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historic 1 (normass/deepe)

(This is the second of a three-part review of developments from the 1966 Honolulu Conference to the second one held this week).

SAIGON, JULY 20--The first Honolulu Conference was often described as "historic". It wasn't. The truly historic decision had been made several months earlier.

Once the American policy decision was made to commit U. S. combat troops to Vietnam, the great watershed decision--the great dividing line of the whole war--was then how the troops would be utilized. The decision, probably made by General William C. Westmoreland and his command staff officers, consisted of this choice: to concentrate American units on using American units to fight the ~~Communist~~ Communist main-force units--when they were relatively the weakest--or to concentrate on the Communist infrastructure which gave them control of the count peasantry, while simply holding off the main-force threat.

The American comma military command chose ~~the main-force war~~ to concentrate on the main-force war and this decision froze the whole Allied pattern of conducting the war. This was to become the most critical decision made within Vietnam channels; the much-publicized decisions of Honolulu were not historic in comparison; ~~the policy enunciated at Honolulu could never be strategically implemented--it became a mere appendage to Westmoreland's war strategy and not a~~ PARALLEL ~~complementary~~ and a contradiction second front to it.

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historic 2 (normass/deepe)

*Came two years later*  
 The second great watershed point of the Vietnam war was the Communist Tet offensive; more precisely, the Tet offensive was the consequence of Westmoreland's watershed decision.

And, ~~Paris, was the consequence of Tet~~ the Paris peace talks were the consequence of Tet. *DATE JANUARY this year.*

One knowledgeable American source explained:

"In early 1965, the American troop buildup began and then continued to the point where the Communists could no longer overthrow the Vietnamese ~~or~~ government armed forces. So, by pure military presence and firepower, the American battalions stopped the Communist advance.

"Then, there was an intellectual crisis in the American military circles—which way to go? More and More more big-battalion operations or the ~~Specific~~ Special Forces route, of placing small groups of American troops in the villages for security and improving the standards of living?

"But by 1965, Special Forces were disliked. They had been President (John F.) Kennedy's special child, and Kennedy was gone and Special Forces got kicked around. Almost as a matter of professional gravitation, the American command rejected the Special ~~For~~ Forces route and was sucked into the big-unit path.

*SHOULD*  
 Strategically, the question was ~~did Westmoreland destroy the Commun~~  
 try to destroy the Communist main force and let the ~~infrastructure~~ infrastructure problem to be dealt with later and at ~~his~~ leisure? Or did he concentrate on the infrastructure and merely try to hold off the ~~m~~ Communist main-force? For almost emotional reasons, the American commanders chose the main to concentrate on the main-force?"  
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historic 3 (normass/deepe)

Strategically, the ~~2 American military~~ Communist military leaders also faced gigantic tasks caused by the American build-up of troops, as their captured documents now reveal. In order to succeed, they had to follow through on at least two fundamental principles of guerrilla warfare. First, they had to sustain their forward momentum of their military forces—for them, "it was like riding a bicycle," one source explained. <sup>Do Not</sup> "if they continue moving forward, they'd flop ~~of~~ over." They sustained this momentum with their invasion from North Vietnam, which meant politically sacrificing their "national liberation" image of the Southern Viet Cong. Second, they could sustain their mountain invasion and main-force buildup only at the rate their people's base—their insurgency movement—could support it. *with Recruits, Food, Arms intelligence.*

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historio 4 (normass/deepe)

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For the Communists, they could not win the war by simply conquering the countryside; they had to break the will of the cities, which were the sources and seats of Vietnamese government strength. But, for the Allies to win, merely holding the cities was not enough; they had to roll back the Communist grip on the countryside, and again bring Allied security to the peasants. In simplest form, this security of the countryside consisted of two facets. First, to provide as many geographically important vailiges with enough forces to fend off large-scale attacks from the ous outside. And second, to ~~provide~~ provide security within each village-- that is to prevent the Communist clandestine infrastructure and guer-ger guerrillas already in the village from collecting taxes, recruiting and psychological and politically dominating his neighbors.

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historie 5 (normass/deepe)

This then was the backdrop of the military problems at the time of the first Honolulu Conference, when President Lyndon Johnson and some of his senior advisors and Cabinet members met with the Vietnamese government. Of relevance to the countryside, the Honolulu Conference was to target against the Communist insurgency problem in the countryside; the assumption was that General Westmoreland's main-force war would proceed satisfactorily.

The ~~sub~~ nub of the decisions at Honolulu the conference were issued in idealistic terms in the famous "Declaration of Honolulu" and the final communique. For the countryside, the official messages promised a social revolution, building democracy in the rural areas, providing rural construction while fighting, developing a better material life, ~~in~~ increasing food production and eradicating illiteracy and disease.

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historie 6 (normass/deepe)

*Then*  
At the rice roots level, the Americans did make a tremendous effort to live up to their Honolulu ~~pledge~~ *PLEDGE*, mostly by furnishing the tools for the Vietnamese government to finish the job. *many* ~~My~~ of these Honolulu ideals were pulled together in one program--the revolutionary development program--which became highly computerized and highly controversial. The Honolulu Conference ~~had the side-effects of serving~~ *outside of Vietnam* did serve as a valuable propaganda weapon to dampen the criticism against the Johnson Administration's war policy. More significantly, it put the Viet Cong on the propaganda defensive amongst the villagers. *HAD* The Viet Cong propg propagandists who once told the peasants that American G.I.'s ate Vietnamese babies, and roasted and ate Vietnamese babies, were incapable of explaining ~~discredited~~ *discredited* how when the peasants saw the GI's treating their b<sup>h</sup> children for headaches and giving them ~~baths~~ *baths* and candies.

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historic 7 (normass/deepe)

"With the luxury of 20-20 hindsight," as one American observed, these were the ~~definite~~ deficiencies in the policies and programs outlined in that first Honolulu Conference two and half years ago:

1. The programs did not fail; they had barely been born. As one diplomat observed at the time, "it should be called the ~~Hollow~~ Hollow-lulu Conference. It ~~was~~ was a lulu--but it was hollow." Or, as another source explained recently, "There was nothing wrong with the Honolulu decisions--but the decisions were just words. The Allied action was minimal because of the distraction of the main-force war. And the White House never intellectually acknowledged to itself that the ~~only~~ only controlling element here was the American military command (MACV). General Westmoreland was running the war--not the Ambassador or the Vietnamese government. We had a military commander, but no real leader to tie the knots together. And MACV was geared in ~~all~~ one direction."

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historic 8 (normass/deepe)

One American provincial advisor who failed to receive a special request for ~~41 million~~ <sup>375</sup> ~~as an additional fund to get his province~~ <sup>DOLLARS</sup> ~~ticking, explained,~~ "Everyone says ~~that this is the a political and economic war as well as a~~ ~~war~~ <sup>that</sup> this is the a political and economic war as well as a military one; that revolutionary development is essential. But the problem is we don't put our ~~best~~ <sup>best</sup> money where our mouth is. At best we spend ~~\$3 billion~~ <sup>three</sup> ~~repeast billion~~ <sup>three</sup> dollars on the non-military side of the war--out of \$26 ~~2~~ billion dollar expenditure."

2. In ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> small number of assigned villages, schools, bridges and dispensaries were built for the people. But not until mid-1967 were Vietnamese regular battalions assigned to ~~provin~~ <sup>stationed in the villages to</sup> provide security for against large outside Communist forces. ~~At at no time was proper~~ <sup>RARELY</sup> attempts made to come to grips with the Communist infrastructure within each village. So, while the villager might be able to send his child to school, at no time did he feel ~~secure~~ <sup>secure</sup> from outside Communist attacks or free of fear of ~~his own~~ <sup>that</sup> neighbors ~~who~~ might assassinate him for helping the government. By late 1967, the revolutionary development program had stalled; it became apparent "you can't buy security," with dispensaries books, sch and "those Christmas goodies," <sup>AS ONE DIPLOMAT SAID</sup> A schoolhouse was no substitute for security--and the villagers knew it.

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historic 9 (normass/deepe)

Now, the ~~slogan~~ oft-repeated slogan of "winning the hearts and minds of the people" has become rephrased, ~~in~~ "grab them by their throats throats and their hearts and minds will follow."

In short, ~~tactical~~, tactically, within each village, the program never really got off the ground; ~~strateg~~ strategically, throughout the countryside, the program failed to re-gain the countryside from the Communists, and hence indirectly—but not directly—lead to the Tet <sup>COMMUNIST</sup> offensive. ~~to LAUNCH the tet offensive.~~

3. A social revolution did hit the Vietnamese countryside—but not the one proclaimed at Honolulu. In simplest terms, the main-force war fought by the North Vietnamese and the Americans destroyed the countryside and the villages faster than all the ~~Hawai~~ Honolulu converts could put it back together. A mass rural migration fled to the cities, creating refugees problems <sup>there</sup> in the cities. Rice planters became taxi drivers in the urban centers. All the American fertilizers and ~~"miracles"~~ IR-3 "miracle" rice seed could not stop the decrease in rice procurement. In 1967 both 1967 and 1968, America imported three times more rice to Vietnam than the once-rice-produ country once exported. <sup>ASIAN</sup>

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historic 10 (normass/deepe)

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If the Honolulu Conference of 1966 provided only periphereal answers, or non-answers, to the problems of the Vietnamese peasantry, General Westmoreland's main-force war was also bogged down in statistics, mirages and self-deceptions. At best, General Westmoreland was applying half-measures in attempting to defeat the Communist main-force. In black-and-white terms, the only "total" solution to the invasion problem was hermetically sealing the borders of South Vietnam, making it ~~virtually~~ <sup>virtually</sup> an island detached from the continent—much like the French did with barbed wire fences, electric currents and half-mile-wide mine fields in Algeria. This course was rejected; the electronic McNamara line was but a half-step in that direction, but it is not so much of a line as a series of outposts through which the North Vietnamese somehow manage to squeeze through undetected. Westmoreland's strategy of using American battalions to search and then destroy the Communist main-force became a ~~distance~~ <sup>race</sup> race on a treadmill. During 1967, for example, two-thirds of the Communists killed by the American units were annihilated when the Communists chose to stand and fight—not when the Americans surprised them and forced to them to fight. Hence, the Communists were determining most of the pacing of the war and their <sup>own</sup> rate of attrition.

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historic 11 (normass/deepe)

By the end of 1967, the American command could claim that American maneuver battalions had pushed the Communist into the border areas and away from the populated areas. In the year-end report of 1967, the command wrote: "More enemy were killed than ever before. By year-year's end, enemy military strength was at the lowest level since late 1965 or early 1966. And about 30 per cent of his maneuver battalions were considered not combat effective." But, 29 days later, the Communist main force units around the country swept past the Honolulu-inspired villages that had been computerized as pro-government, and were fighting in 103 Vietnamese cities, district and provincial towns and in nearby military installations.

Tomorrow: A flashback to Honolulu '66.

(Hank: I'll file the third article Sunday or Monday. Sorriest this one is so long, but its the most important one. The other one will be shorter. Next week, I plan to stay in Saigon to see which way the wind blows on this offensive.etc. I'll try to send you some mailers without any cabling, except for focus, unless you'd like a cabled seepager Saigon mood piece, focusing on Honolulu, Paris, Clifford, U. S. elections, status of a Vietnamese ARV Army etc. It will take until the end of the week to get that pulled together ~~together~~ together and then I could cable it. I think an airmailer would be outdated. Please advise. Regards Bev).

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