

TO: Vietnam local coordinators
RE: Crisis Response

SDS' committee to develop a program to respond to a Vietnam crisis met in Chicago on Monday the 26th. We were faced with a very difficult task: trying to identify the conditions under which we would be compelled to put aside everything to mount the most impressive show of force possible, and then match to these conditions possible responses.

We concluded that we would put before the local Vietnam committees a range of proposals. Local groups should discuss these with a view toward making local contingency plans. You should also communicate with this office as soon as possible information on which plans you are prepared to organize behind so that plans without local support can be dropped and others can be pushed. It is highly important that this discussion take place in the next 10 days; the May 9th Swarthmore meeting which will be discussing summer program will also take up the subject of crisis programming.

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The possibility of a major world confrontation over Vietnam grows nearer each week, it seems. Hans Morgenthau reports from Moscow in the New Republic that the will to retaliate to American bombings is becoming overwhelmingly strong. At the same time, indications are that the U.S. escalation has failed to affect the unfavorable direction of the guerrilla war: S. Vietnamese Air Force General Ky has now called for a land invasion of the north. It certainly isn't foolish to start planning for a crisis; it probably is foolish not to.

The first model of crisis discussed by the committee is the world confrontation, with America and China facing each other eyeball-to-eyeball, and the guerrilla war being transformed into something resembling Korea. A more nightmarish model of this involves the threat of a nuclear exchange, with Russia lined up on the side of China and North Vietnam.

Such a crisis would be caused, most likely, by a response to U.S. bombing of North Vietnam, such as the massing of an international volunteer army in North Vietnam and subsequent mobilization on the part of the U.S. The political atmosphere in America would be very much like during Cuba week--the Communist response would give the long-awaited justification for further American adventures. (Some observers suggest that our escalation policy has been expressly intended to provoke a response that would rationalize a military confrontation with China) Up to now, it should be remembered, the public opposition to the war has been remarkably strong--the Administration would pull out all the stops, and it would be crucial to attempt to make visible all the dissent that could be mustered.

The second model of crisis discussed resembled the Dienbienphu crisis faced by the French in 1954. Roughly, some significant turn for the worse in the internal situation in Vietnam would create a crisis which could go either way--in such a situation the government might at last be forced to decide to bring the war to a negotiated settlement at whatever terms it could eke out; on the other hand, it might decide to pursue its current logic with a vengeance, by either bringing in enough of an army to hold the line against the Viet Cong, or by extending the ground war to North Vietnam and the air war to China.

Either a major military defeat (in this war such a defeat might as likely take place over a period of weeks in a siege as it would in a major pitched battle) or a neutralist coup in Saigon, or even sustained street-fighting in Saigon in a NLF uprising would be the kind of setback that would force heated debate in Washington over which alternative to choose. In 1954 the response of allied powers played a crucial role in France's final decision; international pressure could have some weight

in this case, too. As for the domestic response, it should be kept in mind that the largest proportion of those who tell Gallup they want us to get out are probably the war-weary, not the peaceniks. Tangible evidence that the war is a hopeless endeavor reinforces those who are sick and tired of it, both in the public and in the Congress.

The third general model of crisis actually describes what is going on now. We are adding 5000 troops a week, and Johnson seems to be sneaking us into a much more substantial commitment. Objectively, this is a crisis--the rapid change in the level of U.S. involvement is going on; however, because it is only partially perceived as crisis, it is close to impossible to organize crisis-response to it.

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PROPOSED RESPONSES

1. Mobilization of international pressure. The United Nations, allied and neutral governments, and student and peace movements in both kinds of countries, all can exert some restraining influence in the event of crisis. As the domestic opposition, we can play some role in calling for several kinds of international response. These include U.N. debate, anti-war demonstrations, and government-level initiatives.

In the event of crisis, it would be possible to organize something along the order of a U.N. sit-in demanding the intervention of that organization. To call, however, for world-wide protests, would require substantial advance planning. The committee's proposal is that individual local groups "adopt-a-country" and initiate contacts with that country's student movement, peace movement, and government in the aim of getting commitments from them to take action of one sort or another in case of crisis.

Among the arguments brought up for this plan is that it affirms our internationalism; it encourages the creation of international contacts that can be kept up beyond the current crisis.

Another "international" proposal discussed at the meeting is the plan to send a delegation to Vietnam--it was thought that this is more suitable to an ongoing program than to a crisis.

It's not clear that these programs fit one type of crisis better than any other. They may be more useful in the second model.

2. National Student Strike. A stoppage of class attendance testifies to the feeling among students (and, hopefully, faculty) that we can't return to business-as-usual until the war is ended. Such a strike ingeniously frees large numbers of people to participate in marches, rallies, teach-outs (classes on Vietnam can be held outside of classrooms, or even downtown, or at symbolic sites like draft boards, army bases, helicopter factories), demonstrations at symbolic sites, draft card burnings, mass pledging of non-participation in the war, etc.

Such a strike might be held for only one day--in the case of an eyeball-to-eyeball crisis it could be continued throughout the height of the confrontation. Such an action does not require taking the bus to the arena of action--it is organized on the spot, where people go to school. Now that many universities are on trimester or quarter systems, it makes sense to call such an action in the summer as well as during the rest of the school year.

(When local groups discuss laying contingency plans for this action, it is important to think specifically about the kind of companion action you think are desirable, and to communicate these opinions to the crisis-response committee, so that they can be collated nationally.)

3. Direct Action. There are two separate rationales for direct action in crisis and it is very important to keep from confusing them. One is to actually impede the workings of the war machine--by organizing demonstrations or sympathy strikes that impede transportation of war materials, or that block the doors to plants or offices where these are produced, or where decisions are being made. Demonstrations that last only ten minutes should not be considered as really impeding the war machine.

The committee had grave doubts that we could bring off such an action anywhere, but if it were possible it should definitely be worked on.

One proposal, (on which the committee didn't come to a conclusion), is that the civil disobedience be committed in Vietnam--placing our bodies in the line of fire.

As to symbolic-value civil disobedience, the committee had very mixed opinions on the subject. Some argued that these actions are just not very appropriate to the issue, and aren't effective at all. Others pointed to them as a way of expressing the seriousness of the opposition to war in time of crisis. Civil disobedience is probably least appropriate in the second model crisis.

4. Encouragement of non-cooperation with the war by enlisted personnel. This may be the most extreme act we can perform, and it obviously should be performed only in extremis. The federal laws would be violated in this act by students leafletting army bases, draft boards, and other military installations urging soldiers to desert, 18-year-olds not to register for the draft, draftees and reservists not to report, etc. Such an action should be an official action of the organization, it was suggested; SDS groups should begin to discuss this proposal in order to enable the June Convention to reach a decision.

The motivation behind this includes the desire to dramatically state total opposition to the war. As well, the proposal would involve civil disobedience which could not be brushed off as all other civil disobedience over Vietnam has been up to now. Finally, there is a practical side to the proposal: there have been a number of indications that the people who are being sent to this war are rightfully scared and unhappy about it, and that they just haven't had their indoctrination challenged by any facts or opposing opinion. We shouldn't expect to cause mutinies, but we should be able to create quite a stir "in the ranks". At any rate, the harmless actions--leafletting, trying to strike up conversation--would be quite intolerable to the military hierarchs; on the other hand, they might we be reluctant to invoke the World War I Espionage Act against us.

This program is aimed at a confrontation-type crisis or at the culmination of a gradual escalation--everybody wakes up one morning and we find ourselves in a major war. But it might also be applicable to a crisis in which military or political setback makes soldiers as well as the general public very doubtful about the desirability of fighting.

5. Responses to the continuing crisis. The committee came to the conclusion that it would be overwhelmingly difficult to artificially induce a crisis atmosphere around the gradual introduction of combat troops. Thus, this type of crisis can be responded to only through the ongoing Vietnam program which is being undertaken anyway by local groups.

In the long run it is important to concentrate attention on the continuing crisis and to attempt to escalate the intensity of our ongoing anti-war program along with Johnson's war. The May 9th meeting at Swarthmore will go into the various proposals for summer and long-range action in detail; a working paper for that meeting will be going out shortly. In the meantime a list of proposed programs will have to suffice:

- a) promoting insurgencies, bolts, and other rumblings within the Democratic Party
- b) organizing among draft-age out-of-school youth
- c) symbolic direct action at draft boards, war plants, etc.
- d) another March on Washington
- e) national petitions
- f) pledges to engage in civil disobedience and of non-cooperation with the draft
- g) organizing anti-war committees in the communities
- h) teach-ins and other campus education programs
- i) haunting--following the key decision-makers around day in and day out

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PS: Since our last memo, McGeorge Bundy has agreed to participate in a "confrontation" in the national teach-in May 15. For further details, write Box 1383, Ann Arbor, or phone (313) NO3-4241