

VIETNAM 1969

An
American Friends
Service Committee
White Paper
on Ending the War
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The last year. It has been more than a year since the rhetoric of peace began in Vietnam. During this time scores of thousands of men and women and children have died in the fighting. They continue to die today, and every evidence in Vietnam is that they will continue to die tomorrow unless there is an unparalleled demand from the American people that the slaughter be halted. The American Friends Service Committee calls for a halt—now.

Like millions of others the world over, we felt a sense of relief a year ago that our country was at last moving toward a Vietnam settlement. We welcomed the initiation of the Paris talks, the halting of the bombing of North Vietnam, and, more recently, the reports of an Administration decision to undertake some form of U.S. military disengagement. We have hoped these steps would lead to a cease-fire and our country would begin to right its distorted priorities that require spending billions on destruction while our cities decay and our poor despair. But hope has not been enough. Little has really changed in the year that has passed.

Present illusions. We believe U.S. military and government leaders are fostering illusions in regard to Vietnam. Our own experience in Vietnam is so at variance with official interpretations that we cannot reconcile what we have seen with what is officially reported. Americans are under the impression that the war is all but over; it is not. They are being told that the U.S. military policy is one of restraint in the interest of progress in Paris; it is not. They are encouraged to think that the Thieu-Ky government is becoming more acceptable to the Vietnamese, that it is politically more secure, more resolute in carrying on the war, more ready to institute reforms, more competent to carry on with diminishing U.S. help. We find no evidence that these things are so.

In our judgment, the human situation in Vietnam today is worse than it has ever been; the cumulative result of U.S. involvement (on top of

25 years of warfare) borders not on Vietnam's salvation, but on its death. An entire nation is being physically, morally, and spiritually destroyed—and the tempo of destruction has increased, not decreased, since the beginning of the Paris talks and the bombing halt.

AFSC qualifications to comment. Our judgment on these matters is based on 15 years of relationship with Vietnam, the last four with full-time staff stationed variously in Saigon, Vung Tau, My Tho, Danang, An Khe, Pleiku, Hue, and, for the last two years, Quang Ngai. As far back as June 1954, we urged the U.S. not to follow the French example of trying to deal with Indo-China's problems in military terms, insisting that "nothing but disaster lies down that road."¹ Since the U.S. military involvement escalated in 1965, our field staff, speaking Vietnamese and living as closely as possible among the people, have regularly reported to us on the conditions around them. These reports make hard reading, chronicling as they do a tide of destruction that has gradually engulfed a people and torn apart the fabric of their lives. Here is what these reports have recorded:

Refugees. Four million people—one-third of the rural population of this rural nation—have fled their homes and become refugees in a country where land and village roots have an importance unknown in western culture.² Most have fled to the cities, which are quite unprepared to cope with the influx. Saigon's population has swelled to 2,800,000, making it the world's most crowded city, with more than twice the population concentration of Tokyo.³

1. June 8, 1954, Public Statement issued by the Board of Directors of the American Friends Service Committee.
2. Report of the Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees, Senator Edward Kennedy, chairman. May 9, 1968. The same report indicates that 80% of these refugees fled because of U.S. bombing. In our Quaker experience, this percentage is a conservative estimate.
3. *The Vietnam Guardian*, March 22, 1969: "Saigon: The World's Most Crowded City." Average density of Saigon is reported as 148 persons per acre; Tokyo, the second most densely populated city in the world, averages 63. Densities in Saigon are up to 830 persons per acre.

Destruction. Physical destruction is enormous. Hundreds of thousands of acres have been defoliated, countless villages have been razed, and bomb craters pockmark the countryside. B-52 raids alone have torn 2½ million holes 45 feet in diameter and 30 feet deep⁴—holes that are now filled with water and serve as breeding grounds for malarial mosquitoes and other insects. More tons of explosives have been dropped on this tiny country than were dropped on all the Axis powers in all of World War II, and with every month that passes the loads are bigger and the bombs heavier.⁵ In December 1968, the U.S. for the first time began using in Vietnam 10,000-pound bombs that had been stored in military depots for 15 years.⁶

Economic impact of war. The basic economy of the country has been destroyed, and only heavy imports of consumer goods from the U.S. and Japan keep inflation from assuming explosive dimensions. Corruption is epidemic. Vietnam's ancient Buddhist culture, with its village roots, its veneration of ancestors, its reliance on the extended family, has been torn apart by the impact of having quartered in its midst a half million foreign troops who know nothing of its ways or sensibilities. Prostitution and black marketing are rampant.

Suffering. In all of this the suffering of the Vietnamese has reached levels that would appall the American people if they could see it. Many thousands have been forced from their homes on short notice, incarcerated in tent cities and then after weeks or months been permitted to return to their villages—their homes destroyed,

4. *The Nation*, April 21, 1969. Report from Professors E. W. Pfeiffer and G. N. Orians of the Society for Social Responsibility in Science, as quoted in editorial, "Ravaging Vietnam."
5. November, 6.94 tons per sortie; December, 7.00 tons per sortie; January and February, 7.55 tons per sortie; March, 8.31 tons per sortie. These estimates were computed on the basis of figures on total tonnage and total number of sorties provided by the Southeast Asian News Desk, Directorate for Defense Information of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs).
6. *Washington Post*, December 27, 1968: "10,000-Pound Bombs Used to Clear Viet Landing Zone." These bombs, too big for conventional fighter-bombers, are reported as being dropped from C-130 cargo planes or flying crane helicopters.

their animals dead, and their fields mined.⁷ More thousands are caught under the bombs or between the contending forces, and the result is carnage.⁸ Even before the 1968 Tet offensive it was estimated that there were from 150,000 to 200,000 civilian casualties annually.⁹ Provision

7. In one such removal, during Operation Bold Mariner in January 1969, 12,000 peasants from the Batangan Peninsula were taken to a waterless camp near Quang Ngai over whose guarded gate floated a banner saying, "We thank you for liberating us from communist terror." These people had been given an hour to get out before the USS New Jersey began to shell their homes. After 8 weeks of imprisonment they were ferried back to what was left of their villages, given a few sheets of corrugated metal and told to fend for themselves. When asked what they would live on until new crops could be raised, the Vietnamese camp commander said, "Maybe they can fish."

8. A Quaker worker, writing from Quang Ngai late in February 1969, describes the situation as follows:

Several of us went to the roof about 3 a.m. The Americans unleashed the terrifying "Puff the Magic Dragon," a DC3 that spews forth 5000 machine gun bullets per minute. As I watched it circle overhead last night, silhouetted against the low clouds in the light of the flares, flinging indiscriminate bolts of death earthward, I could vividly visualize the scene below. Men, women, children and animals, caught like rats in a flood. No place to hide, no way to plead their case of innocence to the machine in the sky, no time to prepare for death. The beating the civilians are taking in this war is beyond adequate description.

Sitting behind the others on the roof I felt tears welling up and was shocked as I became aware of feelings foreign to my conscious self, which surfaced under the indescribable strain of watching man slaughter man en masse. The cold, mechanical, compassionless way that monster circled around and around and around, ruthlessly pursuing an unseen "enemy," stabbing viciously earthward again and again, probing, searching, killing and maiming all in its path . . .

We have survived, but a lot of Quang Ngai people didn't make it. And a lot more who are now clinging to life over at the hospital will not make it until morning. If only we could bring this horrifying scene of human devastation in its true dimensions home to the people who must know what it's like. The ones who are pulling the strings on this deadly puppet show. Man's inhumanity to man has reached its climax in Vietnam.

9. Report of the Kennedy Subcommittee, cited above. These figures, the report notes, are prior to the 1968 Tet offensive, which greatly increased the rate of civilian casualties.

for caring for the victims is hopelessly inadequate. Provincial hospitals today have few doctors, poor facilities, and often a shortage of medical supplies and even pain killers.¹⁰ The American Friends Service Committee, which has been involved in the relief of war suffering for more than half a century, has rarely encountered such misery as is found in Vietnam today.¹¹

U.S. escalation since Nov. 1, 1968. The United States, while it is publicly committed to a search

10. In Quang Ngai's 500 bed provincial hospital, for example, there were in late February over 600 patients, the great majority war-related. At one point, our Quaker physician and a single Vietnamese doctor were the only medical personnel available to care for this overflow load.

11. Consider the following, taken from one of many recent reports from Quaker workers in Quang Ngai:

How can I tell you what it was like! These people coming in filthy, with glazed looks, numb. Nobody talking, nobody crying and the sounds of furious battle, not yet ended pursuing them in the door. The emergency room floor still covered with blood from yesterday's casualties, smelled in the heat of the day and was oppressive . . .

One little fella of ten or so, shot in the face. Three bullet or fragment holes in the back and buttocks, one of which had exited through his abdomen, the others lodged somewhere. He, like most of the others, came in lying in a pool of blood. Feces and ground up bits of bone were flowing out of the buttocks wound. Vomitus ran from his mouth and mixed with the blood pouring from the face wound. We worked with him for a long time but his chances are slim. He was in shock (most of them were) and struggling to get up from time to time, at times opening his eyes wide to beg for water or complain of the pain in his belly and then lapsing into unconsciousness. His father stood by silently, grief written all over his face. A girl, maybe seven years old, with a head wound and skull fracture. Also major portions of one foot missing. Mother and grandmother crying quietly while trying to help us dress the wounds. A mother lying on a stretcher on the floor smeared with blood and with her infant lying silently on her chest. The baby also was covered with blood and I never saw it move.

I've seen all this before! Why can't I get used to it?! Each lifeless form, every scream of anguish, each blank stare of those who have suffered too much strikes pain in the pit of my stomach. Are there really those who can look at a scene like this and not suffer with the people?

for peace, has in fact stepped up its military activity since the bombing of the North was halted on November 1, 1968. Consider the following:

1. There are more U.S. troops in Vietnam today than there have ever been since the war began. On March 15 this figure was 540,500, in addition to 45,000 in Thailand and 35,000 in the Navy offshore.¹²
2. The number of battalion-sized operations initiated by the Allies and in progress during each month has grown steadily since the bombing halt. In November the figure was 800; in December, 956; in January, 1077.¹³ The actual figures for less-than-battalion-sized operations in this same period are still classified, but it is known that they, too, reflect a steady increase. Enemy-initiated actions in both of these categories are substantially lower than allied actions during these months, which indicates that it is the allies who have been pressing the fighting.¹⁴ Indeed, the North Vietnamese withdrew 30,000 to 40,000 troops from South Vietnam after the bombing halt.¹⁵ The inclusion of small scale terrorist activity by the NLF forces does not significantly alter the picture. These actions remained relatively constant through December at a level of approximately 100 a month, involv-

12. Figures provided by the Pentagon's Southeast Asian News Desk, March 26, 1969.

13. Ibid.

14. This is confirmed by the *New York Times*, April 18, 1969 ("U.S. Battle Let-Up Denied in Saigon") which reports that "American troops are continuing to follow a policy of maximum pressure against the enemy. Allied units are continuing to patrol and pursue the enemy aggressively." Later in the story an unidentified colonel is quoted as follows: "All our battalions and brigades are out and operating from one end of the country to the other, just as they've been doing for months. If the casualty figures are down, it's because the Vietcong didn't want to fight—not the United States."

15. Figures provided by the Pentagon's Southeast Asian News Desk, March 26, 1969. Senator George McGovern, speaking on the Senate floor March 17, 1969, reports this withdrawal was of "22 full regiments." Sources differed as to the reason for the withdrawal. The military attributed it to the need of North Vietnam to rest its battered forces; Senator McGovern suggests it was in response to the bombing halt.

ing the deaths of from 350 to 450 civilians monthly.¹⁶

3. Despite the cessation of missions over the North on November 1, the total tonnage of bombs dropped on Vietnam has increased every month since then, except for a slight decrease in the shorter month of February. In November 115,000 tons were dropped; in December, 127,700; in January, 129,700; in February, 115,800; in March, 130,141.¹⁷ The March figure is the highest monthly tonnage dropped since the war began.¹⁸
4. Since October the war has been carried into ostensibly neutral Laos with greatly increased intensity. Before November 1 there was an average of 150 bombing strikes daily over Laos in 1968.¹⁹ By the end of January the U.S. had 300 to 400 planes a day over Laos, or more than double the number being used before the November 1 bombing halt.²⁰ U.S. commanders have also been permitted to cross the border and carry ground fighting into Laos when they have felt the military situation required it.
5. U.S. battle deaths—always the inexorable barometer of the level of military action—offer final confirmation of the validity of the preceding statistics. These show a rise every month since the bombing halt: 600 American men lost their lives in October; 703 in November; 749 in December; 795 in January; 1073 in February; 1316 in March.²¹ Renewed military initiatives by the NLF and DRV forces did not begin until the last week of February.

16. South Vietnamese government figures, as reported by the Pentagon's Southeast Asian News Desk, March 26, 1969. Data available only through December 1968. These show 443 killed in October, 440 killed in November, 355 killed in December.

17. Figures provided by the Pentagon's Southeast Asian News Desk.

18. Statement based on a speech in the House by Representative Don Edwards (Dem., Calif.), March 26, 1969.

19. *New York Times*, November 1, 1968. William Beecher, "Laos Route to Be Pounded."

20. U.P.I., January 29, 1969.

21. Pentagon figures, updated from those quoted by W. F. Ryan (Dem., N.Y.) in the *Congressional Record*, March 26, 1969.

Where is there evidence in these statistics of a scaling down of allied operations?

U.S. Aims in Vietnam. Americans are assured that U.S. goals in Vietnam are limited ones. Earlier talk of victory has ceased as the death toll has risen and as the decimation of Vietnam has become apparent. Today the apologists for continued U.S. military action argue that our commitment will be fulfilled if our forces can achieve a reasonably pacified countryside, a reasonably stable government, and a reasonably effective Vietnamese army, capable of defending itself against its opponents. The American people are being assured that progress toward these goals is being made.²² On the basis of our experience, however, and without considering whether these are appropriate goals for the U.S. to be seeking, we do not believe they are in fact attainable:

1. **Pacification efforts have repeatedly failed over a ten-year period, and they will continue to fail.** The Hamlet Evaluation System, a U.S. introduced, computerized measurement of territorial security, may show the country to be 75% secure, but all who know the Vietnamese countryside dismiss such figures out of hand. They are worthless because the sources of data are biased, and the definition of "security" is elusive. As the recent Tet offensive has shown once again, the NLF can still move with impunity into any part of Vietnam, even into the very centers of U.S. military power. Despite the contrived reports of the computers and despite the billions of dollars

22. *New York Times*, January 3, 1969. Charles Mohr, "Major Gains Made by Vietnam Allies, Even Critics Assert." *Reader's Digest*, February 1969, an interview with Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., "In Vietnam the Enemy Is Beaten." When the NLF stepped up the fighting late in February 1969, the military made efforts to keep the vision of U.S. progress alive by downgrading these actions. See *New York Times*, March 11, 1969, Charles Mohr, "Field Checks in Vietnam Show Allies Understated Foe's Gains." The American Friends Service Committee can document this charge from its own experience as far as Quang Ngai is concerned, since the city has more than once since February 23 been subject to night ground attacks that have resulted in an occupation of at least 25% over a period of several hours. Yet, as far as we know, these actions have not been reported by the military briefers.

spent on pacification, there is today no part of Vietnam that is truly secure. Neither the U.S. nor Saigon is "winning the minds and hearts" of the Vietnamese. The countryside has not been pacified; it is less secure in 1969 than it was in 1965. Even the major cities, though ringed with fortifications, are vulnerable to attack and infiltration.²³ Quaker workers and Vietnamese sources report to us that anti-American feeling has never before been so intense as it is now.

2. **The Thieu-Ky government does not offer any promise of future stability.** The government in Saigon is a military dictatorship propped up by U.S. power, despised by most Vietnamese and notoriously corrupt. Freedom of speech is suppressed. No one knows exactly how many Vietnamese political prisoners languish in Vietnam's prisons, but the figure is certainly in the thousands, and includes many of the country's leading intellectuals: university professors, religious leaders, lawyers, students, newspaper editors, politicians—anyone who has dared to advocate political initiatives to end the war. Many of the leading figures in the present Saigon government fought for the French against their own countrymen. They represent an old and vanished order. Whatever the outcome in Vietnam, they will be swept away the moment the Vietnamese regain control of their own affairs. They are too weak a reed on which to pin any U.S. hope for future political stability.²⁴

3. **The South Vietnamese armed forces will never successfully take over the military**

23. Quang Ngai, as one provincial capital, for example, has over the past year been regularly infiltrated at night. In the weeks following Tet 1969, heavy street fighting erupted twice around our unarmed and unprotected Quaker compound, which is well within the city limits. Every house in Quang Ngai city has its sandbagged shelter to protect the occupants. This is the situation in a provincial city garrisoned by allied troops. Is this security?

24. Estimates from our AFSC contacts in Vietnam suggest 20% as the maximum support that Thieu-Ky could claim, with 80% in opposition. Some U.S. government estimates use these same figures but in reverse. We find it difficult to understand the basis for the official U.S. optimism on this point.

burden now carried by the United States. It is not hardware or training that is lacking in Saigon's armies. It is will, the one ingredient the United States will never be able to provide. Thieu's soldiers have no heart for this struggle and have not had any for years. Indeed, one of the most striking phenomena of the war is the contrast between the contending forces: a Vietnamese dressed in the peasant garb of the NLF is one of the world's most formidable fighting men; the same man in the uniform of Saigon is one of the world's poorest. Why? Because one believes he fights to drive the foreigner from his soil while the other fights only to sustain the power of a corrupt military clique.

Why the U.S. should withdraw. If, therefore, as the American Friends Service Committee believes, a continuing U.S. military presence in Vietnam will not result in any genuine pacification of a war-weary and embittered countryside, and will not make palatable a government that is not palatable, nor an army fight that has no will to fight, it becomes useless to pursue further a course that is leading nowhere. It is useless to stay on even for the purpose of a bargaining position in Paris, because we find no reason to think that time will serve to strengthen the U.S. position. This is why we believe that the only viable option left for the U.S. in Vietnam is to withdraw from the whole tragically misconceived adventure.

This is something the U.S. can do. Our military can cease all offensive action, all search-and-destroy missions, all air and sea attacks, and withdraw U.S. troops to port areas for repatriation. This action would have the paramount advantage of returning the future of Vietnam to the Vietnamese, where it belongs. Questions of reunification and political settlement are questions for the Vietnamese to answer, because the Vietnamese, whether they live in Hanoi or in Saigon, are still a single people. They were divided by foreign fiat at Geneva; they have been kept divided by U.S. preoccupation with anti-communism; but fiat and power do not undo the history of a thousand years. The Vietnamese remain one people and not two. They are presently torn by strife between North and South, and between contending forces within South Vietnam, but

these struggles can only be resolved by the Vietnamese themselves.

As the only foreigners in South Vietnam, the U.S. and its allies have nothing to negotiate but the rate and manner of their withdrawal. If our leaders were to acknowledge this and move to act on it, it would at once open up a whole new range of possibilities for the good offices of other nations to be used in mediation and in arranging for sanctuary or amnesty for those open to reprisal. This in itself would be a hopeful development.

There will be suffering and turmoil if the U.S. leaves. There may be a government in Saigon led by Ho Chi Minh; there may not be. Withdrawal does not mean that justice will be done. It does not insure fair elections or well-protected freedoms. It does not even insure that urgently needed resources will at last be released for use in America's cities, since the Pentagon has plans to use any savings for its own new weapons projects. But whatever happens, or fails to happen, will, in our judgment, be preferable to going on with the present agony of death and destruction that is literally destroying Vietnam, undermining our own domestic social fabric, and damaging our country's name in the world community.

The real problem for the United States in unilateral withdrawal is not in the military consequences in Vietnam, but the political consequences at home. We do not underestimate their magnitude, or the courage that would be required to face them. The President is under great pressure, and it may seem safer and wiser for him to pursue a less drastic course. But we believe that both the American people and the world at large would respond to forthright leadership to withdraw our country from this war, especially if it were made clear simultaneously that the U.S. stood ready to assist generously in the task of economic reconstruction. We are not calling for the United States to abandon Vietnam, but only to replace a destructive American presence with a constructive one that will act in concert with an international effort to provide such economic help as may be requested by the Vietnamese.

This approach would give us a whole new position in Southeast Asia. At the very least, it would change the present tragic image of the United States. Every day sees the armed forces of

the world's most powerful nation raining bombs and chemicals and napalm on the rice fields and bamboo huts of one of the poorest and most defenseless countries. As long as this continues, millions must wonder whether the Americans have indeed become the New Barbarians.

Let us therefore order a cease-fire and withdrawal from Vietnam, unilaterally and immediately. Let us get on with what is really important: the rebuilding of their country—and ours—and the lifting of the burden of poverty from the backs of Vietnamese and Americans alike. These are tasks in which Americans can join with enthusiasm.



GILBERT F. WHITE
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BRONSON P. CLARK
Executive Secretary

The American Friends Service Committee is a corporate expression of Quaker faith and practice. It is rooted in the conviction that each human life is sacred, each man a child of God, and that love, expressed through creative action, can overcome hatred, prejudice and fear. To that end, the Committee undertakes programs of relief, service and education, ministering to both the physical and spiritual needs of men. Its work is made possible by the generous cooperation of thousands of concerned persons of all faiths.

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