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"United States Policy in Vietnam," by Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, 26 March 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 13 April 1964

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"At the Third National Congress of the Lao Dong (Communist) Party in Hanoi, September 1960, North Vietnam's belligerency was made explicit. Ho Chi Minh stated, 'The North is becoming more and more consolidated and transformed into a firm base for the struggle for national reunification.' At the same congress it was announced that the party's new task was 'to liberate the South from the atrocious rule of the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen.' In brief, Hanoi was about to embark upon a program of wholesale violations of the Geneva agreements in order to wrest control of South Vietnam from its legitimate government.

"To the communists, 'liberation' meant sabotage, terror, and assassination: attacks on innocent hamlets and villages and the coldblooded murder of thousands of schoolteachers, health workers, and local officials who had the misfortune to oppose the communist version of 'liberation.' In 1960 and 1961 almost 3,000 South Vietnamese civilians in and out of government were assassinated and another 2,500 were kidnaped. The communists even assassinated the colonel who served as liaison officer to the International Control Commission.

"This aggression against South Vietnam was a major communist effort, meticulously planned and controlled, and relentlessly pursued by the government in Hanoi. In 1961 the Republic of Vietnam, unable to contain the menace by itself, appealed to the United States to honor its unilateral declaration of 1954. President Kennedy responded promptly and affirmatively by sending to that country additional American advisers, arms, and aid.

U.S. Objectives:

"I turn now to a consideration of United States objectives in South Vietnam. The United States has no designs whatever on the resources or territory of the area. Our national interests do not require that South Vietnam serve as a Western base or as a member of a Western alliance. Our concern is threefold.

"First, and most important, is the simple fact that South Vietnam, a member of the free world family, is striving to preserve its independence from communist attack. The Vietnamese have asked our help. We have given it. We shall continue to give it.

"We do so in their interest; and we do so in our own clear self-interest. For basic to the principles of freedom and self-determination which have sustained our country for almost two centuries is the right of peoples everywhere to live and develop in peace. Our own security is strengthened by the determination of others to remain free, and by our commitment to assist them. We will not let this member of our family down, regardless of its distance from our shores.

"The ultimate goal of the United States in Southeast Asia, as in the rest of the world, is to help maintain free and independent nations which can develop politically, economically, and socially and which can be responsible members of the world community. In this region and elsewhere many peoples share our sense of the value of such freedom and independence. They have taken the risks and made the sacrifices linked to the commitment to membership in the family of the free world. They have done this in the belief that we would back up our pledges to help defend them. It is not right or even expedient--nor is it in our nature--to abandon them when the going is difficult.

"Second, Southeast Asia has great strategic significance in the forward defense of the United States. Its location across east-west air and sea lanes flanks the Indian subcontinent on one side and Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines on the other and dominates the gateway between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. In communist hands this area would pose a most serious threat to the security of the United States and to the family of free-world nations to which we belong. To defend Southeast Asia, we must meet the challenge in South Vietnam.

"And third, South Vietnam is a test case for the new communist strategy. Let me examine for a moment the nature of this strategy.

"Just as the Kennedy administration was coming into office in January 1961, Chairman Khrushchev made one of the most important speeches on communist strategy of recent decades. In his report on a party conference entitled 'For New Victories of the World Communist Movement,' Khrushchev stated: 'In modern conditions, the following categories of wars should be distinguished: world wars, local wars, liberation wars and popular uprising.' He ruled out what he called 'world wars' and 'local wars' as being too dangerous for profitable indulgence in a world of nuclear weapons. But with regard to what he called 'liberation wars,' he referred specifically to Vietnam. He said, 'It is a sacred war. We recognize such wars ...'"

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"President Kennedy and President Johnson have recognized, however, that our forces for the first two types of wars might not be applicable or effective against what the communists call 'wars of liberation,' or what is properly called covert aggression or insurgency. We have therefore undertaken and continue to press a variety of programs to develop skilled specialists, equipment, and techniques to enable us to help our allies counter the threat of insurgency.

"Communist interest in insurgency techniques did not begin with Khrushchev, nor for that matter with Stalin. Lenin's works are full of tactical instructions, which were adapted very successfully by Mao Tse-tung, whose many writings on guerrilla warfare have become classic references. Indeed, Mao claims to be the true heir of Lenin's original prescriptions for

the worldwide victory of communism. The North Vietnamese have taken a leaf or two from Mao's book--as well as Moscow's--and added some of their own.

"Thus today in Vietnam we are not dealing with factional disputes or the remnants of a colonial struggle against the French but rather with a major test case of communism's new strategy. That strategy has so far been pursued in Cuba, may be beginning in Africa, and failed in Malaya and the Philippines only because of a long and arduous struggle by the people of these countries with assistance provided by the British and the United States.

"In Southeast Asia the communists have taken full advantage of geography- the proximity to the communist base of operations and the rugged, remote, and heavily foliated character of the border regions. They have utilized the diverse ethnic, religious, and tribal groupings and exploited factionalism and legitimate aspirations wherever possible. And, as I said earlier, they have resorted to sabotage, terrorism, and assassination on an unprecedented scale.

"Who is the responsible party--the prime aggressor? First and foremost, without doubt, the prime aggressor is North Vietnam, whose leadership has explicitly undertaken to destroy the independence of the South. To be sure, Hanoi is encouraged on its aggressive course by Communist China. But Peiping's interest is hardly the same as that of Hanoi.

"For Hanoi, the immediate objective is limited: conquest of the South and national unification, perhaps coupled with control of Laos. For Peiping, however, Hanoi's victory would be only a first step toward eventual Chinese hegemony over the two Vietnams and Southeast Asia and toward exploitation of the new strategy in other parts of the world.

"Communist China's interests are clear: It has publicly castigated Moscow for betraying the revolutionary cause whenever the Soviets have sounded a cautionary note. It has characterized the United States as a paper tiger and has insisted that the revolutionary struggle for 'liberation and unification' of Vietnam could be conducted without risks by, in effect, crawling under the nuclear and conventional defense of the free world. Peiping thus appears to feel that it has a large stake in demonstrating the new strategy, using Vietnam as a test case. Success in Vietnam would be regarded by Peiping as vindication for China's views in the worldwide ideological struggle.

"Taking into account the relationship of Vietnam to Indochina-and of both to Southeast Asia, the Far East, and the free world as a whole-five U.S. Presidents have acted to preserve free-world strategic interests in the area. President Roosevelt opposed Japanese penetration in Indochina; President Truman resisted communist aggression in Korea; President Eisenhower backed Diem's efforts to save South Vietnam and undertook to defend Taiwan; President Kennedy stepped up our counterinsurgency effort in Vietnam; and President Johnson, in addition to reaffirming last week that the United States will furnish assistance and support to South Vietnam for as long as it is required to bring communist aggression and terrorism under control, has approved the program that I shall describe in a few minutes.

"The U.S. role in South Vietnam, then, is first, to answer the call of the South Vietnamese, a member nation of our free-world family, to help them save their country for themselves; second, to help prevent the strategic danger which would exist if communism absorbed Southeast Asia's people and resources; and third, to prove in the Vietnamese test case that the free-world can cope with communist 'wars of liberation' as we have coped successfully with communist aggression at other levels."