

“The Vietnam Syndrome”: Fascists Flipping Burgers in Saigon or Stalingrad

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For the vast majority of Westerners, that is to say both US Americans and their relatives (imagined or real) in Europe, the war against Vietnam was a brutal military conflict waged by the United States against a small Southeast Asian country by deploying up to some 500,000 combat personnel and more ordnance than dropped on Germany in WWII. The virtues of this endeavour are still disputed.

In fact there are numerous “technical” disputes which continue to make sober discussion of the period between 1945 and 1975 extremely difficult—never mind the attempts to draw coherent conclusions from the course of events.

After having destroyed much of Indochina with high explosives or carcinogenic toxins, massive military force withdrew from the territory of Vietnam in 1975, having delayed independence and unification of the country under a popular government by some thirty years. This generous description of the war’s effects pertains however only to the activity leading to the ostensible defeat of combined US Forces under the command of MACV, leaving the said US either relieved and/ or frustrated.

The events leading to the abandonment of the US embassy in Saigon on 30 April 1975 also gave rise to America’s own peculiar version of the Dolchstoßlegende—the so-called Vietnam Syndrome. Briefly described, the Vietnam Syndrome is a creation of the hormonally dysfunctional among the US ruling class, its acolytes and functionaries. As US comedian George Carlin once observed it reflects foreign policy formulated in the vulgate of pubescent males. America “withdrew too early”, was afraid to go “all the way”. The central thesis of this legend is that either the premature ejaculation or momentary impotence of the US war machine and those whose hands bring it to erection—also called “force projection”—led to a “loss of will”, to an inability to exercise national manhood by sodomising other countries in the future. (It is certainly no accident that foreign policy and war are waged largely by graduates of private nurseries organised as imitations of the infamously sadistic ancient public schools in Great Britain.) Of course not only the policy and military establishment were so indoctrinated but also the prefects of public communications, e.g. journalists employed by or managing the nation’s propaganda/ advertising corporations.

Yet like the original *Dolchstoßlegende* promoted to justify the re-militarisation of Germany and the cultivation of Nazism, Vietnam Syndrome is based on fundamental lies about the war that supposedly engendered it. The Vietnam Syndrome is a useful lie for the US regime just as it was for the German regime. In both cases the lie fostered latent fascism. German Nazism is defunct but since 1945 its spirit has been nurtured in the hearts and minds of those who rule the United States, its dependencies and the forces dedicated to the principle formulated so poignantly by Josiah Strong:

“It is manifest that the Anglo-Saxon holds in his hands the destinies of mankind, and it is evident that the United States is to become the home of this race, the principal seat of its power...”

These legends have some fundamental similarities. They are based on deliberate misrepresentations of the war and obfuscation with regard to the interests involved. In order to explain the deceptions behind the Vietnam Syndrome it is necessary to examine the “other war”. Contrary to much official history of US involvement in Indochina—the stuffing of almost all the films made—whether documentary or feature—the war began and ended as a CIA operation. The confusion as to war aims, strategy, tactical and operational effectiveness arise entirely from the fact that more than probably any other war fought with conventional forces—up to that time (except Korea but that war hasn’t ended yet)—the war in Vietnam was initiated, managed, funded, advertised and ultimately waged by the invisible army of US capitalism.



Villagers flee B-52 bombing Quang Tri provinve 1972. (Photo credit: Don North)

The war against Vietnam is often described as America’s first TV war in which the reality of war became present in the living rooms of Americans every night. This statement implies that TV viewers had access to the real war as it was waged—albeit not yet 24-7 or in “real time”. Per corollary—and this is one of the assumptions upon which the Vietnam Syndrome is based—those very Americans sitting addicted between Leave it to Beaver re-runs and Bonanza actually saw the war in Vietnam on their television sets. Even a cursory examination of the news footage posted in the Internet and the archival material offered in documentary films belies this.

The presentation of the Vietnam War was with virtually no exception carefully structured in network headquarters before being served to US viewers. Even the controversial Cam Ne story Morley Safer filed and the special report on the battle of Ia Drang were polished by corporate editors at CBS, if only to make them fit into the carefully measured segments between commercials. William Paley, owner and chief executive of CBS, was an old psychological warfare officer in the US Army during WWII—and certainly no opponent of the war or the US government. Just like today’s extreme broadcast entertainment, reality TV, the television quality of the war in Vietnam was not an exposure of the war but a structuring of images, often if not primarily intended to conceal what was actually happening in Indochina.

Far from random, every broadcast had to be approved by corporate management and such approval usually meant checking with friends or functionaries in the government to “confirm” whatever might be said in public. The intended effect was either to cultivate and

manage support for the war or control damage impending or caused by unanticipated disclosures or “leaks” from the geographically sealed environment in which the war was waged. Of course, when the war became a mass spectacle with troop strengths increasing and body bags multiplying, damage control in the form of structured or distractive reporting became more crucial. As the number of witnesses to the war increased the corporate state and its media turned their focus toward distortion rather than concealment. Then as now the ability to magnify trivial events and trivialise major events enhances propaganda efforts far more than conventional censorship or secrecy rules.

The occasional willingness of corporate managers to use their control over media resources in political faction fights should not be confused with any supposed ethical commitment to something as obtuse as informing the citizenry to enable them to make intelligent decisions in the governing of the republic. The latter is officially stated policy of large media conglomerates because such policy is part of their product packaging and competitive strategy to win customers for the advertisers and owners to maximise profits and market share. It is important to remember this fact when assessing “the other war”. This covert war—the core of US aggression against Vietnam—depended as much on the capacity of corporate media to wage psychological warfare against the US population as it did upon the conventional military to bomb, strafe, incinerate and otherwise obliterate Vietnamese Vietnam. The quality of public debate, with the benefit of over 40 years of hindsight, does not indicate very much progress in finding, let alone facing the truths about the US war against Vietnam.

Even the infamous Pentagon Papers—generally considered to be a watershed of revelations whose publication by the New York Times turned public opinion against the war—were released in such a way that a disclosure augmented concealment. The leaked documents described the US military activity in Vietnam but omitted chapters describing the CIA role in the war.

In Michael Curtiz’ 1942 film *Casablanca*, German major Strasser, presumably a part of the military mission in French Morocco, reacts angrily to a spontaneous display of Free French patriotism in Rick’s Café Americain by demanding that the police Prefect Renault close the club. Renault, agreeing reluctantly but unwilling to appear as responding to German commands, declares the club closed on the pretext that illegal gambling has been discovered—not before collecting his winnings. The film viewer recognises Renault’s faint unlike the readers of the New York Times or Washington Post.

Until 1965, the war in Vietnam was almost entirely covert. That does not mean it was secret, in the sense of invisible, but that it was kept largely unknown. The war was waged by the covert action arms of the French accompanied by US “advisors” followed by a transition to CIA. US strategy was to frustrate the consolidation of the Vietnamese nationalist state—the PRVN—in Hanoi by isolating it politically, economically, and demographically. Having adopted the French shell company, the *État du Vietnam*, created by the retreating French in 1949, they needed to prevent the elections agreed in the 1954 Geneva Accords and build a nation capable of sustaining the shell, which the US then baptised the Republic of Vietnam. The problem was that they had created a country but this country had no citizenry beyond the officials, functionaries and economic beneficiaries of the shell in Saigon.

The approach can be compared to a group of investors who approach a lawyer to establish a new company or tax vehicle, etc. The lawyer has an off-the-shelf entity that is already

incorporated. The investors buy the entity for a nominal sum, change the name, appoint new directors and inject the required capital to conduct business with limited liability. Not only is this a faster way to license a business in corporate form, it also can limit the disclosures that investors might be required to make were they registering the company personally for the first time. As an organisation founded mainly by corporate lawyers and their traditional hired thugs—often from the days of “white shoe” terrorism in Latin America, the corporate lawyer’s approach to Vietnam was quite a natural choice from the beginning—far more fitting than an ostentatious military campaign.

In order to create a Republic of Vietnam, the shell bought by the Company to offer a foothold for US corporate expansion in Southeast Asia, it was not enough to inject a few billion dollars and run it like the French had run the État. To prevail in the election agreed under the 1954 Geneva Accords, the CIA found it needed a population—one that would vote to remain citizens of a state that did not exist in the minds of the majority of Vietnamese. The CIA and its subsidiaries, affiliates, and joint venture partners invested enormous energy and sums of money to rally population from Tonkin to help fill the South with more people and thus increase the number of votes available. Under no conditions were Vietnamese to be allowed to choose their own form of political organisation. A strong cohesive shareholder minority below the 18th parallel was positioned with CIA assistance to exert a controlling interest and eject the hostile shareholders, rejecting their share certificates as somehow fraudulent in what would become an extremely violent “proxy fight”.

Strictly speaking this was the underlying premise of “nation-building”, a fashionable slogan even today for interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Nation-building sounds like a friendly, benevolent activity particularly to Westerners who have been taught the founding myths of the United States. However, the people of Vietnam already understood themselves as a nation before the US arrived. The problem faced by the US regime was not the absence of a nation, that still had to be built, but the presence of one incompatible with the needs of the United States. Franz Neumann argued in 1942, National sovereignty handicaps imperialist expansion. Indeed whenever democratic states resort to expansion, they almost invariably abandon the national concept and glorify racial and biological traits that allegedly make them superior to the conquered. The doctrine of the white man’s burden illustrates this point, and is true of the United States.

There was no need to build a Vietnamese nation as far as the Vietnamese were concerned. The problem for the US invaders was to create and consolidate a corporate vassal state. As Neumann also pointed out,

“The modern state however has not been created by the nation but resulted from the introduction of commodity production, which has preceded the appearance of modern nations. When the product of labor as a commodity is convertible into money, this money can be used to build the state and establish a bureaucracy and standing army.”

Pre-existing Vietnam was rejected just as General Hodges rejected the People’s Committees in Korea and Admiral Dewey rejected the Philippine Republic in 1899. In order to build the nation most favourable for US corporate exploitation, it was necessary to destroy any semblance of the existing one. Vietnam was not a settlement operation, like the North American continent. Unlike the indigenous North Americans, the Vietnamese could no longer be driven into extinction- to do so would also have removed the cheap labour needed to

work the country as a business. Unable to settle they had to make Vietnam a business venture with Vietnamese (which US corporations are arguably doing now.) The business venture had to be made attractive by creating a captive market— just like GM systematically opposed or destroyed public transport to promote cars. “Nation-building” is jargon to describe how the US regime creates markets—for products nobody needs—to extract maximum profits. US objectives were criminal from the start in the way corporations organise criminal activity, euphemistically called “business”.

With the decision to create a Republic of Vietnam virtually out of whole cloth, mainly the rags left by the French, a series of policies and practices evolved that were on the one hand consistent with the deepest political and cultural sins of the United States and on the other hand best exemplify the relationship between the US corporate elite and their National Socialist brethren.

From the standpoint of the US regime the fates of Vietnam and Korea were integrally linked in the vision of a US Asia-Pacific empire. The empire’s covert warriors certainly felt they had learned from Korea and hoped to dispense with the kind of war that had been fought there. The introduction of massive military force was certainly not planned or intended before 1964. The corporate lawyers at Langley and the corporations they represent were convinced that the experience in Iran, throughout Latin America, especially in Guatemala, and in manipulating Western European politics had allow them to capitalise their new Indochina shell in Vietnam. By 1964 they had discovered they were wrong. A thousand years of Vietnamese identity could not be erased with ad campaigns displaying burger-flippers like McDonald’s serving in Vietnamese. The shell company was threatened with bankruptcy if something was not done to create a sustainable market—to manufacture a population that would demand “RVN product”.

“Civic Action” is deliberately portrayed as the deployment of rugged soldiers performing relief or construction operations for people in need. It plays on fantasies of masculinity and chivalry also implying that the civic action tasks are undertaken under such difficult conditions that only soldiers would be capable of performing them. The weapons borne by the soldiers are subconsciously turned into ploughshares following the narrative of the “good American soldier” which has been the stock of Hollywood propaganda for decades. To a limited extent this “generosity” is supposed to persuade the target population too. However, the soldiers’ weapons are not the innocent accessories of macho construction workers as presented for metropolitan consumption.

The French and US civic action programs were always decoration for intelligence and counter-insurgency operations. The principal counter-insurgency strategy pursued until 1964 was the so-called “strategic hamlet system”. Since the armed Vietnamese resistance to the French *État du Vietnam* and the US Republic of Vietnam was defined as an alien force which relied upon the local population for support, attempts were made to resettle rural populations in fortified camps and thus isolate them from the supposed foreign invaders. This policy was not fundamentally different from the British concentration camps in South Africa. For one obvious reason, this strategy could not succeed on its own—the supposed “foreign” invaders were not foreign at all. Since there was no identifiable distinction between pro-American and anti-American Vietnamese, the expensive and ultimately half-hearted strategic hamlets program was deemed a failure.

More intensive and diverse marketing instruments were required if the competition for

political loyalty in Vietnam was to be curbed and eliminated. The Catholic-dominated burger joint in Saigon could neither make an edible hamburger nor smile convincingly to the Buddhist majority at the counter. None of the customers were impressed and even worse they exhibited no particular interest in hamburgers and fries under the stars and stripes (if not the golden arches). Corporate management was faced with its last alternative to create a stable market by a) destroying the competition and b) destroying the competitor's customer base. Corporate empires are established and maintained not by talent but by deploying business talent in the respective theatres of economic warfare. Creating a US vassal state with a captive population follows the same principles applied by Exxon, Microsoft or McDonald's. Like the US itself, these corporate brands are ubiquitous because of conquest and the ideology of business (especially entrepreneurialism) that equates their success with progress and freedom. The impending failure of the Saigon label only intensified demands for proper elections as agreed in Geneva and threatened the entire business venture. More time was needed and covert action was simply not working fast enough.

The USS Maddox incident in the Gulf of Tonkin provided the pretext for creating open hostilities between the US and the PRV. With a quasi-state of war now extant between the US and the government in Hanoi, elections could be indefinitely postponed and more cover could be given for intensified covert operations—the marketing campaign to create an RVN population that could be permanently isolated from the PRV. The Southeast Asia Resolution was also adopted to deceive the US public about the nature of US policy in Vietnam. The ideology of business is sufficiently strong among US Americans to sustain a policy of ordinary economic exploitation. However, exploitation of Indochina was part of an Asia-Pacific strategy that had already cost billions (for Korea) and would cost even more. Therefore it was deemed necessary to package the billions in future subsidies to US corporations in terms of national defence and protection of Vietnamese from communism. The Tonkin Gulf show was needed to justify despatching combat forces actually needed to support the covert war already under way. From that point onward, the only Vietnamese in the eyes of the US television viewers were those in the US-occupied South. The Vietnamese in the PRV were simply communists without any nationality (just as communists had been defined as foreigners in the US).



Corporate propaganda—advertising—is an accepted part of life in the US and much of the West. People pay exorbitant amounts of money to function as billboards for corporations—that is to wear branded clothing, eat branded food, and imitate the behaviour of branded celebrities. It may be argued that it is harmless as long as people can choose not to wear Nike clothing, eat McDonald's hamburgers, and can walk or cycle instead of driving cars. The domination of the burger, software and fuel markets by a handful of megalomaniacs and their corporate instruments may be tolerable if ultimately indigestible. The same cannot be said about a country where

the majority of the population are faced with swallowing the corporate product or being destroyed. The US essentially dissolved Vietnam—as they had other Asian republics they targeted—and declared the territory open for exploitation (development). The overall mission, the strategy and tactics applied in the attempt to fulfil this mission were essentially identical to those for which highest-ranking Nazi officials and functionaries were tried in Nuremberg after 1945.

The Nuremberg Principles, derived from the statutes of the International Military Tribunal adopted in London and the tribunal's rulings in the course of the Nuremberg trials, are deemed part of international law. Aside from subsequent conventions and treaties, torture, retaliatory attacks against non-combatants, slave labour, as well as summary execution under denial of due process were all held to be crimes for which both individuals, governments and corporate entities could be held liable. In addition aggressive war was established as a crime under international law—a principle also articulated in the UN Charter. Although the US was a principal party to the Nuremberg statutes and the tribunal, its reservations (and today one can say refusal) with regards to jurisdiction were presaged in the cautious remarks made by the US Chief Counsel Robert Jackson:

“Unfortunately, the nature of these crimes is such that both prosecution and judgment must be by victor nations over vanquished foes. The worldwide scope of the aggressions carried out by these men has left but few real neutrals. Either the victors must judge the vanquished or we must leave the defeated to judge themselves. After the First World War, we learned the futility of the latter course. The former high station of these defendants, the notoriety of their acts, and the adaptability of their conduct to provoke retaliation make it hard to distinguish between the demand for a just and measured retribution, and the unthinking cry for vengeance which arises from the anguish of war. It is our task, so far as humanly possible, to draw the line between the two. We must never forget that the record on which we judge these defendants today is the record on which history will judge us tomorrow. To pass these defendants a poisoned chalice is to put it to our own lips as well. (emphasis added) We must summon such detachment and intellectual integrity to our task that this Trial will commend itself to posterity as fulfilling humanity's aspirations to do justice.”

Since 1945 the US regime has regularly circumvented application of the Nuremberg precedents by exempting itself from jurisdiction of international criminal court venues and extending such exemption to its agents, functionaries, and armed forces. The US exerts its sovereignty and its pretension to the highest judicial standards to argue that even to the extent it might accept the Nuremberg Principles as binding, no foreign court or international court empaneled with non-US judges could conceivably render a “fair” verdict.

As a result the United States has never been successfully prosecuted and subjected to international criminal law judgement that was enforced. In 1989, the US regime began what can only be called an aggressive psychological war against the governments of target countries using pseudo-judicial venues imposed by multilateral treaties.

Despite the proliferation of such venues, the US has also exempted itself from the jurisdiction of these fora. The International Criminal Court—whatever virtues it might have, were it in fact governed by the original UN system—is little more than an instrument designed to give US attacks against the “infrastructure” of its enemies the “colour of law”. It

is part of the combination of quasi-judicial measures, economic sanctions, military invasions or assaults, and covert terror operations that evolved out of the Vietnam “experience”. There are different names for this package: humanitarian intervention, “right to protect” (R2P), or just plain anti-terrorism (anti-communism having become obsolete).

The origins of this global corporate strategy, successfully applied in Indonesia in 1965, where at least one million or more people were murdered imposing a US vassal regime with virtually no trace of US/ UK initiative, can be found in the policies and practices of the Nazi regime developed and applied for the extermination of the Soviet Union—Operation Barbarossa. In fact, the US regime slaughtered approximately the same proportion of the Vietnamese population as were killed by the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union—some 20%.

An essential part of the Nazi war aims was the settlement and exploitation of the European part of the Soviet Union. The details of this were later outlined in Generalplan Ost. Once the Wehrmacht had invaded Soviet territory, the Soviet Union was deemed extinct as a political entity. The population was reduced to the status of stateless persons who would then become subject to the protection of the realm (Reich). Specific secret instructions were issued to the German military commanders in what have been called the Barbarossa Jurisdiction Decrees.

The view adopted by the Nazi regime was that since the Soviet Union was not a party to either the Hague or Geneva conventions governing the conduct of land war, its civilians—in particular the political leadership—did not constitute protected persons. Hitler explained the regime’s logic by saying that the war against the Soviet Union was not between states but was a “race war” against the “Jewish-Bolshevist” criminals in order to establish the living space needed for Germany. Franz Neumann called this a “Germanic Monroe Doctrine”.

The focus on the US military operations, particularly against the PRV regular army, that is to say on the conventional war in Vietnam—is both distracting and deceptive. No doubt the destruction and viciousness of US bombing, chemical warfare and daily atrocities in the course of sweeps, cordon and search, search and destroy, and field engagements with NVA units was unspeakable. The profits earned by US corporations arming the US military were obscene. US land forces, Army and Marines, lived up to their own traditions from more than a century of terrorising and exterminating indigenous peoples. The air forces continued—despite overwhelming evidence of its futility—bombing Vietnam as if it were one long Dresden. Indeed conventional military operations had their own dynamic. If Vietnam had been a conventional war, almost like Korea, the violence would have been atrocious to be sure.

However in Vietnam the military was not there of its own accord. The US military had been sent to occupy Japan and Korea, but not to occupy Vietnam. Amidst all the dioxin-soaked, cratered square kilometres of Vietnam despoiled by the customers of DuPont, Dow, General Motors et al. are the untold thousands of people murdered by CIA’s death squad prototype, what became the CIA’s Phoenix program. While the US television viewer was gratifying his patriotism vicariously, the covert war—euphemistically called the “war for hearts and minds” was accelerated. DuPont and Dow were “creating better lives through chemistry” and CIA was coordinating an immense bureaucratic network designed to convert or kill the competition for its own version of Vietnam.

Leaving aside the dubious legality of the US invasion by regular troops in 1965, CIA action

defied any pretence to legality. US officials were under no statutory authority to conduct surveillance against

Vietnamese citizens, pursue them through police or military measures, interrogate, sentence, detain, imprison—or kill them—not to mention torture. Hence all CIA operations whether conducted directly by US civilian or military organisations had to be dressed in the bureaucratic clothing of the Vietnamese state the US had created. The original legal system of the Republic of Vietnam was deemed inadequate so CIA had the constitution amended to make communism and being a communist a crime. The effect of this and other emergency legislation and executive decrees was to create a veneer of statutory legality for the actions CIA wanted to conduct in Vietnam through its hired surrogates. The laws might constitute bills of attainder, incompatible with US law, but because this was Vietnam, the CIA could argue that Vietnamese law permitted the actions whose execution it was merely advising. Formal legality (as opposed to substantive justice) is not only endemic to bureaucracies like the CIA but also characteristic of corporate law practice—the legal culture that prevails in the agency.

The second line of defence for extra-legal CIA practices was that they were not policy. William Colby testified that while torture and assassinations were no doubt performed by people associated with Phoenix, Phoenix was not an assassination program. US Congressman Pete McCloskey charged that the planned assassinations under Phoenix violated “several treaties and laws”—in particular Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions which prohibits “the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognised as indispensable by civilized peoples.” Torture, mutilation and cruel treatment are also forbidden. Colby claimed—based on a legal opinion prepared in-house—that Vietnamese citizens were not “protected persons” in terms of the Geneva Conventions. Several contortions were used to exclude civilians from protection of ordinary laws as well as international law. In practice the Phoenix program defined anyone whose loyalty to the Saigon regime was not absolutely demonstrated and certified to be an enemy—essentially non-Vietnamese, a foreigner and stateless person afforded no legal protections whatsoever.

This is precisely the legal framework created by the Barbarossa Jurisdiction Decree and so-called Political Commissar Decree issued by the German High Command to regulate the political warfare waged against the Soviet Union. These bear citing at length:

Decree on the jurisdiction of martial law and on special measures of the troops

The exercise of martial law serves primarily to maintain military discipline.

The wide extent of operational space in the East, the form of combat that this offers, and the peculiarity of the enemy, present tasks to the courts martial...that, with their limited personnel, they can only solve, if military law restricts itself for the time being to its central task.

That is only possible if the troops themselves defend themselves against every threat from the enemy civilian population without mercy....

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Treatment of criminal acts by enemy civilians

1. Criminal acts of enemy civilians are withdrawn until further notice from the jurisdiction of courts-martial and summary courts.
2. Guerrillas are to be dispatched without mercy by the troops either in combat or while trying to escape.
3. Furthermore, all other attacks by enemy civilians against the Wehrmacht, its members and retinue are to be repelled on the spot by the most extreme measures up to the destruction of the attacker.
4. Where measures of this kind were missed or were initially not possible, the suspicious elements are to be immediately brought before an officer. He will decide whether they are to be shot.

Collective drastic action will be taken immediately against communities from which treacherous or insidious attacks against the Wehrmacht are launched, on the orders of an officer with at least the rank of battalion commander upwards, if the circumstances do not permit a speedy apprehension of individual culprits.

5. It is expressly forbidden to detain suspected culprits, in order to hand them over to the courts when jurisdiction over native inhabitants is restored to these.

II.

Treatment of criminal acts by members of the Wehrmacht or its retinue against native civilians

1. For acts which members of the Wehrmacht or its retinue commit against enemy civilians, there is no compulsion to prosecute, even when the act represents at the same time a military crime or offense.
2. In judging such deeds it is to be considered in any proceedings that the collapse in the year 1918, the later period of suffering of the German people, and the battle against National Socialism with the movement's countless sacrifices of blood are incontestably to be attributed to Bolshevik influence, and that no German has forgotten that.
3. The chairman of the court must therefore examine whether a disciplinary reprimand is appropriate or whether it is necessary to institute judicial proceedings. The chairman only orders court-martial proceedings for acts against native inhabitants, when the maintenance of discipline or the protection of the troops demands it. That applies, for example, in the case of serious acts that result from the loss of sexual restraint, are derived from a criminal disposition, or are a sign that the troops are threatening to run wild. Criminal acts, by which lodgings or supplies or other plunder are senselessly destroyed to the detriment of our own troops, are not on the whole to be judged more leniently.

This secret decree bears uncanny resemblance to the emergency decrees, the outlawing of communism, and the administrative detentions laws upon which the Phoenix program was based, and which represent the core CIA strategy for "neutralising" the so-called Viet Cong Infrastructure. The Commissar decree goes even further:

Guidelines for the Treatment of Political Commissars

In the battle against Bolshevism, the adherence of the enemy to the principles of humanity or international law is not to be counted on. In particular the treatment of those of us who are taken prisoner in a manner full of hatred, cruelty and inhumanity can be expected from the political commissars of every kind as the real pillars of opposition.

The troops must be aware that:

1. In this battle mercy or considerations of international law with regard to these elements is false. They are a danger to our own safety and to the rapid pacification of the conquered territories.

2. The originators of barbaric, Asiatic methods of warfare are the political commissars. So immediate and unhesitatingly severe measures must be undertaken against them.

They are therefore, when captured either in battle or offering resistance, as a matter of routine to be dispatched by firearms.

The following provisions also apply:

2. ...Political commissars as agents of the enemy troops are recognizable from their special

badge—a red star with a golden woven hammer and sickle on the sleeves.... They are to be separated from the prisoners of war immediately, i.e. already on the battlefield. This is necessary, in order to remove from them any possibility of influencing the captured soldiers.

These commissars are not to be recognized as soldiers; the protection due to prisoners of war under international law does not apply to them. When they have been separated, they are to be finished off.

3. Political commissars who have not made themselves guilty of any enemy action nor are suspected of such should be left unmolested for the time being. It will only be possible after further penetration of the country to decide whether remaining functionaries may be left in place or are to be handed over to the Sonderkommandos. The aim should be for the latter to carry out the assessment. Guideli

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In judging the question “guilty or not guilty”, the personal impression of the attitude and bearing of the commissar should as a matter of principle count for more than the facts of the case which it may not be possible to prove.”

The Sonderkommandos (special units) included SS and SD as well as specially constituted police units. Phoenix after 1965 operated just like the Wehrmacht in the Soviet Union. Regular military devastated the Vietnamese countryside, while specialised political assassination units were responsible for despatching VCI—what the Nazi regime called the “real pillars of the opposition” during its invasion of the Soviet Union. Citizens in the territory occupied by the Wehrmacht and other organs of the NS state were not even subject to martial law with its administrative procedures. Phoenix operated along the same lines. Vietnamese had no protection from the violence of US military occupation of their country.

The CIA had incited the military invasion of Vietnam because the assumptions of its marketing strategy—that there Vietnamese could be persuaded to stop being Vietnamese or denounce fellow citizens as being “not Vietnamese” and therefore beyond the pale, i.e. subject to extermination were false. Despite its initial plans to change from a “shotgun” approach to a “rifle” approach, the only way to protect the long and uncertain road to a Vietnam purified of nationalists, communists and anyone else considered ideologically unreliable in corporate Vietnam was to bring Barbarossa-type fire power against the rural population, destroying its means of subsistence and concentrating the population so that the death squad system could do the rest.

So-called Vietnamisation—following the withdrawal of US combat troops in 1973—was intended to transfer as much of CIA pacification technology and organisation to ostensibly Republic of Vietnam institutions. However this failed in the end for two reasons. First of all VCI was never accepted as a legitimate or workable pacification target. It was understood by all Vietnamese (even those who exploited it opportunistically) as an entirely US idea. Secondly as long as the CIA had funds to finance Phoenix there were people willing to take the money. When funds dried up, Vietnamese Phoenix units were unable to operate and degenerated into private criminal organisations beyond political control.

The Phoenix program collapsed in Vietnam with the withdrawal of military cover, evaporation of covert funding and the defeat of the Saigon burger-flippers. But by that time a whole generation of US military, foreign civil service and CIA officers had been through the Phoenix “political and psychological warfare” school in Vietnam. The bird may have been incinerated in Saigon after 30 April 1975 but it has been reborn in thousands of places around the world ever since.

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