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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON 20330



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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Dear Elliott:

I share your concern over our inability to satisfy the doubts of the "conscientious dissenter," but I do not believe the problem is secrecy. Some information from clandestine sources cannot be revealed without jeopardizing the lives of agents or the effectiveness of our intelligence system, but on the whole there has been open disclosure of most military and political information.

The Department of State has issued two white papers and numerous information notes which make the following case. To me it is a convincing case of external aggression although it is by no means as easily defined as Pearl Harbor or North Korean divisions attacking across the 38th Parallel.

1. After the Geneva agreements of 1954 Hanoi forcefully communized its own territory, executing between 50,000 and 200,000 people in the process. South Vietnam did then reject the planned North and South elections in 1956, on the basis that fair elections could not be held under the totalitarian system operating in the North.

2. Based on evidence collected in 1961, the International Control Commission (with Communist Poland's delegate dissenting) found that North Vietnam had sent arms and men into South Vietnam to carry out subversion with the aim of overthrowing the legal government there. The ICC also found that Hanoi had violated four provisions of the Geneva accords.

3. The key leadership and hard corps units of the VC were trained in the North, sent into S. Vietnam and operated under Hanoi's direction, at least some 40,000 trained men by the end of 1964.

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4. Lower level VC forces were recruited in South Vietnam. Certainly the existence of these forces reflects in part an indigenous South Vietnamese Communist movement, but much of the recruiting was through kidnapings and terrorism. Recent statements by a captured Viet Cong leader indicated that the percent of volunteers had declined to less than 50% by 1966.

5. Hanoi began sending in organized units of the North Vietnamese army in 1964 -- a year before the introduction of U.S. units. In 1967 North Vietnamese troops constitute over 50% of regular combat battalions, and North Vietnamese are also being used as replacements in Viet Cong units.

6. In 1964 alone, 436 South Vietnamese hamlet chiefs, school teachers, etc., were killed outright by the VC. More than 1,350 civilians were killed in terrorist bombings, and at least 8,400 were kidnapped.

7. The Lao Dong Party, the Communist Party of North Vietnam, directs both North Vietnam and the Viet Cong and sees the war as an integral part of the worldwide Communist revolutionary struggle.

Since the "facts" about a war can never be completely known, and are never interpreted in the same way by all conscientious observers, we may have to expect "conscientious dissent" as a valid indication that we are indeed a free society with a well developed moral conscience. Some claim that dissent was greater in many of our previous wars including the Revolutionary War. Needless to say, there is no indication of dissent against the war effort in North Vietnam, the USSR, or Communist China. Absence of dissent in the U.S. would be neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for proving we are right.

The real cause of our disagreement over the war in Vietnam may not be the immediate "facts," but basic attitudes concerning the state of the world. For some two decades we have periodically been assured that Communism is no longer a threat and that Communist states seek only their own security. Some among us have been so anxious for Communism to change

from an aggressive ideological movement to benign national bureaucracies that they have forgotten the past and future importance of our own firm defensive arrangements in bringing about such an evolution. As a result, it is hard for them to accept the Viet Cong as anything but a local revolution with little international significance.

I feel this is a very dangerous assumption. The Communists continue to believe that they will eventually rule the entire world and that it is their duty to seize whatever opportunities they can to achieve that result. In spite of sharp differences among themselves, the USSR, Communist China, North Vietnam, and most other Communist Parties join together in support of the war in Vietnam as another step in the worldwide "socialist" revolution. Communist agents are attempting to instigate similar guerrilla wars in Laos, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Korea, and many countries in Latin America. Success in Vietnam will not insure automatic Communist victory elsewhere, but it would certainly strengthen the hand of Communist cadres and weaken the position of free world governments in the lesser developed areas.

As to the interests of the United States, we are only a few of the three billion people on this earth. We know that we cannot live as an isolated island. If we abandon our commitments and our allies, the spectre of such totalitarianism will indeed haunt and quite possibly overwhelm the world. The result may be much more serious conflict than we face in Vietnam. If we hold fast, the prospects for a thriving free world community and a working detente with the Communists will be good.

The above notes represent my personal beliefs concerning the war. I would appreciate hearing more from you concerning your own doubts. I will suggest the preparation of a new white paper -- and I am enclosing some State Department information notes on Vietnam.

Sincerely,


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