

**ALTERNATIVE
PERSPECTIVES
ON
VIETNAM**

A STATEMENT OF ASSUMPTIONS

and

A CALL FOR AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Alternative Perspectives on Vietnam: A Statement of Assumptions

Deep concern about the war in Vietnam continues, now that the United States Administration is increasing its military involvement there and committing massive numbers of combat troops. American intellectuals, both within and outside of the universities, have become increasingly articulate during the past few months in expressing their concern about the Vietnam situation and calling for a thorough re-analysis and re-evaluation of American policy in that part of the world. The most dramatic expression of this concern has been the teach-in movement, which has captured the imagination of intellectuals not only in the United States but also in many other countries.

The teach-ins and discussions so far have been extremely effective in raising fundamental issues and in analyzing the weaknesses and dangers of current policy; they have been less effective, however, in identifying alternatives to current policy. It is to the search for alternatives that we must now devote our primary attention. This in turn requires us to develop new perspectives on the problem, out of which alternative solutions are more likely to emerge.

Much of the debate on Vietnam so far-- even when it has taken place--has been carried out within an excessively narrow framework. The ana-

lytic perspective that is typically brought to bear on the issue is rooted in the assumptions of the Cold War; the evaluative perspective is provided by considerations of national interest and national power. These perspectives govern the approach not only of the United States, but also of the Soviet Union and of China; and not only toward Vietnam, but also toward the Dominican Republic and other foreign policy issues. Our concern for the moment, however, is primarily with United States policy toward Vietnam.

Regardless of the degree to which one accepts or rejects the assumptions of the Cold War and of the doctrine of national interest, it seems clear that these perspectives have led us into a dead end on the issue of Vietnam. The problems of Vietnam have proven incapable of any acceptable resolution within the terms of the Cold War and of power politics. Yet our policy makers seem to be trapped by these pervasive assumptions, and helplessly pulled by them into actions that are both futile and dangerous. What is desperately needed is a way out of this trap, a way that would cut through the assumptions of the Cold War and permit us to define the problem in terms less refractory to solution. In other words, we need to bring radically new analytic and evaluative perspectives to bear on the issue in the hope that these will point to policy alternatives that could not emerge out of the closed system of the Cold War philosophy.

The search for alternatives must begin with the raising of certain basic value questions: Toward what ends ought our Vietnam policy to strive, and what are the means appropriate to the achievement of these ends? By approaching these questions from the moral perspectives of all great religions and philosophical systems, we may find solutions that are more consistent with fundamental human values than current American policy in Vietnam has turned out to be.

These value questions, however, must not be asked in the abstract, but in conjunction with new analytic perspectives on the conflict in Vietnam. Such perspectives can be derived from a combination of two major sources: from various social-theoretical formulations, yielding general propositions that can be applied to the special case of Vietnam; and from concrete knowledge of the social, economic, and political conditions within Vietnam and within the larger region of which it forms a part.

The development of new perspectives and the consequent broadening of the range of policy alternatives represents a major challenge to the intellectual community of the world. This challenge must be met by the combined efforts of humanists and religious thinkers, of social theorists and social philosophers, of students of Southeast Asia and of the developing world. American intellectuals must take the primary responsibility for meeting this challenge, for it is the policy of our government that is creating a moral crisis. In this effort, however, we must have the participation of intellectuals from all over the world, not only because the intellectual community, by its very nature, transcends national boundaries, but also because--coming from outside of American society--they are in a unique position to approach American policy from fundamentally different perspectives.

A Call for an International Conference on "Alternative Perspectives on Vietnam"

A group consisting of faculty members and students from the University of Michigan, of clergymen, and of other citizens of Ann Arbor, Michigan, has come together for the purpose of organizing an international conference on "Alternative Perspectives on Vietnam." The conference is designed as an initial effort to meet the challenge described in our Statement of Assumptions.

The conference will be held under the sponsorship of a national group, the Inter-University Committee for Debate on Foreign Policy, and of two local groups: the University of Michigan's Office of Religious Affairs, and the Faculty-Student Committee to Stop the War in Vietnam; and with the cooperation of the Universities Committee on Problems of Peace and War. It will take place on the campus of the University of Michigan from the 14th to the 18th of September, 1965.

In line with one of our basic assumptions about the nature of the task before us, the conference is being planned as an international cooperative venture. It is very appropriate for this initial effort to take place during International Cooperation Year, which is designed to step up the level of international cooperation in all areas of human endeavor. It would be a very fitting contribution to the purposes of International Cooperation

Year if the September conference could begin to establish patterns of international cooperation among intellectuals in the systematic exploration of questions so central to human survival and to fundamental human values.

Due to practical limitations, the number of participants from other parts of the world cannot be very large, nor will it be possible (for both technical and political reasons) to have all areas of the world and all points of view adequately represented. Despite these limitations, the international composition of this conference is central to its conception and to the purposes that it is designed to achieve. The conference constitutes merely an initial effort, and it is our hope that it will lead to continuing international cooperation among intellectuals in the analysis of world problems and the search for alternatives to war.

The purpose of the conference is to combine three functions that are integrally related: analysis, communication, and action. To fulfill these functions, the conference will be divided into three parts:

- (1) International study groups (September 14-16): About thirty humanists, religious thinkers, social theorists, and area and development specialists will meet in small groups, each set up to examine the problem of Vietnam from a particular new perspective--differing from that provided by power politics within the Cold War framework--and to derive some concrete alternatives to current American policy from that perspective.
- (2) Open sessions (September 17): Members of the university community and of the wider Ann Arbor community, and individuals from other campuses and communities throughout the