

impact even of this was diluted by increasing American pressure gradually rather than suddenly, thus giving the enemy time to adapt. Eisenhower, who refrained from publicly criticizing the conduct of the war, privately fumed about the gradualism. He once commented to me: "If the enemy holds a hill with a battalion, give me two battalions and I'll take it, but at great cost in casualties. Give me a division and I'll take it without a fight."

In Vietnam during that period we were not subtle enough in waging the guerrilla war; were too subtle in waging the conventional war. We were too patronizing, even contemptuous, toward our ally, and too solicitous of our enemy. Vietnamese morale was sapped by "Americanization" of the war; American morale was sapped by perpetuation of the war.

Democracies are not well equipped to fight prolonged wars. A democracy fights well after its morale is galvanized by an enemy attack and it gears up its war production. A totalitarian power can coerce its population into fighting indefinitely. But a democracy fights well only as long as public opinion supports the war, and public opinion will not continue to support a war that drags on without tangible signs of progress. This is doubly true when the war is being fought half a world away. Twenty-five years ago the ancient Chinese strategist Sun Tzu wrote, "There has never been a protracted war from which a country had benefited. . . . What is essential in war," he went on, "is victory not prolonged operations." Victory was what the American people were not getting.

We Americans are a do-it-yourself people. During that period we failed to understand that we could not win the war for the South Vietnamese: that, in the final analysis, the South Vietnamese would have to win it for themselves. The United States bulldozed its way into Vietnam and tried to run the war our way instead of recognizing that our mission should have been to help the South Vietnamese build up their forces so that they could win the war.

When I was talking with an Asian leader before I became President, he graphically pointed out the weakness in what was then the American policy toward South Vietnam: "When you are trying to assist another nation in defending its freedom, U.S. policy should be to help them fight the war but not to fight it for them." This was exactly where we had been going wrong in Vietnam. As South Vietnam's Vice President Ky later said, "You captured our war."

When I took office in 1969 it was obvious the American strategy in Vietnam needed drastic revision. My administration was committed to formulating a strategy that would end American involvement in the war and enable South Vietnam to win.

Our goals were to:

- Reverse the "Americanization" of the war that had occurred from 1965 to 1968 and concentrate instead on Vietnamization.
- Give more priority to pacification so that the South Vietnamese could be better able to extend their control over the countryside.
- Reduce the invasion threat by destroying enemy sanctuaries and supply lines in Cambodia and Laos.
- Withdraw the half million American troops from Vietnam in a way that would not bring about a collapse in the South.