

The Johnson Administration and the Recruitment of Allies in Vietnam, 1964–1968

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Abstract

The Vietnam War has generated a vast literature but one which has often forgotten that the United States fought in Vietnam as part of a coalition. This article examines Washington's efforts under President Lyndon B. Johnson to recruit third country combat assistance. He and his colleagues sought military help less for practical reasons than for political ones as a way of legitimizing the war both domestically and abroad. However, no NATO countries were willing to participate, and some of the five troop-contributing countries (Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand) were attracted probably more by American largesse than by idealism. In exploring the diplomacy of coalition-building, this article has a contemporary resonance in the light of the military campaigns initiated by the White House since 2003.

Recent historical studies have shown a tendency to draw parallels between the wars in Iraq and Vietnam.¹ Both conflicts became bloody, costly and unpopular as military and political success proved much more elusive than was first anticipated. Yet there is a further parallel, less often invoked, in that both conflicts have involved the United States constructing and fighting in a coalition. In Vietnam, in addition to the United States, four countries – the Republic of Korea, Thailand, Australia and New Zealand – provided combat troops, while the Philippines contributed a 'civic action group' of medics and engineers

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¹ The literature in this field is substantial. For example, see *Vietnam in Iraq: Tactics, Lessons, Legacies and Ghosts*, ed. John Dumbrell and David Ryan (2007), and Jeffrey Record and W. Andrew Terrill, *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights* (Carlisle, PA, 2004). In the former work, see especially the contributions by John Dumbrell and Trevor B. McCrisken. Other useful texts include Robert K. Brigham, *Is Iraq Another Vietnam?* (New York, 2006), and *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam*, ed. Lloyd Gardner and Marilyn B. Young (New York, 2007). Record and Terrill is the only one of the above accounts that compares the role of allies in the conflicts.

with a security force of infantry, armour and artillery. By 1969, there were almost 69,000 third country combat personnel present, alongside 550,000 American and 850,000 South Vietnamese troops.²

Washington wanted to defend South Vietnam as part of a collective largely as a means of furthering the international legitimacy of the war and ‘selling’ the conflict, or at least placating the critics, in the United States. Unfortunately for American policymakers, third country troop contributions fell short of what was desired – certainly, the number of contributor nations compared poorly with the Korean War of 1950–3 when ‘Free World’ efforts involved combat forces from fourteen countries, plus US personnel.³ American diplomats wanted to mount the Vietnam coalition on the existing Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), but this proved impossible in the absence of soldiers from SEATO members such as the United Kingdom, France and Pakistan, and with the fact that the main third country troop contributor, the Republic of Korea, was not even part of SEATO. In effect, the resulting coalition was essentially an *ad hoc* grouping. While *quid pro quos* are characteristic features of alliances and coalitions, there was a recognition among Washington policymakers that the attractions of American largesse featured among the motives of some of the troop-providing countries. The anxious courting of allies for troops and the meagre results of the recruitment campaign boded ill for the outcome of the war, but, paradoxically, as the US position in Vietnam deteriorated, the need for allied support increased all the more. This article explores the American efforts during the administration of Lyndon B. Johnson to recruit third countries to join the war in Vietnam. It was in 1964 that the recruitment campaign began; in 1965 Washington ‘Americanized’ the war by introducing US combat troops; and by 1968 it had become evident to a beleaguered White House that the Free World’s war in Vietnam was all but unwinnable. Consequently, events had overtaken the idea of seeking increased third country contributions.⁴

This article also seeks to strengthen the relatively limited literature on American efforts to build a coalition. Stanley Robert Larsen and James

² Troop numbers are from Stanley Robert Larsen and Brigadier General James Lawton Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam* (Washington, DC, 1975) [hereafter Larsen and Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam*], table, p. 23. Legally, the United States was a ‘third country’ in Vietnam, but given its role in backing first the French in Indochina from the end of the Second World War until 1954, then supporting South Vietnam, and given Washington’s centrality in building the coalition, the United States is considered integral to the conflict and as such distinct from other Free World participants.

³ The term ‘Free World’ has its origins in American cold war propaganda and is used in this article only to mean countries allied with the United States. On the coalition dimension of the Korean War, see Wayne Danzik, ‘Coalition Forces in the Korean War’, *Naval College War Review*, xlvii (1994) [hereafter Danzik, ‘Coalition Forces in the Korean War’]; Stanley Sandler, *The Korean War: No Victors, No Vanquished* (1999), pp. 149–69; and William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, NJ, 1995), pp. 167–203.

⁴ Source material for the article includes US government documents such as State Department and White House memoranda along with oral history testimony, memoirs and secondary analyses.

Lawton Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam* (1975) has explored the contributions of third countries but focuses on military rather than diplomatic issues.⁵ Robert M. Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson's 'More Flags': The Hiring of Korean, Filipino, and Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War* (1994) has provided an account of the diplomacy of third party troop recruitment but its emphasis on 'mercenaries' makes it a tendentious work. It is also the case that a much fuller body of documentary evidence has become available since the book first came out.⁶ In addition, there are a few texts dealing with the participation of individual third countries in Vietnam.⁷ While this article focuses on American policy and does not purport to offer any definitive verdicts on the motivations of third country participants, it does, unlike many texts about the Vietnam War, acknowledge that the effort in Vietnam under Johnson was an example of coalition warfare – the United States and South Vietnam were not fighting on their own.⁸

I

Although by early 1964 countries such as Australia and the Republic of Korea were already providing non-combat assistance, the Vietnam

⁵ See Larsen and Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam*.

⁶ Robert M. Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson's 'More Flags': The Hiring of Korean, Filipino, and Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War* (Jefferson, MO, 1994) [hereafter Blackburn, 'More Flags']. The literature on the international history of the Vietnam war is still limited in part due to the difficulties such as language, inherent in multi-archival research, but it includes *America, the Vietnam War and the World: Comparative and International Perspectives*, ed. Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner and Wilfried Mausbach (Cambridge, 2003) [hereafter Daum, Gardner and Mausbach, *America, the Vietnam War and the World*]; *International Perspectives on Vietnam*, ed. Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger (College Station, TX, 2000) [hereafter Gardner and Gittinger, *International Perspectives on Vietnam*]; and *The Search for Peace in Vietnam*, ed. Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger (College Station, TX, 2004) [hereafter Gardner and Gittinger, *Search for Peace in Vietnam*]; *The Vietnam War*, ed. Peter Lowe (Basingstoke, 1998) [hereafter Lowe, *Vietnam War*] includes chapters by Carl Bridge, 'Australia and the Vietnam War', pp. 181–95, and Alastair Parker, 'International Aspects of the Vietnam War', pp. 196–218; Ralph B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, iii: *The Making of a Limited War, 1965–66* (New York, 1990).

⁷ Texts focusing on single states include Carl Bridge, 'Australia and the Vietnam War', in Lowe, *Vietnam War*, pp. 181–195; Arne Kislenko, 'Bamboo in the Shadows: US Relations with Thailand during the Vietnam War', in Daum, Gardner and Mausbach, *America, the Vietnam War and the World*, pp. 197–219; and Roberto Rabel, *New Zealand and the Vietnam War: Politics and Diplomacy* (Auckland, 2005).

⁸ Important texts that do not mention the coalition element include George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975* (2nd edn., New York, 1986); and Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941–1975* (Oxford, 1997) [hereafter Schulzinger, *Time for War*]. It is worth noting that, as well as the third party combat participants, thirty-four more countries obliged with help for Saigon in forms such as food, medicine, technical assistance, equipment, educational facilities, training and economic aid. Washington valued this sort of assistance greatly, though less than it did the presence of combat troops. Countries that supplied non-military assistance were Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Denmark, Ecuador, Federal Republic of Germany, France, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Laos, Liberia, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Republic of China, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Tunisia, Turkey, United Kingdom, Uruguay, and Venezuela. See Larsen and Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam*, pp. 160–9.

recruitment campaign began formally in April that year with the ‘More Flags’ or ‘Many Flags’ initiative. President Johnson stated during a press conference that ‘we would like to see some other flags’ in South Vietnam and that ‘we would all unite in an attempt to stop the spread of . . . communism in that part of the world’.⁹ The assistance was originally called ‘Third Country Aid’, and, according to Frederick Flott, a diplomat at the Saigon Embassy: ‘it was basically aid from other countries, other than the United States, to help the government of Vietnam. It was very open-ended. The more aid we could get the more we liked it.’ Flott stated that he ‘changed the name of the programme . . . to Free World Assistance because of the obvious favorable political connotation’.¹⁰ Initially the programme was intended to elicit non-combat assistance such as medical, engineering and police support, but by the time of the launching of the US bombing campaign and the introduction of American combat troops in spring 1965 this had given way to a desire to see third countries directly engaged in the fighting as well. Furthermore, when it became apparent to the White House by the end of 1965 that there was little prospect of obtaining ‘More Flags’ in Vietnam, greater emphasis was put on obtaining extra troops from those countries which had already made commitments.

Cold war policy doctrines originating in the late 1940s and early 1950s had led Washington to believe that the loss to communism even of a small state was damaging to American and western security interests. The chief problem with South Vietnam, however, was that it was too weak to provide for its own defence against a communist uprising drawing on the support of the Soviet Union and China. Consequently, reinforcements had to come from the United States and from other Free World countries.¹¹ Yet, at the same time, Washington was consistent in regarding third country support as representing greater political than military value: combat troops above all else had, as Secretary of State Dean Rusk pointed out in 1966, ‘an importance beyond mere numbers’.¹² Third country contributions helped to relieve American policymakers’ sense of isolation and to strengthen the international legitimacy of a war whose moral and geopolitical virtues were hotly contested.¹³ Given, too, that in Vietnam the United States was not merely defending a single country but

⁹ Research Memorandum, Thomas L. Hughes (State Department Director of Intelligence and Research) to Dean Rusk, 28 Aug. 1964, Document 143, Vietnam Memos Vol. XVI 8/16-31/64, Box 7, NSF: Country File Vietnam, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas [hereafter LBJL].

¹⁰ Frederick W. Flott Oral History, interviewed 22 July 1984 by Ted Gittinger, LBJL/Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project (ADST).

¹¹ Department of State to Embassy Saigon, 22 April 1965, Document 271, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* [hereafter *FRUS*] 1964–1968 Volume I, Vietnam 1964.

¹² Memorandum of conversation, 30 June 1966, Document 17, *FRUS* 1964–1968 XXVII, *Mainland Southeast Asia: Regional Affairs*.

¹³ Chester L. Cooper, *Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam* (New York, 1970) [hereafter Cooper, *Lost Crusade*], p. 267.

abstract values such as democracy, world order and civilization,¹⁴ it was incumbent on other Free World states to participate.

Johnson himself felt a wholehearted concern with the recruitment effort. According to Paul M. Kattenburg, who served in the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department, he brought 'almost fanatical fervour' to the programme.¹⁵ Flott added that Johnson was personally very much interested in the programme, and if he had a visiting head of state from a potential donor country coming in to see him in the Oval Office, he'd ask us, 'Just what should I ask this fellow for?' He was trying very hard to help.¹⁶ Such was Johnson's enthusiasm that he ended up 'leaning on all our embassies around the world to be supportive of this program and to try to find donors'.¹⁷

The president sought to further his ambitious 'Great Society' programme of domestic legislation, and was keen not to alienate Congress over Vietnam.¹⁸ He indicated in 1966, for example, that 'key members of the Congress' felt 'very strongly' that other troop-contributing states should meet a 'substantial part of the need' for reinforcements.¹⁹ Foreign troops would not only help to reduce the American commitment but they were also a means of justifying to Congress the growing financial burdens of waging war in Vietnam. While on a diplomatic tour of Asia late in 1967 to increase third country support, presidential advisers Clark Clifford and General Maxwell Taylor argued that faced with tax increases the American people would ask 'if we have to put this [extra] money in the war, what are our allies going to do?' Americans were not going to believe 'this is important to us if it's not important to you'.²⁰

At a meeting at The Hague in May 1964, when US personnel had been present in Vietnam only in an 'advisory' capacity, Rusk asked NATO members for at least a token amount of support. Some states agreed to provide small amounts of non-military help but none were willing to send combat troops.²¹ Aside from the general legitimizing function of internationalizing the war, contributions from NATO members were sought in part as a way of helping resist pressures for cutbacks in the American troop commitment to Europe. Rusk explained to German Foreign

¹⁴ Fabian Hilfrich, 'Visions of the Asia Periphery', in Daum, Gardner and Mausbach, *America, the Vietnam War and the World*, p. 58.

¹⁵ Paul M. Kattenburg, *The Vietnam Trauma in American Foreign Policy, 1945–75* (New Brunswick, ME, 1980), pp. 218–19.

¹⁶ Flott OH, LBJL/ADST.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ For a recent discussion of the relationship between America's war in Vietnam and the 'Great Society' programme, see Francis M. Bator, 'No Good Choices: LBJ and the Vietnam/Great Society Connection' and the various commentaries, *Diplomatic History*, xxxii (2008), 307–63.

¹⁹ Memorandum of conversation, 30 June 1966, Document 17, *FRUS 1964–1968 XXVII*.

²⁰ Notes of Meeting, 5 August 1967, Document 270, *FRUS 1964–1968 V Vietnam, 1967*.

²¹ Fredrik Logevall, 'The Western Powers and the Escalation of the War' [hereafter Logevall, 'Western Powers and Escalation of the War'], in Daum, Gardner and Mausbach, *America, the Vietnam War and the World*, p. 183.

Minister Gerhard Schroeder late in 1965, some months after the first instalments of American combat troops, that the ‘revelation to the Congress of the extent of our requirements in Vietnam will raise major questions about what others are doing in the face of our own continuing commitments in such areas as NATO’.²² The commitment in Vietnam, and the relatively poor level of international support there, had led influential figures such as Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield to argue that the United States was militarily overcommitted across the globe. By 1967 the administration had to bow to congressional as well as economic pressure to reduce the numbers of American troops in West Germany, the main American outpost in Europe. However, some adroit diplomacy ensured that the matter was addressed without doing serious damage to transatlantic ties.²³

The United States looked beyond NATO for support. While the military contributions of ‘white’ countries like Australia and New Zealand were deeply appreciated, assistance from Asian states had more significance in the light of the American concern to avoid ‘anything that looks like a white man’s club in Asia’.²⁴ In an age when numerous Asian and African states had only recently gained their independence from European colonialism, American officials felt that the presence of non-white contributors would erode any perception among the ‘non-aligned’ states that Washington had inherited the imperial mantle. Washington policymakers also considered that help from each third country might have a multiplier effect in the sense that one contribution could encourage contributions from other countries. During their 1967 tour, Clifford and Taylor pointed out that, while more troops might not actually make much of a military difference, their presence would ‘enable the United States to add several times the number of Asian forces to the effort in Vietnam’.²⁵

Not surprisingly given the public-relations importance of third country contributions, the White House worked hard to placate the domestic critics of US involvement in Vietnam by publicizing any additional help. In 1964 Johnson indicated that he wanted the third country presence to be as ‘large and visible as possible in terms of men on the scene’.²⁶ Two years later, he ordered a ‘systematic assessment’ of the

²² Rusk to State Department, 15 Dec. 1965, Document 135, *FRUS 1964–1968 XV Germany and Berlin* (1999). For a brief general account of the impact of Vietnam on US relations with Western Europe, see Frank Costigliola, ‘The Vietnam War and the Challenges to American Power in Europe’, in Gardner and Gittinger, *International Perspectives on the Vietnam War*, pp. 143–52.

²³ See, for example, Andrew Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO: Britain, America and the Dynamics of Alliance, 1962–68* (2006), pp. 131–5, 159; and Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA, 2003) [hereafter Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe*], pp. 143–59.

²⁴ Memorandum by the Government of Australia, 11 April 1965, Document 12, *FRUS 1964–1968 XXVII*.

²⁵ Memorandum of conversation, 14 Sept. 1967, Document 355, *FRUS 1964–1968 XXVII*.

²⁶ Taylor to Johnson, 17 Oct. 1964, Document 383, *FRUS 1964–1968 I*.

efforts to widen third country contributions.²⁷ The White House disseminated the results of this survey to Congress to make it known that the administration was engaged in a war that had international support. Thus, Washington sought third country contributions for both domestic and foreign policy reasons. At home, such contributions helped to placate congressional worries about greater financial burdens and about geopolitical over-stretch, while abroad they served both diplomatic and military objectives. Allied support became all the more important as opposition in Congress towards the war intensified.

II

One of the challenges for US policymakers was to ensure that the Free World coalition rested on a sound political foundation, to give the war greater propriety and to serve as a means of encouraging further contributions. The non-communist powers had fought in Korea under the aegis of the United Nations, and Washington had been able to operate under this banner because of the Soviet boycott of the Security Council over American policies towards Communist China. The Soviets were therefore unable to veto the use of the UN for the Free World enterprise in Korea. There was no comparable opportunity for American policymakers in relation to Vietnam. Washington tried instead to mount the coalition on SEATO, which had been established in 1954 – when Indochina was partitioned – under American sponsorship to contain the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. The use of SEATO in relation to Vietnam a decade or so later was, according to Chester Cooper of the National Security Council, ‘more cosmetic than real’.²⁸ Of the seven member countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand), three – the United Kingdom, France and Pakistan – were not represented. The United Kingdom, as co-chairman of the Geneva conference and with many of its MPs and members of the public deeply hostile to the American stance in Vietnam, did not provide troops, while France and Pakistan were unwilling to extend even rhetorical support for the war. The Republic of Korea, the largest contributor after the United States, was not a member of SEATO, and Australia and New Zealand were members of the ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand and the United States) security pact.²⁹ So what was intended to be essentially a SEATO coalition became a looser, more *ad hoc* one, reflecting mere expediency rather than the presence of a more compelling rationale.

Paris in particular compounded SEATO’s Vietnam problems. The French had suffered their own debacle in Indochina in 1954 and had grave reservations about the wisdom of the American stand there some

²⁷ Rostow to Rusk, 11 Nov. 1966, Document 302, *FRUS 1964–1968 IV*.

²⁸ Cooper, *Lost Crusade*, p. 267.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

years later. At the SEATO conference in Manila in April 1964, French nay-saying ensured that US diplomats faced, as one of them put it, ‘a real crusher’ on how to word the conference communiqué so that it would ‘condemn North Vietnamese aggression’ and express satisfaction with the leadership in the South Vietnam.³⁰ After the Manila meeting, Franco-American differences over Vietnam intensified, and French President Charles de Gaulle became increasingly strident in his criticisms of American policy.³¹ Early in 1965, an American diplomat privately expressed hopes that the French would withdraw from SEATO so that the organization could ‘play a more active role in Vietnam, including, if desired, initiation of collective SEATO action’.³² The view was that this might help to correct the impression in Congress and beyond that the United States was doing all the work in Vietnam. This became all the more crucial as congressional dissent intensified. However, France did not pull out from SEATO, to the disappointment of some American diplomats. Instead, de Gaulle continued to exasperate the White House and State Department not only over Vietnam but in relation to policies such as withdrawing France from the NATO command structure in 1966.

American policymakers faced the problem that, while they wanted a coherent vehicle for the Free World effort in Vietnam, they lacked a substitute for SEATO. This was partly a difficulty of their own making according to one US diplomat. In response to a suggestion for a conference of troop-contributing nations instead of a yearly SEATO Council meeting, US Ambassador to Thailand Graham A. Martin maintained that repeated assertions about the commitment to South Vietnam, deriving from SEATO obligations, made it difficult to adopt any other coalition vehicle without undermining SEATO and without raising awkward questions about Vietnam in the US Senate.³³ Trying to use SEATO as a vehicle for the defence of South Vietnam ended up reducing the salience of the alliance as a means of containing communism and preserving stability in Asia. The unilateral American ‘opening’ to Communist China in 1971 played a further part in weakening SEATO, and the alliance was dissolved in 1977.

III

Several countries gave rhetorical endorsement of American policy in Vietnam but were not willing to participate directly. When the United States considered an active combat role in Vietnam in early 1965, William

³⁰ Telegram from SEATO meeting delegation to State, 14 April 1964, Document 48, *FRUS 1964–1968 XXVII*.

³¹ Maurice Vaisse, ‘De Gaulle and the Vietnam War’, in Gardner and Gittinger, *Search for Peace in Vietnam*, p. 162. See also Anne Sa’adah, ‘Idées Simples and Idées Fixées: De Gaulle, the United States, and Vietnam’, in *De Gaulle and the United States*, ed. Robert O. Paxton and Nicholas Wahl (Oxford, 1994), pp. 295–316.

³² State Department to Embassy Paris, 30 March 1965, Document 54, *FRUS 1964–1968 XVII*.

³³ Embassy Bangkok to State Department, 12 Jan. 1967, Document 85, *FRUS 1964–1968 XVII*.

P. Bundy of the State Department indicated that he and his colleagues had met with ‘sympathy to our principles of action – resistance to aggression while working for peace – but . . . little tangible evidence of prospects of substantially increased assistance’.³⁴ Probably the main reason for the reluctance to provide combat support was that, as Flott noted, allies ‘didn’t quite see the urgency’ of the war in Vietnam ‘in the same terms that we did’. He believed that many Asian allies in particular had ‘the feeling that the Viet Cong did after all have a popular base of a sort and that they just didn’t want their country in the long run to be associated with having fought against the Viet Cong’.³⁵ The perception that ultimately the communists might well triumph was subsequently vindicated in 1975 with the collapse of the Saigon regime – though American policymakers would have argued that the relatively limited third country support played at least an indirect role in this outcome.

In late 1964 National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy noted in relation to the United Kingdom, which gave only diplomatic support and non-military practical assistance, that there was ‘no political base whatever . . . in any party, for an increased . . . commitment’.³⁶ The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was a supporter of the US dollar during the 1960s, helping in effect to finance the US war effort in Vietnam, and it was one of the largest contributors to South Vietnam economically.³⁷ However, Bonn felt inhibitions towards a more substantial involvement involving ‘boots on the ground’. In 1964 a German official stated that his country could not become involved in ‘brush-fire’ wars: ‘Military adventures outside our own borders have characterized two disastrous world wars. People still remember and resent that all over the world. So please leave us out.’³⁸ As in many West European countries, there were popular inhibitions. According to Gerhard Schroeder later that year, ‘people in Germany are under the impression that all of South Vietnam is a war zone’.³⁹ The need to enhance the security of South Vietnam was precisely why US policymakers wanted help, but no European leaders were willing to commit troops in the absence of popular support nor were they willing to try to create that support. Leaders of NATO states simply did not

³⁴ William P. Bundy to Johnson, 27 July 1965, Document 95, *FRUS 1964–65 III*.

³⁵ Flott Oral History, LBJL/ADST.

³⁶ Bundy to Johnson, ‘The British and Vietnam’, 5 Dec. 1964, Bundy Vol. 7 10/1–12/31/64 (2 of 3), Box 2, NSF: Memos to the President, LBJL. On Bundy’s contributions as national security adviser, see Andrew Preston, *The War Council: McGeorge Bundy, the NSC and Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

³⁷ From 1966 the FRG extended economic and humanitarian aid of about \$7.5 million per year and provided more than 200 medical and technical personnel. See Larsen and Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam*, p. 164.

³⁸ Research Memorandum, Thomas L. Hughes (State Department director of intelligence and research) to Dean Rusk, 28 Aug. 1964, Vietnam Memos Vol. XVI 8/16–31/64, Box 7, NSF: Country File Vietnam, LBJL. On the FRG’s support of the dollar during the 1960s and the Vietnam War, see Hubert Zimmerman, ‘Who Paid for America’s War? Vietnam and the International Monetary System, 1960–1975’, in Daum, Gardner and Mausbach, *America, the Vietnam War and the World*, p. 170.

³⁹ Rusk to State Department, 15 Dec. 1965, Document 135, *FRUS 1964–1968 XV*.

identify their interests with the future of the regime in Saigon. Similarly, Clifford returned from the 1967 mission with Taylor to troop contributing countries in the Pacific area with a sense of what the London *Times*' Washington correspondent Henry Brandon described as: 'uneasiness, even dismay. He had come to the conclusion that these allies did not agree with the American analysis of the importance of the war . . . The allies felt no urgency, no real sense of danger, certainly nothing to compare with their feelings when Japan had been on the march in the Second World War.'⁴⁰

Some foreign leaders invoked legal restraints as a means of deflecting American pressure to provide soldiers. Although Johnson argued that the United Kingdom had legal obligations under the SEATO treaty to fight in Vietnam, the British contended that they were obliged to maintain a neutral stance owing to their position as co-chairman of the Geneva conference of 1954 and as a member of the International Control Commission established to uphold the settlement.⁴¹ Schroeder rejected Rusk's entreaties for construction or police units to perform non-combat roles on the grounds of 'legal as well as policy obstacles'.⁴² President Castelo Branco of Brazil pointed out to Ambassador-at-Large Averell Harriman late in 1965 that under the terms of the Brazilian Constitution, Congressional approval was required 'before troops can be sent abroad and the Brazilian Congress does not reconvene until March'.⁴³

International political concerns inhibited some otherwise close American allies from contributing. Flott suggested that in the case of Israel, for example, 'the biggest problem was that the government . . . did not want to be seen as doing something that would antagonize the Russians unnecessarily and therefore compromise even further the position of Soviet Jewry'.⁴⁴ American policymakers refrained from approaching Tehran for military assistance because an Iranian contribution might antagonize Iran's neighbour, the Soviet Union.⁴⁵ In fact, Washington made requests only of those countries with a reasonable prospect of obliging. African countries were, as Thomas L. Hughes noted in 1964, 'preoccupied with their own problems and only marginally interested in what is happening in Asia'. They also considered that 'their own material needs are greater, and their means of satisfying them smaller, than those of most other countries, including South Vietnam'. Furthermore, African governments tended to regard the Vietnam conflict 'as one having cold

⁴⁰ Henry Brandon, *Anatomy of Error: The Secret History of the Vietnam War* (New York, 1970) [hereafter Brandon, *Anatomy of Error*], p. 122.

⁴¹ Johnson–Wilson telephone conversation, 10 Feb. 1965, Document 103, *FRUS 1964–1968 II Vietnam: January–June 1965*.

⁴² Rusk to State Department, 15 Dec. 1965, Document 135, *FRUS 1964–1968 XV*.

⁴³ Harriman to Johnson, 23 Dec. 1965, Document 87, *FRUS 1964–1968 III*.

⁴⁴ Flott Oral History, LBJL/ADST.

⁴⁵ Harriman to Johnson, 23 Dec. 1965, Document 87, *FRUS 1964–1965 III*.

war overtones and therefore calling their own policy of non-alignment into play'.⁴⁶

The efforts to elicit third country contributions often bred frustration among American policymakers and led occasionally to the use of threats. At a late 1965 meeting with German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard, President Johnson requested a battalion each of construction workers and of medics. To make his case, he 'recounted all we have done for Germany. Now was the time for Germany to pay us back', and complained: 'If I can get legislation to put 200,000 more men into Vietnam, surely the Chancellor can get two battalions to Vietnam. If we are going to be partners, we better find out right now.'⁴⁷ A few weeks later, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara complained that the Germans had still not provided

a damn thing except the hospital ship. The Ambassador came in the other day and asked if the hospital ship was satisfactory as the substitute for combat troops and I told him absolutely not . . . I told him that you had personally asked the Chancellor for a medical unit and a combat construction battalion, done it twice in my presence, and I saw absolutely no excuse whatsoever for their failure to send it. Well, he didn't indicate they would.⁴⁸

There were instances of American frustration even in relation to the main third country contributor, the Republic of Korea. In early 1968, during the Tet Offensive, Rusk advised Ambassador William Porter in Seoul that if President Park raised the question of reduced Korean 'participation in Viet-Nam . . . you should not hesitate to point out that that would require a reduced US participation in Korea'.⁴⁹ A discussion between Korean leaders and US officials a few days later saw the threat unveiled to dramatic effect: 'When [Prime Minister] Chung stated that National Assembly pressure might force his government to withdraw their troops from Vietnam, [Cyrus] Vance told him flatly we would reciprocate by withdrawing our troops from Korea. He gasped, sputtered and immediately went out.'⁵⁰

At other times, there was a sense of resignation towards the limits of recruitment not least because most of the allies approached by the United States had severe limitations of one type or another. These included their relatively modest defence budgets. For example, Robert McNamara noted in 1964 that because Australia's 'entire defence budget is so low', the country would be able 'to put in only a token force in South Vietnam'.⁵¹ An American diplomat in Thailand commented three years later

⁴⁶ Research Memorandum, Thomas L. Hughes (State Department Director of Intelligence and Research) to Dean Rusk, 28 Aug. 1964, Document 143, Vietnam Memos Vol. XVI 8/16-31/64, Box 7, NSF: Country File Vietnam, LBJL.

⁴⁷ Wilfried Mausbach, 'Triangle of Discord: The United States, Germany, and French Peace Initiatives for Vietnam', in Gardner and Gittinger, *Search for Peace in Vietnam*, p. 167.

⁴⁸ Johnson-McNamara telephone conversation, 17 Jan. 1966, Document 26, *FRUS 1964-1968 IV*.

⁴⁹ State Department to Embassy Seoul, 11 Feb. 1968, Document 175, *FRUS 1964-1968 XXIX*.

⁵⁰ Embassy Seoul to State Department, 14 Feb. 1968, Document 179, *FRUS 1964-1968 XXIX*.

⁵¹ NSC meeting, 15 May 1964, Document 156, *FRUS 1964-1968 I*. Australia provided nearly 8,000 troops by 1968 and New Zealand around 500.

that if the Thais increased their commitment from the existing 2,300 to around 10,000, then the financial burden would amount to one-eighth of the country's defence budget, 'solely to pay the overseas allowances for 10,000 troops at the present rates'.⁵² American financial support for some of the contributors was therefore essential, and while for symbolic reasons Washington was keen to see any form of participation, the view was that the larger the contribution the better.

IV

US diplomats were obliged to maintain a low profile to avoid generating public opposition in the donor countries. In August 1964, a circular telegram was sent to US missions concerning the visit to European capitals of the US Ambassador to Saigon, Henry Cabot Lodge, explaining that

Major purpose of his trip, although this will not be indicated publicly, will be to enlist support for increased economic and technical assistance from third countries as regards getting more third country personnel out into the field. For public consumption it will be stated that [the] purpose [of] Amb[assador] Lodge's trip is to explain to leaders of various foreign governments in Europe the current situation and US policies in Vietnam.⁵³

Though compatible, the publicly stated purpose of the visit differed from the main purpose. In November 1966 McGeorge Bundy confirmed in an internal memorandum that, for reasons of their own, Australia and New Zealand needed little urging to increase their respective contributions, but American pressure 'right after the elections' which were due to take place in both countries 'would be badly misconstrued' and possibly counterproductive.⁵⁴ The official rationale of Clifford and Taylor's diplomatic tour in 1967 was to consult the other members of SEATO on strategy in Vietnam, but contemporary documentation acknowledged that the more important and more closely held aspect of the mission was to secure additional contributions.⁵⁵ All told, then, the administration was obliged to operate 'below the radar' in its efforts to increase the third country combat commitments in Vietnam because to act otherwise would be counterproductive both in terms of eliciting additional contributions and in terms of the political value of contributions. Correspondingly, policy-makers had to be careful in their public statements to convey the impression that third countries were contributing largely for independent reasons and because of the self-evident righteousness of the war rather than because Washington was pressuring them or offering material inducements.

⁵² Unger to William P. Bundy, 12 Sept. 1967, Document 354, *FRUS 1964–1968 XVII*.

⁵³ Editorial Note, Document 301, *FRUS 1964–1968 I*.

⁵⁴ William P. Bundy to Rusk, 15 Nov. 1966, Document 309, *FRUS 1964–1968 IV*.

⁵⁵ Editorial Note, Document 253, *FRUS 1964–1968 V*.

Some American officials recognized that the efforts to recruit third countries might have been more carefully crafted. Maxwell Taylor, then US ambassador to Saigon, complained in April 1965 that Washington had directed him to raise the question of an Australian combat force with the regime in Saigon, only for him to be informed soon after that he should now wait for further instructions. He had also been told to discuss with South Vietnam the question of Korean combat troops, but lacked an indication of how these troops would be deployed – something Saigon would want to know. There was confusion even about how US combat troops were going to be deployed now that the Americanization of the war had begun. Taylor wanted an authoritative indication of Washington's desires with respect to the introduction of US and, above all, third country, combat troops: 'It is not going to be easy to get ready concurrence for the large-scale introduction of foreign troops unless the need is clear and explicit.'⁵⁶ US Ambassador Winthrop G. Brown in Seoul opposed third country contributions on account of the possible damage to bilateral relations between the United States and would-be donors. He warned in 1965 that recruiting Korean combat troops would risk

creating a situation in which Korea appears to its own people and to others in the world not as an independent and willing contributor to a struggle in which it has a vital interest, but as a puppet or vassal of the United States, brought into danger in distant Southeast Asia and at home to serve the interests of the United States.⁵⁷

Brown later expressed concern that Washington was pushing too hard and too quickly to elicit a Korean contribution. Even if 'low-key' initial representations were made in South Vietnam, those representations would 'of course, immediately become known to ROK Government, which will just be emerging from [a] highly difficult struggle to obtain Assembly approval for [the] despatch [of an] additional brigade and division'. This struggle had undermined Korean–American relations and led to criticism of Washington for applying 'too much pressure'.⁵⁸ However, by 1968 the Republic of Korea did commit some 50,000 troops, by far the biggest third country effort, to the defence of South Vietnam. It seems therefore that fears for the state of US–Korean relations were overstated, but it was certainly evident in relation to the Korean case how Washington was proceeding with haste to cultivate third country commitments in Vietnam.

The regime in South Vietnam was scarcely able to participate in the recruitment programme. Saigon was chronically preoccupied with its internal politics as one regime gave way to another time and again, with the result that the South Vietnamese were ill-fitted to take the diplomatic initiative. According to Chester Cooper, 'Saigon appeared to believe'

⁵⁶ Embassy Saigon to State Department, 17 April 1965, Document 259, *FRUS 1964–1968 II*.

⁵⁷ Embassy Seoul to State Department, 15 April 1965, Document 39, *FRUS 1964–1968 XXIX*.

⁵⁸ Embassy Seoul to State Department, 18 March 1966, Document 82, *FRUS 1964–1968 XXIX*.

(with some justification) ‘that the [recruitment] programme was a public relations campaign directed at the American people’.⁵⁹ A related problem was that South Vietnam’s foreign policy establishment was small and inexperienced. Robert McNamara complained in 1964 that Saigon was ‘inadequately represented abroad’ and should dispatch ‘many more able ambassadors’ to enable ‘proper’ representation in the United Nations, African and South American countries, and in Europe, above all, the FRG.⁶⁰ Effective representation would help to increase international concern for South Vietnam’s plight, and might lead, it was hoped, to more third country assistance.

Officially, the Pentagon supported the programme to increase third country support, but some military personnel had their reservations. A State Department official suggested in 1964 that military staff at the US Mission in Saigon looked upon third country assistance ‘with very little zeal’. This was mainly on account of their previous experience in allied commands such as Korea where ‘the care and feeding of these third country elements has always proved more trouble than it is worth’.⁶¹ The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised against relying on allies in Vietnam because the United States had received ‘no significant support in Korea . . . The United States did essentially all the fighting, took all the casualties, and paid all the bills.’⁶² This was a harsh view especially in relation to the Republic of Korea’s extensive contribution in that conflict, but the perception was that unless third country forces were present in large numbers it was scarcely worth having them on board. Overall, it is not surprising that US military officials in Vietnam were much more interested in the operational rather than the political value of third country contributions.

V

On occasion, American policymakers tried to use economic persuasion to obtain combat troops. In mid-1965 a number of White House advisers developed the idea of providing support for the pound sterling (which suffered periodic crises or ‘runs’ that required American bailouts) only if the British would send soldiers to Vietnam. According to McGeorge Bundy, ‘a British brigade in Vietnam would be worth a billion dollars at the moment of truth for sterling’.⁶³ President Johnson was keen to bring the British into a combat role because the United Kingdom was a leading

⁵⁹ Cooper, *Lost Crusade*, p. 266.

⁶⁰ Embassy Saigon to State Department, 14 May 1964, Document 152, *FRUS 1964–1968 I*.

⁶¹ Sullivan to Bundy, 24 June 1964, Document 223, *FRUS 1964–1968 I*.

⁶² Quoted in Danzik, ‘Coalition Forces in the Korean War’, p. 25.

⁶³ Bundy to Johnson, 28 July 1965, Bundy Vol. 12 (1/3), Box 4, NSF: Memos to the President, LBJL. Recent scholarship on the Anglo-American ‘deal’ on Vietnam in the summer of 1965 includes Jonathan Colman, *A ‘Special Relationship’? Anglo-American Relations ‘at the Summit’, 1964–68* (Manchester, 2004), pp. 75–99; Saki Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice Between Europe and the World?* (Basingstoke, 2002) [hereafter Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez*], pp. 114–21; Sylvia Ellis, *Britain, America and the Vietnam War* (Westport, 2004) [hereafter Ellis, *Britain, America*], pp. 118–27; Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe*, pp. 66–83.

member of NATO as well as SEATO, but he did not want to adopt Bundy's approach to recruitment. Johnson realized that if the British agreed to send troops to Vietnam only under duress, then the national and international controversy over America's stand might be inflamed still further should British motivations become public knowledge. Moreover, Washington had an existing interest in supporting the pound because the devaluation of sterling might lead ultimately to attacks on the dollar, which was increasingly vulnerable as a result of increasing defence spending in Vietnam and elsewhere. The White House advisers conceded to the wishes of their chief. Bundy informed Johnson in September that:

The one thing which [Prime Minister Harold Wilson] was apparently trying to avoid was a liability in Vietnam, and you will recall that it was your own wisdom that prevented us from making any such connection earlier in the summer, although I did once informally say to one of the Prime Minister's people that a battalion would be worth a billion – a position which I explicitly changed later.⁶⁴

Yet 'battalion for a billion' type thinking did not disappear entirely. Even as late as 1967 Dean Rusk remarked 'rather wryly . . . that he did think we could help the British' with their financial troubles if only "they put forces into Vietnam".⁶⁵ American foreign policy managers never got any troops from the British, but they valued the United Kingdom's military role supporting Malaysia in the 'Confrontation' with Indonesia, and they also appreciated London's public support for the US position in Vietnam.⁶⁶

It was not just in relation to the British that American diplomats thought in terms of financial *quid pro quos*. In 1966 McNamara told President Johnson that Korean participation in Vietnam was certain but would come at a price. Seoul had requested 'about \$600–\$700 million worth of cumshaw [gratuities or bribes] that they wanted from us in order to send that division'.⁶⁷ Other commentators understood that the motives of third country contributors were not always idealistic. A 1968 Department of Defense memorandum stated that, while the Republic of Korea was willing to send 5,000 civilians to provide various types of help, Seoul's main motive was 'to obtain high paying jobs and to earn additional foreign exchange'.⁶⁸ Flott commented that Filipino troops were 'on per diem and there were perhaps other incentives than fighting the fight

⁶⁴ Bundy to Johnson, 'Report from George Ball', 10 Sept. 1965, Bundy Vol. 14 (2/3), Box 4, NSF: Memos to the President, LBJL.

⁶⁵ Memorandum of conversation, 21 April 1967, Document 22, *FRUS 1964–1968 XXVII*.

⁶⁶ Ellis, *Britain, America*, p. 269. On Britain and the Vietnam War, see also John W. Young, 'Britain and "LBJ's War", 1964–68', *Cold War History*, ii (2002), 63–92; and Simon Kear, 'The British Consulate-General in Hanoi, 1954–73', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, x (1999), 215–39.

⁶⁷ Johnson–McNamara telephone conversation, 17 Jan. 1966, Document 26, *FRUS 1964–1968 IV*.

⁶⁸ Rostow to Johnson, enclosing Department of Defense paper, 19 June 1968, Document 202, *FRUS 1964–1968 XXIX*.

for freedom'.⁶⁹ Early in 1968 Pakistan offered to provide 5,000 civilians but only at what Clifford described as 'an exorbitant price'.⁷⁰

Without a doubt, some contributors were inclined to try to exploit the political vulnerability of the United States. In September 1967, Thailand offered an additional 8,500 men but only at a high price. As National Security Adviser Walt Rostow indicated, 'The Thai [*sic*] have tied to this offer a statement of their military requirements, which, if taken at face value, is huge.' Even after isolating 'those elements of the price list necessary to receive the additional troops' the package still amounted to \$149 million. However, if Washington decided that the price was too high and chose 'to forget the whole thing', then Bangkok might become less willing to make Thai 'real estate' available to the United States 'for a broad range of Vietnam-related projects' such as bombing missions and logistical support.⁷¹ Some third country officials, at least low-level personnel, were unabashed in admitting the connection between participating in Vietnam and financial considerations. Flott noted that 'there were a number of enterprising individual Filipinos' who arrived at the Saigon embassy 'saying, well, if you can make such and such a contract for barges or floating cranes or something from my firm, or if you can buy so much San Miguel beer for sale on the PX' [post exchange] they could 'be very influential and we'll certainly see to it that you get the Free World assistance'.⁷²

While some US officials acknowledged the importance of financial *quid pro quos* in eliciting third country support, it is too easy to charge the United States with recruiting mercenaries – the situation was more nuanced. This was certainly a point that American officials were keen to make. In September 1966 Walt Rostow pointed out in relation to the Philippines, which was introducing its civic action group, that it was 'all too simple – and generally superficial – to take an action by Government A and an action by Government B and make one the "pay off" for the other'. The American assistance programme to the Philippines was 'a determined effort to help a friendly country that is in trouble'. It had been underway before the Filipino decision to provide troops had been made and would have been implemented regardless of the situation in Vietnam. He noted too that there was no sending of 'economic aid to our Australian and New Zealand friends – who also have sent troops to Vietnam'.⁷³ Moreover, the fact that Australia and New Zealand chose to cover all their own costs indicates the existence of motives other than money. Canberra and Wellington sought to strengthen their security links with

⁶⁹ Flott OH, LBJL/ADST.

⁷⁰ Notes of Meeting, 19 June 1968, Document 276, *FRUS 1964–1968 VI*.

⁷¹ Wright to Rostow, 19 Sept. 1967, Document 359, *FRUS 1964–1968 XXVII*. For an account of Walt Rostow's contribution to policymaking, see David Milne, *America's Rasputin: Walt Rostow and the Vietnam War* (New York, 2008).

⁷² Flott OH, LBJL/ADST.

⁷³ Rostow to Johnson, 16 Sept. 1966, Document 346, *FRUS 1964–1968 XXVI*.

the United States in an era in which British power in Asia was declining.⁷⁴ Financial issues aside, the Thais had a range of motives in providing troops. Their contribution was in part, according to Rusk, ‘a gambit to have a larger voice in determining the composition of any future peace conference and related actions, dealing with the command structure, etc.’.⁷⁵ They also wanted to modernize their armed forces.⁷⁶ According to Larsen and Collins, Seoul relished the political symbolism of sending its army as an independent (if American-funded) force to assist the United States.⁷⁷ While generous American largesse played a role in some cases, it was not the sole reason why third countries were willing to contribute troops; given their locations, they all had a particular strategic interest in the outcome of the war in Vietnam. This was in contrast to the NATO states, which were geographically more removed from the action.

VI

While Washington was most concerned about the political symbolism of recruiting third countries in Vietnam, it is worth noting that these forces did make a useful practical contribution. Early in 1966, Presidential adviser Jack Valenti commented that the cost of equipping two or more Korean divisions, and sending them to Vietnam was ‘cheap – for the equipping Koreans is at the ratio of 5-1 to 10-1 for the same equipment of the same number of Americans. Moreover, the Koreans are competent jungle fighters – and are ready to fight.’⁷⁸ On a visit to Vietnam in June 1967, Special Counsel to the President Harry McPherson noted that the Korean Marines and Tiger Troop were ‘a tough bunch. They have a method of seal and search that is the epitome of war psychology; it is slow, harrowing, and effective.’⁷⁹ Army Chief of Staff General Creighton Abrams commented that the activities of the Koreans ‘left nothing to be desired’ and that the Australians had ‘performed very well’.⁸⁰ The latter participated in as many as nineteen major operations, including one in 1966 when an Australian unit uncovered a vast complex of tunnels that turned out to be a Viet Cong headquarters.⁸¹ As far as Filipino troops were concerned, in 1967 Harry McPherson stated that he was ‘stunned’ by their ‘soldierly bearing’. They had ‘an effective civic action project, a

⁷⁴ Brandon, *Anatomy of Error*, p. 69. On British policy in Asia, see Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*.

⁷⁵ Rusk to State, 26 Oct. 1966, Document 334, *FRUS 1964–1968 XVII*.

⁷⁶ Larsen and Collins, *Allied Participation*, p. 25.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 134–5. For a fuller consideration of Thai motives, see Arne Kislénko, ‘Bamboo in the Shadows: US Relations with Thailand during the Vietnam War’, in Daum, Gardner and Mausbach, *America, the Vietnam War and the World*, pp. 197–219.

⁷⁸ Valenti to Johnson, 4 Jan. 1966, Document 322, *FRUS 1964–1968 XXVI*.

⁷⁹ McPherson to Johnson, 13 June 1967, Document 197, *FRUS 1964–1968 V*.

⁸⁰ Editorial Note, Document 160, *FRUS 1964–1968 VI*.

⁸¹ Larsen and Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam*, p. 93.

med cap [medical capabilities] program, and they are building a large and decent refugee camp'.⁸²

However, the third country troops were not always perfect. Freeman Matthews, a diplomat based in the US embassy in Saigon, was surprised that the brutality and cruelty of the Koreans, especially in 'how they enforced the rules in their particular sectors', did not create 'more trouble' for the United States.⁸³ McPherson commented that the view that the Koreans had 'created as many problems as they have solved, that they are too brutal and careless of civilian life' was widespread among American civilians in Vietnam.⁸⁴ There is also evidence of holding back from engagements. Army Chief of Staff General William C. Westmoreland suggested in 1965 that the Koreans were especially 'sensitive to the possibility of heavy casualties',⁸⁵ and two years later McPherson noted the common perception that the Australians were 'too cautious; they did not patrol widely, or invite attacks . . . their effectiveness was being diminished by their conservatism'. The same observer ventured that the seeming reticence of some Australian military operations had domestic political origins: 'the home government did not want to see a big casualty list'.⁸⁶

The participating states sometimes expressed concerns about the conduct of the war and about the terms of a settlement. Bundy noted in 1965 that 'to hold some of our allies we may need to be a little less rigid about talks'.⁸⁷ A bombing pause as a prelude to negotiations would, among other things, 'ease the domestic pressure' on allies such as the Australians.⁸⁸ The Manila conference of troop-contributing countries in 1966 saw intense wrangling between the United States and its allies over the wording of the communiqué on peace negotiations and US troop withdrawals should negotiations succeed.⁸⁹ There were also different views among the contributors about the prospects of Soviet and Chinese intervention, an issue of grave concern to strategists in the White House and the State Department. The State Department's Philip Habib noted in 1967 that Asian contributors were less concerned than were the Australians and New Zealanders about direct intervention from the major communist powers.⁹⁰ However, political differences were not detrimental to the allied effort in Vietnam, because the United States and South Vietnam carried by far the heaviest burdens. The decision not to send troops into North Vietnam, for example, for fear of precipitating direct Chinese involvement, was a Washington-originated policy rather than

⁸² McPherson to Johnson, 13 June 1967, Document 197, *FRUS 1964–1968 V*.

⁸³ H. Freeman Matthews Jr OH, conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy, 20 April 1993, ADST.

⁸⁴ McPherson to Johnson, 13 June 1967, Document 197, *FRUS 1964–1968 V*.

⁸⁵ Westmoreland to Sharp, 13 June 1965, Document 1, *FRUS 1964–65 III*.

⁸⁶ McPherson to Johnson, 13 June 1967, Document 197, *FRUS 1964–1968 V*.

⁸⁷ Bundy to Johnson, 6 March 1965, Document 183, *FRUS 1964–1968 II*.

⁸⁸ Bundy to Johnson, 19 June 1965, Document 8, *FRUS 1964–65 III*.

⁸⁹ Cooper, *Lost Crusade*, pp. 267, 316.

⁹⁰ Habib to Rusk, 5 Aug. 1967, Document 269, *FRUS 1964–1968 V*.

one deriving from any concerns for the views of third countries. At the same time, different policy preferences among the contributors did have to be considered by American policymakers whose energies were already well dispersed by the demands of waging war in Vietnam and maintaining domestic support.

Given that financial inducements played a role in bringing some third countries into the conflict, it is not surprising that some of the contributors were notably corrupt. Andrew Antippas, who served as a Political Officer in Saigon from 1967 to 1969, commented in relation to the Philippines that:

the manager of the Commissary or the PX in Cholon was a Filipino employee. The PX would get in a supply of TV sets, stereos, or whatever. He would call PHILCAG, Philippine Civic Action Group, which was out in Tay Ninh province. He would call them, and they would scarf up everything that had come in. I was in Saigon for months before I could buy a TV set.⁹¹

Antippas noted the saying about the Thais that, 'If we could only manoeuvre the Viet Cong between the Thai and the PX, we'd have a military victory on our hands.' Thai soldiers 'would buy refrigerators and sell them off the back of their trucks . . . on a wholesale basis'.⁹² According to General Westmoreland, the South Koreans would 'use their presence to get as much new American equipment as possible, trading off their participation in operations for new helicopters and artillery'. He noted that 'the reputation of the Koreans for scrounging afforded one argument against a combined command, for under such an arrangement foreign officers would have made up part of the MACV [US Military Assistance Command Vietnam] staff'.⁹³ However, it seems that there was a general sense that corruption was merely the cost of doing business and, as such, there was little or no desire on the part of American policymakers to admonish the culprits. Corruption was a serious matter nevertheless. It was a drain on resources, offered grist to the communist propaganda mill, and risked undermining morale in the more virtuous elements of Free World forces.

Ultimately, the contribution of third country troops in Vietnam should be measured by their sacrifices. With over 5,000 dead (mainly Korean) between them, third country forces did accept a notable share of the losses.⁹⁴ This amounted to around a tenth of American casualties, and was proportional with the numbers of third country troops in Vietnam. Larsen and Collins noted in 1975 that the Korean troops, for example, 'received almost no recognition in the American press and it is doubtful

⁹¹ Andrew F. Antippas OH conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy, 19 July 1994, ADST.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (New York, 1976) [hereafter Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*], p. 258.

⁹⁴ Blackburn, *More Flags*, p. xiii. The breakdown was as follows: Republic of Korea, 4,407; Australia and New Zealand, 475; Thailand, 350; and the Philippines, 9. Ibid.

if many Americans fully appreciate their contributions in Vietnam'.⁹⁵ Decades later, third country contributions have yet to receive much acknowledgement in the United States.

VII

There are a number of interesting paradoxes involved in coalition-building which stretch far beyond the US experience in the Vietnam War. First, while coalitions are often sought for the purposes of burden-sharing and legitimacy, they also invite conflicting interests from coalition-partners and make effective coordination of policy hard to achieve. Burden-sharing may be fine in principle but it also hinders effective control of policy and war-planning. Secondly, it might seem strange that even a superpower like the United States still needed allies in order to legitimize its actions both domestically and internationally. If anything, this indicates the close relationship between war and politics, and points to the potential conflict of interests between winning a war and winning the peace. Finally, while the United States needed allies in Vietnam, this could not be seen to occur as a direct result of political pressures from Washington but had to be 'voluntary' and based on allied initiatives. This was in essence a public-relations issue, but it had important consequences for the efforts to gain political legitimacy and domestic and international support for US efforts in the region.

In some regards, the campaign to recruit allies in Vietnam can be seen positively. For a start, it is natural for states to try to wage war as part of a coalition rather than carry the political and military burdens alone.⁹⁶ In the 1960s, the United States had the politically, if not militarily successful, example of coalition warfare in Korea upon which to draw. Though *quid pro quos* are sometimes distasteful, especially in the light of the exalted rhetoric of freedom and self-determination usually deployed to justify the making of war, implicit or explicit deals feature in all coalitions. So far as payments for contributors in Vietnam are concerned, it is too simplistic to speak of the United States recruiting 'mercenaries' – for a start, of the five countries furnishing troops, Korea had offered to make a contribution in 1954, long before the launching of the 'More Flags' appeal, and Australia and the Philippines were providing non-combat assistance before the appeal.⁹⁷ In proportion to their numbers, third countries made significant sacrifices and played a useful operational role – Australian troops, for example, had well-honed skills in guerrilla warfare because of experience gained in operations with the British in Malaysia.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Larsen and Collins, *Allied Participation*, p. 145.

⁹⁶ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 255–6.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

⁹⁸ Larsen and Collins, *Allied Participation*, pp. 113–14.

Vietnam divided the western alliance, so one might expect at best only modest results from a recruitment campaign. The presence of Asian allies went some way to obviate the view, noted by French Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville, that ‘this war is a matter of white people against yellow people’.⁹⁹ Although the coalition did not give rise to a long-lasting alliance between troop contributors, such a development has rarely been the case historically. The Grand Alliance of the Second World War, for example, gave way to the bitter rivalries of the cold war soon after the defeat of Nazi Germany. The Korean War did not lead to a recasting of Free World alliances. Some of the negative attitudes expressed by US officials towards the recruitment campaign and its results might have derived as much from the general frustrations towards the war as towards allies.

However, the limitations of the coalition-building effort do seem to overshadow the more positive aspects. A further paradox of US efforts to recruit allies was that the more the US position in Vietnam suffered, the greater was the need for those allies. Correspondingly, as the situation in Vietnam deteriorated then the less other countries would want to participate. On the ‘mercenary’ question, it seems unlikely that in the absence of US material incentives the Koreans, the Thais and the Filipinos would have contributed on the scale that they did. The limited results of the recruitment campaign – just five third country contributors of combat troops – was surely a comment on the wisdom of American policy in Vietnam. The historian Fredrik Logevall has argued that President Johnson seemed to prefer pressuring allies for troops to taking advice from them.¹⁰⁰ The prime example of this attitude is Johnson’s blunt response to Harold Wilson’s telephone call early in 1965 to try to moderate the US response to communist attacks in Vietnam – essentially, he told the British leader either to provide troops or to mind his own business.¹⁰¹ Yet had the caution of allies been heeded, then the United States would have had further cause to think especially hard about Americanizing the conflict in 1965.¹⁰² It hardly needs adding that with hindsight the decision to introduce US combat troops was a disastrous initiative, staking American prestige on the survival of South Vietnam as never before, making it difficult to retreat, and leading eventually to the loss of nearly 60,000 American lives in a war whose scars have not yet healed.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Maurice Vaisse, ‘De Gaulle and the Vietnam War’, in Gardner and Gittinger, *Search for Peace in Vietnam*, p. 163.

¹⁰⁰ Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, 1999), p. 183.

¹⁰¹ Johnson–Wilson telephone conversation, 10 Feb. 1965, Document 103, *FRUS 1964–1968 II*.

¹⁰² Logevall points out that ‘the governments in London, Ottawa and Tokyo . . . failed . . . to truly confront the administration with the choice it was making. In doing so, they performed an essential function in allowing Lyndon Johnson in late 1964 and the first half of 1965 to escalate the Vietnam War by stealth.’ See Logevall, ‘Western Powers and Escalation of the War’, p. 177.

¹⁰³ Naturally, Washington’s main concern was with American casualties, but the cost for the Vietnamese was much higher and amounted to up to 3 million dead. Schulzinger, *Time for War*, p. 335.

The alliance of troop-contributing states in Vietnam might be described, in the light of some of the measures needed to induce assistance from the Asian countries, as ‘a coalition of the semi-willing’. SEATO had notable limitations as a vehicle for the coalition, which ended up merely as an *ad hoc* grouping. Asian and Antipodean third country participation certainly did not prevent the wrenching domestic divisions in the United States, popular protests in Europe or Congress’s later imposition of checks on the White House’s capacity to wage war without a formal declaration.

Moreover, the dismal experience of trying to increase third country combat support furthered the disillusionment of at least one important American official, namely, Clark Clifford, presidential adviser and Secretary of Defence. According to Henry Kissinger, President Richard Nixon’s National Security Adviser and Secretary of State, Clifford was one of the ‘shapers of the postwar foreign policy consensus’ in the United States.¹⁰⁴ However, for Clifford the fruitlessness of the 1967 recruitment tour with Maxwell Taylor ‘buried’ the ‘domino theory’ that he had once helped to promote.¹⁰⁵ Under pressure from figures such as Clifford, on 31 March 1968 Johnson announced a unilateral halt to bombing in Vietnam and stated that he was withdrawing as a candidate in the presidential race. The problem of Vietnam therefore fell to President Nixon, with the last American troops being withdrawn in 1973 and South Vietnam falling to communism two years later. All told, the Vietnam recruitment campaign under Johnson had turned the United States into a supplicant and had confirmed that the American-dominated coalition war to defend South Vietnam was a seriously flawed enterprise.

¹⁰⁴ Henry A. Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York, 1994), p. 677.

¹⁰⁵ Clark Clifford with Richard Holbrooke, *Counsel to the President: A Memoir* (New York, 1991), p. 452.