy makers with the machinery
at their disposal. Survey of events over the past decade suggests
the need for an integrated political-economic-ideological offensive.
Military capability exists to support such an offensive in Southeast
Asia. The prospect that embarrassingly large forces or "high" levels
of violence would be involved are remote. Historical precedent and
introspection intimate that the size of the military commitment,
indeed that the probability of force being required, runs in inverse
proportion to firmness displayed in our non-military strategies.
Thoroughly informed by their leaders, Americans uniformly applauded
their government's "strong stand" on Cuba despite some "panic buying"
of foodstuffs and more prevalent if less noticeable private fears.
Although courage tends to respond more swiftly to sudden crisis there is no reason to doubt popular fortitude in a less spectacular, long term "emergency" once the situation and America's goals are unequivocally announced.