

VIETNAM PEACE PROGRAM

(Though the National Governing Board of the Ripon Society does not necessarily endorse opinions expressed in guest editorials, it hopes the position on Vietnam developed by Governor Romney will be strongly represented in the Republican Party, despite his withdrawal from the presidential race.)

I have recently visited twelve countries in five subcontinents representing more than one billion of the world's population. Wherever I went, the single most consuming problem was Vietnam.

I believe the Republican party must face this issue responsibly and directly.

Let me make clear where I think we stand today, and what we must do.

First, the United States relies too much on the military effort in Vietnam.

There are uncertain and even ominous factors on the military side. The enemy is now engaged in an aggressive military campaign to destroy U.S. units and inflict high casualties. While we have won important victories and maintain the upper hand, the other side has wone some, too, and its aggressiveness has not yet abated. So far the enemy has matched our escalation. I believe that the enemy can continue to put in more troops and more sophisticated weapons.

As recent developments in Vietnam indicate—the build-ups in Khesanh, the attacks on populated areas throughout the South and on the U.S. Embassy in Saigon itself, are striking examples—there is certainly no lessening of the military conflict. It does not appear that we can effectively reduce the military threat and capacity of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong for some time.

While the military effort is important, we should not expect that there can be a purely military solution to what is basically a political-guerrilla conflict, and we should conform our military activity to a sound overall policy.

Second, not enough attention is paid to the social and political effort to build a nation. Given the limitations on the effectiveness of military power, the offensive must be mounted on the political side.

It is in the villages and hamlets, and in the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese people, that this conflict will really be wone or lost.

We cannot hand the South Vietnamese a nation. They must do more. There must be a way to make certain that they play more of a part.

In addition to strengthening the contribution of the South Vietnamese Army, I believe that we should bring greater pressure to bear on the South Vietnamese to improve the amount and effectiveness of their contribution to the social and economic effort in the countryside. I believe we should as well apply greater pressure on the South Vietnamese to improve their self-government, eliminate corruption, and broaden political participation at all levels.

Third, we should be more creative and more credible

in our diplomatic efforts to pursue a peaceful solution.

I believe we must have a positive program for peace. That's why I have proposed the guaranteed neutralization of the area.

By guaranteed neutralization I mean that North and South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia would be de-fused from cold war conflict, liberated from the destructive presence of so-called "wars of national liberation," and relieved of the use or threat of force as a way of resolving disputes on their territory.

There would be a removal of foreign military troops or bases in the area and there would be no alliances by nations in the area with outside blocs, either eastern or western. The principle of self-determination would govern internally. The nations concerned would be free to pursue and should be assisted in economic development through cooperation on a regional basis.

There are three integrally related steps necessary to bring about guaranteed neutralization.

1. An internal settlement in South Vietnam, to come about by talks between Saigon and the Viet Cong to bring about cease-fire and disengagement and agreement on procedure and participation for elections in the South; and then actual free and open elections to determine the government of the South. The international community can help by providing the encouragement of an eventual guaranteed neutralization and by providing resources to help with the implementation, but those living in within South Vietnam must work out the internal arrangements.

2. An agreement among the great powers. This could be accomplished under the auspices of the Geneva Conference co-chairmen, perhaps with the help of a specially appointed committee of the Geneva Nations.

3. A carefully coordinated system of international community supervision, control, and implementation. This could be planned and assigned by a special international commission, sponsored, perhaps, by the U.N.

The U.S. cannot dictate the terms of an overall settlement. The conditions must be worked out by the principal protagonists, ourselves included, with help from the international community. But the U.S. should suggest the scope and general criteria for a settlement that is fair to all, express the crucial need for cooperative international support, and pledge its own sincere and serious backing for such an approach. The U.S. should serve as a leader and a catalyst.

My proposal counts on nations urgently motivated by the common revulsion to war and desire for peace. Despite the differences of the great powers, I believe there is also a common interest in ending destruction and the danger of wider war. I believe there is also an overriding interest in stability and order. This common interest must be identified and common cooperation to exploit it galvanized by pointing the way toward peace.

I believe that new Republican leadership can work more effectively for such a peace.