

Three Not-So-Obvious Contributions of Psychology to Peace

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There are two things in this world that don't quite fit together. One is that mushroom cloud. We try not to think about it—but it's *there*, rising, enormously, behind everything else we do. And then there's the other thing: the whole complicated spectacle of all the old causes of war going on as usual. There's the arms race, and ABM, and—much worse than ABM—that hydra-headed monster, MIRV. Most of all, there's the war in Vietnam. It stands there as a continual, glaring reminder that the United States—our own peace-loving United States—is capable of the kind of bungling that got us into that war. And then comes the thought: *if* even the peace-loving United States could bungle itself into a little war like Vietnam, what guarantee is there that we won't bungle ourselves into a big war—a nuclear war? It might be possible to exorcize the specter of that mushroom cloud if the Vietnam war did not exist. But it does exist.

The sense of bafflement is especially great perhaps among psychologists, because a good many psychologists feel that the bungling that got us into the Vietnam war, and could get us into a nuclear war, consists largely of ignoring certain fundamental *psychological* truths. Most of our American policy-makers (both Johnson and Nixon, for instance) behave as if they don't recognize certain things that we psychologists take for granted—things such as the necessity of empathy (including empathy with our

own worst enemies), the dangers of black-and-white thinking, and the role of the self-fulfilling prophecy in the vicious spiral of the arms race.

Communicating with Policy-Makers

All of this strengthens the case for better communication—better communication directly between us and the policy-makers in Washington, and better communication also between us and other scholars (historians, political scientists, area specialists) who in turn influence the policy-makers a good deal more than we do.

One difficulty in communicating with these people is that from their standpoint we often sound like a little boy trying to teach Grandma to suck eggs. Many of them are experts in their own fields, people from whom we really could learn a great deal. And then we come up with these ideas that they think they have heard many times already, ideas that they often think we have dressed up in pretentious new terminology but that they regard as essentially old, familiar, and in a sense obvious ideas.

The paradox is that it is precisely these so-called obvious ideas that we often see the top policy-makers ignoring when it comes to concrete action decisions. We see that mushroom cloud coming closer because they *act* as if they couldn't see what to us seems obvious. So, in order to define the problem accurately, it looks as if we need three categories. First, there are the things that really are obvious, on the verbal level *and* on the action level. Second, there are the things that seem obvious on the verbal level but that are often ignored on the action level. And third, there are the things that are not obvious on either the verbal or the action level.

Difficulties in Communicating the "Obvious"

The second category, although it won't be my main focus in this paper, does seem to me the most important: namely, the things that seem obvious on the general, abstract, verbal level, but that are often ignored on the specific, concrete, action level. As examples, let's take the three ideas I've already mentioned: the necessity of empathy, the dangers of black-and-white thinking, and the role played by the self-fulfilling prophecy in the vicious spiral of the arms race.

When empathy is defined in common-sense terms like "understanding the other fellow's point of view," any policy-maker is likely to say: "Sure, I believe in that, and I try to do it all the time." The chances are he takes pride in understanding the other fellow's point of view—even when he doesn't really understand it.

Or take the black-and-white picture. Anybody who has ever seen a Western movie, and knows about the bad guys and the good guys, the black hats and the white hats, is likely to have some notion, on the verbal level, of the dangers of black-and-white thinking, even if in practice he engages in black-and-white thinking most of the time.

Or take the role of the self-fulfilling prophecy in the vicious spiral of the arms race. To some, the self-fulfilling prophecy may be a new and interesting idea—Senator Fulbright found it a new and interesting idea when he heard it from Jerome Frank—but the vicious spiral of the arms race is an old idea that has been heard many times and might be accepted in theory even by people like Melvin Laird who in practice ignore it. What can we do then? The things that we feel are being most dangerously ignored in practice are the things most likely to make our listeners yawn.

The answer, as I see it, is *not* to stop talking about these fundamental things. It is, rather, to get right down onto the concrete action level and to talk not about these abstractions as such, but about concrete examples of them.

Bombing and Empathy

For instance, take again the notion of empathy. It seems to me that a flagrant concrete example of violation of the principle of empathy was our bombing of North Vietnam. That bombing was urged and continually supported by our most flagrant non-empathizers—the military. But its effects included a continual solidifying of opposition to us among the people in North Vietnam. It was as if we were doing our best to persuade every man, woman, and child in North Vietnam that America really *is* the devil, the wanton cruel aggressor that Communist propaganda has always said it was. Most of our military men in active service not only failed to empathize with the North Vietnamese; it looks as if they actively, though unconsciously, resisted the temptation to empathize. They shut their eyes to the best evidence available: the first-hand testimony of people like Harrison Salisbury (1967), Cameron (1966), Gerassi (1967), Gottlieb (1965), and the Quakers of the ship, *Phoenix*, who went to North Vietnam and came back saying that our bombing was solidifying opposition to us (Zietlow, 1967). They shut their eyes also to the evidence that the bombing was tending to alienate from us most of the other people in the world. And, most surprisingly, they shut their eyes to the evidence of history, represented by our own strategic bombing survey after World War II (Over-all report, 1945) which described how our bombing of Germany and Japan had had the same solidifying effect.

This kind of concrete example may jolt and antagonize some people, but it won't make them yawn. And focusing on such examples should help to make abstract concepts like empathy become more and more a part of the reality-world of the listener, on the concrete action level. It matters very little whether a policy-maker talks about empathy. It matters a great deal whether the impulse to empathize keeps coming up in his mind, at those particular moments when wisdom in action requires that he should at least try to understand the other fellow's point of view.

Communicating the "Not-So-Obvious"

Then there is that third category of psychological ideas and psychological facts that really are relatively unfamiliar to the decision-makers on both levels. I'm going to talk about three of them today: "three not-so-obvious contributions of psychology to peace." (Of course when I say "contributions" I mean potential contributions. What we have done is to learn certain things about the psychological causes of war. Whether these insights and the facts that support them ever actually contribute to peace depends on our own effort and our own skill as communicators.) Also it should be clear that these are not necessarily the most important of the not-so-obvious contributions. There are others that seem to me just as important or more so: Charles Osgood's (1962) GRIT proposal, for instance, and the experimental work Morton Deutsch has been doing (Deutsch and Krauss, 1962), and the monumental job Herbert Kelman did editing that big volume, *International Behavior* (1965). But those are pretty well known. I'm going to focus here on three that are not very well known.

The Hovland Principle in Communicating with Communists.

First, there is a corollary of the Hovland principle that a two-sided presentation of an argument is more persuasive than a one-sided presentation when you are talking with people who initially disagree with you. The corollary is that *we Americans should publicly accept as much as we can honestly accept of the Communist point of view.*

To some psychologists this may seem obvious, but most of our politicians and foreign-policy makers are likely to regard it as far from obvious. To many of them it must sound like subversive doctrine—like being "soft on Communism." That is precisely why we psychologists, *if* we think the evidence supports it, ought to be saying so—clearly, and often, and with all the research evidence that we can bring to bear.

Let's look at the evidence. You are probably familiar with the

impressive body of experimental data accumulated by Hovland and his colleagues (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953), on the general advantages of a “two-sided” form of persuasion—defining a two-sided argument not as a neutral position but as a genuine argument that candidly takes the stronger arguments on the other side into account. And “candidly taking them into account” means not only stating them fairly before trying to refute them, but also acknowledging any elements in them that the speaker honestly regards as elements of truth. You are probably also familiar with their more specific findings, including the finding that the two-sided approach is not always more effective. It is likely to be more effective if the audience is intelligent, or initially hostile to the viewpoint of the speaker, or both intelligent and hostile. Now comes the corollary, which is especially interesting from the standpoint of our relations with the Communist world. The Communist leaders fit exactly the Hovland prescription for the kind of people with whom one should use the two-sided approach. They are intelligent. They could hardly have maintained stability in a vast nation like the USSR if they were not at least fairly intelligent. And, to put it mildly, they are initially in disagreement with us. So it would follow that in communicating with them we should use the two-sided approach.

What is Right in Communism?

What would it mean, concretely? It would *not* mean soft-pedaling any of the things we believe to be wrong and dangerous on the Communist side: the invasion of Czechoslovakia, for instance, or the recent regression toward Stalinism in the Soviet Union, or the anarchy and cruelty of the “great cultural revolution” in Communist China, or the assassination of village leaders in Vietnam. But it would mean coupling candor about what we think is wrong with candor about what we think is right. That raises the question: what *is* right in Communism? Is anything right? Each of us would probably have a different answer, but just to make the main point concrete I’m going to go out on a limb and mention some of the things that I personally think are right.

Most important, probably, is the depth and intensity of the Russians’ desire for peace. They hate and fear war at least as much as we do. How could they not hate war, after the searing experience they went through in World War II? We can also give them credit for bearing the brunt of World War II—and winning, on that crucial Eastern Front. I know from my own experience in Moscow that nothing touches the heart of a Russian more than real appreciation, by an American, of what they suffered and what they accomplished in our common struggle against Hitler. There

is real common ground here, both when we look back on World War II and when we look ahead to the future. We and the Communists, looking ahead, find ourselves on the same side in the rather desperate struggle that both they and we are waging against the danger of nuclear war.

Some other things that I personally would acknowledge include Soviet space achievements, which really are extraordinary, considering how backward Russia was in 1917; the case for Communist Chinese intervention in Korea after MacArthur crossed the 38th Parallel; the case for Communist China in the matter of Quemoy and Matsu; the Vietnamese Communist case against Diem and his American supporters; a very large part of their case against what we have been doing in Vietnam since the death of Diem. And, more basically, the proposition that the Communist countries are ahead of us in social justice. In spite of striking inequalities, my reading of the evidence is that they are definitely ahead of us in eliminating unearned income—"surplus value"—and somewhat ahead of us in diminishing the gap between rich and poor. (This and related problems are spelled out more fully in White, 1967-8.)

Research on the Need to Seek Common Ground

If all this has a subversive sound, please recall again the Hovland experiments, and also the rather large number of other experiments that bring out, in one way or another, the desirability of discovering common ground if conflict is to be resolved. For instance, there are the experiments of Blake and Mouton (see Sawyer and Guetzkow, 1965) on how each side in a controversy ordinarily underestimates the amount of common ground that actually exists between its own position and that of its adversary. There is all the research on the non-zero-sum game, and the need to keep the players on both sides from treating a *non-zero-sum* game, in which the adversaries actually share some common interests, as if it were a zero-sum game in which loss for one side always means gain for the other. There is the so-called Rapoport Debate (actually originated by Carl Rogers, apparently), in which neither side is permitted to argue for its position until it has stated, to the other side's satisfaction, what the other side is trying to establish. There is Sherif's Robbers' Cave experiment in which conflict was replaced by cooperation and friendliness when a superordinate goal—an overriding common goal—demanded cooperation (Sherif, 1958). There is Rokeach's work (1960) on the importance of common beliefs as a basis for good will. There is Kenneth Hammond's recent work on the harm done by implicit assumptions that differ on the two sides of an argument, and that

are never really challenged or examined. All of these have as a common element the idea of common goals or common ground, and the desirability of common ground for conflict-resolution.

The "Modal Philosophy" and East-West Convergence

There is also my own content-analysis (White, 1949) of the values in various ideologies (American, Nazi, and Communist) using the value-analysis technique (White, 1951)—a project carried a good deal further recently by William Eckhardt (Eckhardt and White, 1967). The main upshot of that analysis was that there has apparently been a convergence of the value-systems of the Communist East and the non-Communist West. From a study of opinion and attitude surveys in a number of non-Communist countries, and of behavior data and political speeches and writings on both sides of the East-West conflict, a picture emerged of a good deal more common ground, shared by us and the Communists, than the embattled partisans on either side have ever recognized. Neither they nor we depart very far from the most commonly held political philosophy—I call it the "modal philosophy"—which with minor variations seems to characterize most of the politically conscious people in the world (White, 1957). (It is the great piling up of people in the middle zone—a very large "mode" in the statistical sense of the word "mode"—that justifies the term "modal philosophy.")

It includes three main elements. First, a preference for private ownership and free enterprise in at least the smaller economic units: the grocery store, the laundry, the repair shop, the small farm. In that respect the global majority seems to lean more toward our American way of life than toward that of the thorough-going socialists, or the Communists. A second element, though, is a strong emphasis on social welfare—helping the poor. In that respect the modal philosophy is more like Communism. And third, there is a belief in political democracy, including free speech. Most of the people in the global majority reject dictatorship, and most of them reject the word "communism" because to them it implies dictatorship, while they more or less accept the term "socialism," which to them implies democracy. In fact, the term "democratic socialism" probably comes closer than any other single term to representing what this modal philosophy is. This pattern of values and beliefs, or some not-very-wide variation from it, constitutes the great common ground that liberal Americans share, not only with millions of people who call themselves Communists but also with an actual majority of the politically conscious members of the human race.

Mirror-Image Wars and Territorial Self-Images

A second not-so-obvious proposition is *the frequency of mirror-image wars, and the importance of overlapping territorial self-images as causes of such wars.*

There are two kinds of war. There is the mirror-image war in which each side really believes that the other side is the aggressor (Bronfenbrenner, 1961). And there is the non-mirror-image war in which one side really believes that the other side is the aggressor, while the other side, though feeling justified, doesn't really literally believe that it is the victim of aggression.

An example of a mirror-image war would be World War I. A great many Americans don't realize how well Bronfenbrenner's term, the "mirror-image," applies to what happened in 1914. A great many still picture that war as a case of outright German aggression, comparable to Hitler's aggression in 1939. The historical facts, as we know them now, do not support that belief. The Germans believed, with some factual justification, that they were the victims of aggression. They pictured Russia, France, and England as ganging up on them, and felt that unless they struck first they would be overwhelmed by enemies on two fronts. Ole Holsti and Robert North (1965) with their content-analysis of the documents of 1914, have confirmed what historians such as Fay (1928) and Gooch (1938) had already showed—that when the war actually broke out the Germans were motivated mainly by fear.

Another mirror-image war is the Vietnam war. The militants on each side clearly believe that the other side is the aggressor. The North Vietnamese see the United States as aggressing against the soil of their homeland, and, in mirror-image fashion, militant Americans see the North Vietnamese as aggressing against South Vietnam, both by a campaign of assassination in the villages and by actual troops invading the South.

There is a supreme irony in this mirror-image type of war. It seems utterly ridiculous that *both* sides should be fighting because of real fear, imagining the enemy to be a brutal, arrogant aggressor, when actually the enemy is nerving himself to fight a war that he too thinks is in self-defense. Each side is fighting, with desperate earnestness, an imagined enemy, a bogey-man, a windmill. But you can't laugh at this kind of joke. It's too bloody, too tragic. You can only stand aghast, and ask: how is it possible, psychologically, for one country, or perhaps both, to be *that* much deluded?

Then there is the other kind of war: a non-mirror-image war. Any conflict regarded by neutral onlookers as outright aggression is a case in point: Hitler's attack on Poland, for instance. He must have known, and other Germans must have known, that

Poland was not attacking or threatening to attack Germany. Whatever their other justifications may have been, in this respect the German perception of the war was not a mirror-image of the perception in the minds of Germany's victims.

Since most people probably assume that the Hitler type of outright aggression is the typical way for wars to start, I did a rough check to see whether that is actually true, looking at thirty-seven wars that have occurred since 1913, and putting each of them, to the best of my ability, in one category or the other. The result was surprisingly even: 21 of the 37 wars (a little more than half) were in my judgment the mirror-image type, and 16 (a little less than half) were the non-mirror-image type. The method was rough, but it does seem clear that mirror-image wars, such as World War I and the Vietnam war, are not unusual exceptions. Their frequency is at least comparable with the frequency of non-mirror-image wars.

Overlapping and Conflict of Territorial Self-Images

Now, what can psychology contribute to an understanding of mirror-image wars, aside from applying to them Bronfenbrenner's apt and vivid term, "mirror-image"?

Actually it can contribute a number of things, several of which I've discussed in a book called *Nobody Wanted War* (White, 1968).¹ In this paper I want to focus on just one of them: the notion of the overlapping and conflict of territorial self-images.

It was a striking fact that most of the mirror-image wars in my list—16 out of 21—grew out of territorial conflicts in which there was reason to think that each side *really* believed that the disputed territory was part of itself. The surface of the world is dotted with ulcerous spots that have been the source of an enormous amount of bad blood and, often, of war: Bosnia, Alsace-Lorraine, the Sudetenland, the Polish Corridor, northern Ireland, Algeria, Israel, Kashmir, the Sino-Indian border, South Korea, Taiwan, Quemoy, South Vietnam. Every one of these ulcerous spots is a zone of overlap, where one country's territorial image of itself overlaps with another country's territorial image of *itself*.

The historians and political scientists are in general quite aware of this as a cause of war, and, under labels such as "irre-ndentism," or simply "territorial disputes," they have given it a fair amount of emphasis. But I don't think they have given it nearly

¹This book is an expanded version of "Misperception and the Vietnam War," *Journal of Social Issues*, 1966, 22(3). *Nobody Wanted War* in a further updated edition is scheduled for paperback publication in April, 1970 (Anchor Books).

enough emphasis, and as far as I know they have never suggested an adequate psychological explanation of it. Their favorite formula, the international struggle for power, does not adequately cover it, because what needs to be explained is the special emotional intensity of the desire for power over a certain piece of territory when that territory is perceived as part of the national *self*, even though it may make little contribution to the overall power of the nation. Taiwan is a good case in point. The Chinese Communists seem fanatically intent on driving the invaders out of Taiwan—the “invaders” being us and Chiang Kai-shek—even though Taiwan would add only a little to their national power.

Identification and the Self-Image

But psychologists can offer some useful clues to an understanding of such territorial conflict. One is the notion of the self-image itself, and of how, by a process of identification, the self-image comes to include many things that were not originally part of it. We use a variety of names in referring to the self-image: many would call it simply “the self”; Kurt Lewin called it the “person.” (His use of the term was broader, but I won’t go into these complexities here.) But whatever we call it, I think most of us would agree that the concept of self-image plays a central role in psychology, and that the process of identification, by which other things come to be incorporated in the self-image, is also very important. Lewin, for instance, spoke of how a person’s clothes come to be psychologically a part of the “person.” If clothes are identified with to such an extent that they seem to be part of the person or part of the “self,” then surely the territory that represents one’s own nation on the map can also be part of it.

Territory in Animal Behavior

Another clue is the analogy with the territorial fighting of animals. Lorenz (1966), Ardrey (1963), Carpenter (1934), and others have described how an animal will spring to the defense of territory that it has identified with and that it seems to regard as its own. Now of course we need to be on our guard against overhasty parallels between animal behavior and complex human behavior such as war making, but at this point the parallel seems valid, since the mechanism of identification is involved in both. In both cases, too, there is emotional disturbance when strangers—alien, unpredictable, presumably hostile strangers—are seen as impinging on land that is regarded as one’s own, and therefore as part of the self.

Territorial Overlap and Intolerance of Ambiguity

Still another clue lies in the notion of intolerance of ambiguity. What calls for explanation, you remember, is the rigidity of overlapping territorial claims, usually on both sides, and the special emotional intensity of those claims. Usually each side refuses to grant for one moment that there could be a particle of validity in the other side's claim. There is a clean-cutness, a simplicity, an all-or-none quality in these territorial perceptions that is clearly a gross oversimplification of the complexity of reality. In each side's reality-world that land just *is* its own; that's all there is to it.

As an example let's take Dean Rusk, and his perception of what land belongs to whom in Vietnam. Of course Secretary Rusk didn't see South Vietnam as belonging to America, but he did apparently see it as self-evidently part of something called the "Free World," and he did assume an American responsibility to resist any Communist encroachment on the Free World. If he had not seen the problem in these simplistic terms, he would hardly have kept coming back, as he did, to the simple proposition that the Communists have to be taught to "let their neighbors alone." To him it apparently seemed self-evident that South Vietnam was a "neighbor" of North Vietnam rather than, as the Communists apparently perceive it, a part of the very body of an independent nation called "Vietnam," into which American invaders have been arrogantly intruding. To Mr. Rusk the notion that American troops might be honestly regarded by anyone as invaders was apparently an intensely dissonant thought, and therefore unthinkable.

Territorial Self-images in Vietnam

South Vietnam, I think, is almost a classical case of an area in which territorial self-images overlap and in which, therefore, each side honestly feels that it *must* expel the alien intruders. On both sides ideology is to a large extent rationalization; the chief underlying psychological factor is pride—the virile self-image—defined as having the courage to defend one's "own" land when foreigners are perceived as attacking it. In a sense you could also say that fear is a fundamental emotion in wars of this type, but it is important to recognize that the fear is mobilized by cognitive distortion—by the mistaken assumption that the land in dispute is self-evidently one's own, and that therefore anyone else who has the effrontery to exist on that land, with a gun in his hand, must be a diabolical alien "aggressor." Neither fear nor pride would be intensely mobilized—as both of them are—if it were not for this

cognitive distortion. Each side feels that its manhood is at stake in whether it has the courage and the toughness to see to it that every last one of those intruders is thrown out of *its* territory. To Ho Chi Minh this proposition was apparently as self-evident and elemental as the mirror-image of it is to Dean Rusk. Neither one of them, apparently, would tolerate overlapping, and therefore ambiguous, territorial images. Frenkel-Brunswik (1949) would probably say that neither could tolerate ambiguity. We have, then, in the concept of intolerance of ambiguity, another clue to an understanding of why it is that territorial claims have such rigidity and emotional intensity. And we have the implication that *pulling apart* these overlapping images—clarifying boundaries and getting agreement on them—is one of the things that most needs to be done if we want peace. It may be, too, that deliberate withdrawal from certain hotly contested areas would on balance contribute to peace.

The “Pro-us Illusion”

A third not-so-obvious proposition is that *there is a tendency to see the people in another country as more friendly to one’s own side than they actually are*. Let’s call this the Pro-us Illusion. It’s a form of wishful thinking, obviously, but like various other forms of wishful thinking, it is seldom recognized as such by those who indulge in it.

. . . *in American Perception of the USSR*

One major example of it would be the long-lasting, hard-dying delusion of many Americans that most of the people in the Soviet Union are against their present rulers and on the American side in the East-West conflict. From 1917, when the Communists first came to power, until perhaps the middle 1950’s this was a very widespread belief in the United States, and it contributed much to the rigidity of the militant anti-Communist policy of American policy-makers such as John Foster Dulles. The Harvard research by Bauer, Inkeles, Kluckhohn, Hanfmann, and others (1956) did a lot to put an end to this delusion, but it lingers on in some quarters. Not so very long ago a prominent United States Senator declared that the Soviet Union is “seething with discontent” and hostility to its present rulers.

. . . *in Our Perception of the Bay of Pigs*

Another example was the belief of many Americans, at the time of our Bay of Pigs adventure, that most of the Cuban people were intensely hostile to Castro in the same way we were, and perhaps ready to rise up against him. It is hard to tell just what was in the minds of our policy-makers at that time, but it looks as if

they thought there was a good chance of some kind of uprising if we could just provide the spark to ignite it. The sad thing is that they could have known better. They had easy access to the research of Lloyd Free, a good solid piece of public-opinion survey work indicating that most of the Cuban people, less than a year earlier, were quite favorable to Castro (Cantril, 1968). But Free's evidence was ignored. According to Roger Hilsman, the policy-makers just didn't try to find out what real evidence existed on the attitudes of the Cuban people (Hilsman, 1968). They made no genuine effort to get evidence that was free from obvious bias. (The testimony of refugees in Miami, which they apparently did get, was obviously biased.) That much seems clear: their curiosity was inhibited. As to the reasons for their inhibition of curiosity, one can speculate along various lines. Perhaps it was a defense against dissonance; Festinger might say that they were embarked on an enterprise, and any doubts about the wisdom of that enterprise would have been cognitively dissonant. Or perhaps it was a defense of their black-and-white picture; they may have sensed that the information they didn't inquire into would have impaired their all-black image of Castro's diabolical tyranny over the Cuban people, and their all-white image of themselves as liberating the Cuban people from a diabolical tyrant. Heider might say they were preserving psychological harmony or balance. In any case it looks as if they shut their eyes because they were unconsciously or half-consciously afraid of what they might see. They cherished too fondly the Pro-us Illusion—and we know the fiasco that resulted.

. . . *in Our Perception of Vietnam*

Now, more disastrously, there is the case of Vietnam. There, too, we more or less kidded ourselves into believing that the people were on our side. In some ways it is very much like the case of Cuba. In both cases there has been a great overestimation of the extent to which the people were pro-us, and consequently a gross overestimate of the possibility of achieving a quick military victory. In both cases, too, there has been a striking lack of interest, on the part of top policy-making officials, in the best evidence that social and political science could provide.

The irony is increased by our solemn official dedication to the great objective of enabling the people of South Vietnam to determine their own destiny. President Johnson, McNamara, Rusk, President Nixon, and others have continually talked about helping "the Vietnamese" to defend themselves against the Viet Cong and invaders from the north—as if the Viet Cong were not Vietnamese, and as if it were self-evident that most of "the Viet-

namese” were gallantly resisting these attacks from within and without, and eager for our help in doing so.

Actually that was always far from self-evident. Some of you may have read my long article, “Misperception and the Vietnam War,” nearly three years ago in the *Journal of Social Issues* (White, 1966). If so, you may remember the twenty-five pages of the article (pp. 19–44) that were devoted to a rather intensive effort to cover the evidence on both sides of that question and to find out how the people of South Vietnam really felt about the war. The upshot of that analysis was pessimistic; I estimated that probably there were at that time more South Vietnamese leaning in the direction of the Viet Cong—or NLF²—than leaning in our direction.

Since then I have revised and updated the analysis, on the basis of three more years of accumulating evidence. The new information includes all that I was able to glean during two months on the spot in Vietnam, where I had an unusual opportunity to interview well-informed Vietnamese. It includes the Columbia Broadcasting System-Opinion Research Corporation survey, in which more than 1500 South Vietnamese respondents were interviewed (1967), the writings of Douglas Pike (1966), the outstanding authority on the Viet Cong, and a good deal of other miscellaneous evidence. None of this information is conclusive. For instance, the CBS-ORC survey obviously never solved the problem of getting peasants to speak frankly with middle-class, city-bred interviewers: But by putting together all of the various sorts of information, which is what I did in the book *Nobody Wanted War*, (pp. 29–84), we can, I think, make some fairly educated guesses.

The general upshot of the revised analysis differed from the earlier one chiefly in giving a good deal more emphasis to sheer indifference on the part of a great many of the South Vietnamese. It looks as if a large majority are now so disillusioned with both sides that their main preoccupations are simply the effort to survive, and a fervent hope that peace will come soon, regardless of which side wins. It’s a plague-on-both-your-houses attitude. But the results of the earlier analysis did seem to be confirmed in that it still looks as if, among those who do care intensely about which side wins, the Viet Cong has the edge. My own very rough and tentative estimates, representing the situation in 1967, were these: something like twenty percent really dedicated on the side of the

²The common term “Viet Cong” seems preferable to “National Liberation Front” here, since the core of the group is unquestionably Communist (which is all that “Cong” means) and the term “liberation” is question-begging Communist propaganda.

Viet Cong, something like ten percent equally dedicated on the anti-Viet-Cong side, and the remainder, something like seventy percent, relatively indifferent. Since in any political conflict the people who count are the people who care, what matters here is the estimate that, among those who *are* dedicated to one side or the other, more are against the position of the United States than for it. The upshot still seems to be that the psychological balance tips *against* the Saigon government and the intervening Americans. That is probably true even now, in 1969, and in previous years it was apparently much more true. For instance, my estimate is that in early 1965, when we first became very heavily involved, it was more like 40 to 10, not 20 to 10, in favor of the Viet Cong.

If our policy-makers had known . . .

Suppose our policy-makers had known that most of the emotionally involved people were against us, and had known it clearly, at the time they were making those fateful commitments and staking American prestige on the outcome. Suppose that in 1961–2 when John Kennedy made his major commitment, or in 1964–5 when Johnson made his, they had said to themselves: “Of course we know that if we fight in Vietnam we will be supporting a small minority against a much larger minority.” Would they have done it? Would we now have all the tragedy of the Vietnam War? All the blood, all the guilt, all the moral ignominy in the eyes of most of the rest of the world, all the sensitive intelligent young people here at home estranged from their own country? I doubt it. The American super-ego—if well informed—is too genuinely on the side of national self-determination, too genuinely against any clear, naked form of American domination over little countries on the other side of the world, even in the name of anti-Communism. If Kennedy and Johnson had clearly realized that the attitudes of the South Vietnamese people at that time were much more anti-us than pro-us, would this whole Vietnam mess have been avoided? I think so.

Vietnam was avoidable, just as the Bay of Pigs was avoidable. The one essential factor in avoiding both of these tragedies would have been to look hard and honestly at the best available evidence (not social-science data, in the case of Vietnam, but the testimony of the best-informed area experts, such as Joseph Buttinger). Our policy-makers in 1962 and 1965 did not look hard and honestly at the best available evidence; and the chief reason they didn't, it seems to me, was that they were clinging to an image of America as helping a beleaguered and grateful South Vietnam—not intervening in a nasty civil war in which most of those who were emotionally involved would be against us. Like the adventurers who

planned the Bay of Pigs they were not really curious, because they half-knew what the answer would be if they did look honestly at the facts. They too shut their eyes and put their hands over their ears because they were cherishing too fondly the Pro-us Illusion. And we know now the disaster that resulted.

Summary

The three not-so-obvious contributions (or potential contributions) of psychology to peace are:

First, a corollary of the Hovland two-sided approach: namely, that we Americans should strenuously seek common ground with the Communists, and publicly accept all we can honestly accept of the Communist point of view.

Second, the proposition that the mirror-image type of war is most likely to break out when there is overlapping and conflict of territorial self-images. It follows that reducing such overlap by clarifying boundaries, or even by deliberate withdrawal at certain points, would contribute to peace.

And third, the Pro-us Illusion, with the further proposition that if we Americans had not been indulging in it, neither the Bay of Pigs nor the Vietnam war would have occurred.

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