



# THE RAND PAPERS

*Between 1964 and 1969, the RAND Corporation conducted a major study of the National Liberation Front in Vietnam. Called the Viet Cong Motivation and Morale Project, this study gathered raw data from more than 2,000 interviews with NLF prisoners, defectors, and refugees from free fire zones. The results were classified.*

*In this issue of RAMPARTS, we are presenting documents of this project—some of them still classified—to the American public for the first time. We are also able to show the hitherto unreported story of the key role which this project played in the escalation of the war in 1965, and in the decision to commit massive numbers of U.S. air and land forces to Vietnam.*

*Of the many analyses that came out of the projects, those of RAND project-head Leon Goure in 1965 and 1966 were unique in that they spoke of weaknesses in NLF morale and strongly implied the impending collapse of the Vietnamese resistance. It was Goure's analyses that provided the scientific underpinning for the "light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel mentality" that was so crucial to the escalation of the war and the devastation that followed. In 1966, his work was identified by Carl Rowan as the "study which lies at the heart of President Johnson's strategy."*

*The implications of the Goure study are profound. For they indicate yet another aspect of that erosion of the democratic decision-making process that has attended every phase of the present conflict. For both the RAND inter-*

*views of NLF cadre—the most complete portrait available of the other side in this war—and the reports of Leon Goure, were classified and kept securely within the contract between the war-bent Executive and the private corporation, and thereby unavailable to the American people. (In fact, to this day Goure's reports are unavailable to Congress, which will have to read them in RAMPARTS.)*

*The problem is made even more poignant when one studies the actual interviews on which Goure's analyses are based. For it is obvious (and has become a source of embarrassment to RAND itself) that Goure has distorted the evidence in a manner that borders on fraud, in order to justify the air war that the Pentagon wanted. When it is realized that the U.S. Air Force is the chief financial supporter of RAND, we have the odor of a national scandal which cries out for investigation.*

*A second, and related, document which we are featuring in this issue is a memorandum by the head of RAND's Social Science Department, Fred Ikle, which was drawn up for President Nixon in February 1969, and lays down the stages of Nixon's subsequent escalation of the war to its present levels. This memorandum casts a revealing light on the "secret peace plan" which Nixon promised at the time, and since which his Administration has dropped 3,633,000 tons of bombs, or a Hiroshima a week for every week he has been in office. It exemplifies the continuing influence of RAND on the nation's destiny.—THE EDITORS*

# BEHIND THE POLICY MAKERS: RAND & THE VIETNAM WAR

## 1. THE iKLE MEMORANDUM

THE SURROUNDINGS MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN LIFTED from Ian Fleming and Double-O Seven: cold, antiseptic corridors monitored by closed-circuit TV and protected from the outside world by a small army of full-time guards, the quiet and careful chatter of analysts who, at the sound of footsteps in the hallway, peered outward from behind a wall of locked file cabinets and security-classified vaults, the aura of seasoned detachment which always seems to pervade a gathering of veteran bureaucratic operators—in sum, the model of a modern intelligence agency: the RAND Corporation of Santa Monica, California.

And in the case of this particular scenario-maker, whose paper was calmly titled “U.S. Responses to Enemy Escalation in Vietnam: A Checklist of Issues,” the detachment could not have been more complete. The author was, and still is, a prominent policy consultant, with direct access to important White House decision-makers. His *specialité*, the area in which he had gained his intellectual repute, was the art of diplomacy and negotiation. Yet in this undertaking, he had limited himself to a discussion of American military escalation in Vietnam, and his work was devoid of all but the most cursory diplomatic considerations. Absent, too, was any evaluation of the soundness or humaneness of American policy in the war; gone was any mention of whatever anguish and destruction the war had caused. As had always been the case, there would be no trace of emotion; gone, even, was the perverse sense of excitement which American policymakers of an earlier day had felt as they designed the scenario of escalation. One could not find in this paper any of the sharp and chilling metaphors—the turning of the screw, the tightening of the noose, the orchestrations of brass and violin, the crescendoes of air power—words which the policymakers had used through the mid-sixties to characterize their war against North Vietnam. Now, the options would be clicked off without embellishment:

- 1) Bombing in North Vietnam:
  - a) a single strike,
  - b) interdiction and close ground support within and a few miles North of the DMZ,
  - c) interdiction up to the 19th Parallel; or with 1965/67 target restrictions,

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by david landau

d) less restricted bombing of North Vietnam, perhaps with mining of Haiphong.

- 2) Ground operations immediately North of the DMZ to interfere with an NVA offensive across DMZ.
- 3) Ground operations into Laos, single sweep or continuous.
- 4) Ground operations into Cambodia:
  - a) single air strike against enemy bases,
  - b) continuous air interdiction as in Laos,
  - c) single ground sweep,
  - d) continuous ground operations.

Also, the U.S. could increase troop levels substantially (by calling up reserves). An invasion of North Vietnam (say, near Vinh) would then become possible. This build-up would take up to a half a year and is probably less relevant for the time being—except as a deterrent to further enemy escalation. (emphases in original)

All of which, by the way, is quite routine. With some modifications, this is precisely the ladder of escalation which any American official connected with Vietnam had long known would be followed with deepening U.S. involvement in the war, so that by the era of President Nixon—for whose Administration this paper was written—the scenario had become commonplace. What followed this perfunctory listing, however, was of more than passing interest. “To coerce the enemy,” the writer noted with adroit ease, “the threat of punitive action is sometimes more effective than the action itself—and cheaper.” And what threat would be most effective in deterring or limiting an “enemy” escalation in Vietnam? That was the central question to which the memorandum was addressed, and the analyst's answer was as follows:

*One possible step to increase the credibility of this threat (apart from visible military preparations) would be for the U.S. to suspend the Paris talks. This would make it clear to Hanoi that the United States is not deterred from responding by the fear that Hanoi would walk out of the talks. Because of Hanoi's long-standing position to refuse substantive negotiations while the bombing continued, and because of the eventual success of this position, a U.S. initiative to suspend the talks after an enemy escalation would make the resumption of bombing or another U.S. response a more credible threat. (emphasis in original)*

This was indeed an unusual scenario, one which was far from a commonplace at the time it was written, according to White House officials who served during that period.