

Firing Line episode 098 "Can We Win in Vietnam?" transcript pages 1-22  
are the best copies available of an illegible original document.  
For more information, please contact the Hoover Institution Archives.

#98  
5/7/68

FIRING LINE - CAN WE WIN IN VIETNAM?

I.

WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY JR.

GUEST: HERMAN KAHN

B. Herman Kahn was trained as a mathematician and physicist but he is known - to quote one admirer - the von Clausewitz of the nuclear age. What brought that on was a book of profound impact published in 1960 and called, ON THERMONUCLEAR WAR, in which Mr. Kahn expressed a number of opinions among them that a thermonuclear war would not necessarily mean the end of life on earth. Mr. Kahn, the Harvard-Princeton noted hyperbolically is very impatient with those who believe that nuclear war would be somehow unpleasant. The misunderstanding of Mr. Kahn is a popular intellectual pastime, not to say compulsion. He used to work for the Rand Corporation, the government's principal Think-Tank, until a few years ago when he began his own - the HUDSON INSTITUTE - which conducts projects of military, diplomatic and social interest for the benefit of the government, the armed forces, and if we are to believe a recent dispatch Nelson Rockefeller. These days, of course, everyone is asking Mr. Kahn and his associates at HUDSON what are their views about the Vietnam War and Mr. Kahn has obligingly put together a book completed just after the Tet Offensive, called, CAN WE WIN IN VIETNAM? I should like to begin by asking Mr. Kahn whether in his judgment the Tet offensive was inconsistent with the United States estimate?

K. That offensive was not inconsistent with the estimates that we had. It was a little inconsistent with the impact of these estimates, that is, we knew in late 1967 about the rearmament of the VC and almost nobody understood how important that was. We also had various units that were rather <sup>you?</sup> familiar with the movement of people pre-TET. They were trapped, actually. The order of

The copyright laws of the United States (Title 17, U.S. Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. If a user makes a request for, or later uses a photocopy or reproduction (including handwritten copies) for purposes in excess of fair use, that user may be liable for copyright infringement. Users are advised to obtain permission from the copyright owner before any re-use of this material.

Use of this material is for private, non-commercial, and educational purposes; additional reprints and further distribution is prohibited. Copies are not for resale. All other rights reserved. For further information, contact Director, Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-6010

2.  
battle was the same, that is, no unit showed up in TET which had been previously identified, had been operated. By February 1st General Westmorland gave an briefing which reads very well today and General Ryan(?) gave one on February 2nd. On the other hand it's my impression that they didn't really believe their own briefings. They were very upset by TET, in other words.

B. Well, when the scale of TET was made known to you, I take it then you were not surprised that they were able to put on this kind of offensive but did you instantly understand it as primarily aimed at a piece of psychological warfare against the United States?

K. I don't think it was aimed as a piece of psychological warfare. Everybody was surprised at the SCALE, that is, the bank(?) of the attack and the first reaction was at the incredible skill at and patrol - coordination - to make an attack of that scale. The did have a great deal of skill but not as much as we thought because the actual tactics in many cases were very bad. In other words they overextended themselves. In all kinds of places there were VC effects that were just worse than things done elsewhere. But I don't think the thing was psychological. I think they did expect collapse of the elements. They did expect to occupy most of the towns. The only time I know of none of the units had orders to have a retreat. They were to stay put until rescued by outside units and none of the outside units came in.

B. Well, if it were not intended as a psychological act did it nonetheless have that impact?

K. The impact was incredible. I now have a different position about TET than when it first occurred. I would be willing to guess that on February 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and maybe up to the 5th and 6th, Hanoi was very depressed by the outcome - the National Liberation Front. The main impact of TET was that it appeared to the world - what actually happened is controversial - it appeared



the world that we had said ~~ksomething~~ like come out and fight. They 3.  
came out and said gee, you look tough and at least as far as the news  
stories are concerned, from the 5th of February to March 20 we were passively  
defending cities with a sort of perimeter ~~-type~~ thing. There were rumors  
that 200,000 troops; 12,000 troops were air-lifted - people would  
obviously favor the second way the being suicidal. So to the world  
as a whole the thing looked like an enormous defeat and no American government  
spokesman attempted to explain and reconcile a military victory with things  
like the desperate 12,000 air-lift.

B. How do you account for that?

K. It's not complicated. It's my own belief that the whole discussion  
between the Pentagon and the President on these 200,000 reserves - I think  
the most crucial view in the Pentagon is that you can't win this war with  
business-as-usual but wanted a sense of mobilization and war-time emergency.  
The President I suspect - and I have no special information here - does not  
want to have pressures for escalation. He was against it. This is of course  
his right to make ~~the~~ decision. My guess is that if this ~~was~~ request was  
actually made it's never been confirmed. It's just that same old issue coming  
up again, basically. There was also some fear - people were uncertain what  
was going on - there were a lot of soldiers on the outskirts of Saigon. If they took  
Saigon we lost the war - the sense of ~~insurance~~ <sup>insurance</sup>, that was there, too. But  
most of the people in the headquarters and ~~xplaces~~ like that had a  
real sense of it being a dying gasp, the Battle of the Bulge, and so on. ~~XI~~  
would not accept that interpretation but ~~xthey~~ thought it was a victory.

B. Do you think that if it happened that our own country had been a despotic  
country completely in the position of talking care of its own handouts,  
publicity, and all that kind of business, we would by now have won the war?  
In other words, has at least one of our crucial failures been, as so often



alleged by President Johnson and some people, the reinvigoration of the 4  
Hanoi government constantly results from the appearance of disunity in America.  
K. I'm sure it must play a big role but it's hard to tell how much. If you  
look at what happened in Vietnam the escalation just seemed to be just action  
and counter-action. These sort of <sup>spiraled</sup> ~~spotted~~ out together the way some  
people think all operation do and most of them do not. If you're in Hanoi  
you must take heart at the kind of disunity in the United States and you  
probably over-estimate it - though today it's hard to over-estimate. I,  
however, agree that our own government and some of the military command  
officials themselves accept (?) some of the problems that are often attributed  
to the Press. That is, the Press could issue a kind of distorted reporting,  
nobody argues that - even the Press agrees with that statement.

B. Distorted, - in what sense?

K. There are really 4 or 5 different kinds of distortion: 1) We don't live  
in an heroic culture so you can't report heroism - it looks indecent to report  
the positive (?) angles. 2) We don't live in a religious culture, so you  
can't report it as an anti-communist crusade - that looks indecent. 3) So you  
have to report it at the human level; the tired Marine, the child-mother and  
so on and if you the quality of TV, you automatically get a war  
which has no religious or ideological significance because that's not report-  
able today. Significance is simply a lot of horror. At that  
level it's automatic, without any bias. You have a second thing - I think  
most ~~of the~~ Americans misinterpret the war. They think of it as a racial war.  
That's our formulation, not the Vietnamese formulation. They think of it as  
a foreign intervention unwanted by the mass of the people; there again that's  
our formulation, not theirs. But you add these kinds of misformulations to  
this and you have a very hostile attitude. But even if you didn't have a  
hostile attitude-.

XXXXXXXXXXXXX STATION BREAK.

B. You say, Mr. Kahn, that you get a hostile attitude as the result of 5. these distortions. You mean among the people at large or the intelligentsia.

K. No. I would say the intelligentsia is too restricted here though they're the center of this movement or attitude. Most people in Europe and a great number in the United States feel that they're destroying their country. Well, if you're destroying the country you can't be helping it. Let me give you an example. I sat next to a war (?) hound and I watched an American fighter-bomber dropping napalm on a VC camp. Now if you <sup>are</sup> have the typical American you look at this little man 4'11" , you ~~xxx~~ say, he must be sympathetic with that heroic man in black pajamas and against that man in the airplane. You can't conceive - at least Americans can not - that he's not on the other side. Now this man next to me will turn to me and say the napalm is not as hot as it used to be - he's mad the other way. He hates the National Liberation Front, the VC, and that swamps any racial feelings he may have. But we find it hard to believe.

B. Well, wouldn't you guess that there would be newspaper writers and reporters who, remarking this, would find it newsworthy enough to relay.

K. They don't notice it. I once heard the following: I asked a number of American officers - I wanted to formulate this issue in its most basic terms - this was about two years ago - they all formulated, and these are very big men now, saying we must win this war before rising racism engulfs us -

all these white faces. I said, that sounds very interesting. Do you have any evidence of this aside from the newspapers that you read from home? That is, you've been in the country 6 months, a year, do you have any anecdote to prove this point of view. In fact what seems to happen in a typical Vietnamese village, not the VC village but a friendly one, they see how you behave. If you behave well and they're not too weak, they're very friendly. If you behave badly and they're not too powerful, they're mad. Now



interpreters don't like Americans. The same, as the French interpreter<sup>s</sup> don't like Americans. I don't say there's no racism. Race is not the sine qua non; many other things can swamp it.

B. Now what are those other things? I want to get to that because I know that you are very concrete ~~example~~ in your book but I just want to clear up this point so we won't be accused of hitting and running.

K. Sure.

B. You say that we don't live in a heroic culture or in a theological culture. Do I understand this to be a remark that you are making about American intellectuals or certainly not about the people at large.

K. I would make it mostly about the upper class Americans, the intellectuals, the people who roughly speaking, and this is a kind of cliché, Eastern and Western seaboard.

B. ~~kk~~ Yeah/.

K. The liberal establishment.

B. How about students?

K. Students - I could almost without question - certainly in quote "the better schools." Then I would guess that 50% is still a Christian fundamentalist country - but these are not people who have much influence in the government.

B. And therefore you feel that there is no sense of satisfaction - would you say there



was no sense of satisfaction twenty years ago when we made progress against the Germans, the Nazis?

K. Well, that was quite different. It was(n't)? an ideological war. Nobody, or very few people in the United States objected to dropping bombs on German civilians.

B. How do you account for the difference.

K. Well, there a number of differences here. For one thing ~~the - creating~~ <sup>communism</sup> looks very much less menacing to Americans. We have sometimes pointed out that one of the effects of this war has been the humiliation of the Soviet Union. I've known of Poles and Czechs who've asked Russians if you can't defend North Vietnam who can you defend? Almost every American I've talked to thinks that it's a - not a . And

I almost have to agree with them by the way. Americans are not interested in pushing the Soviet Union around - they're not even interested in pushing China around by and large. I think it's a rather larger position even than our earlier position.

B. You say larger, what do you mean?

K. That more people hold the position - that we should not go out of our way to push the Soviet Union around.

B. Now you as a strategist - do you believe that the American desire not to push the Soviet Union around is the result of an American fear that she will be provoked into a nuclear retaliation or is it rather that the American people are finally becoming convinced about the politics of convergence and believe that under the circumstances one oughtn't to provoke somebody who is

traveling more or less toward a happy horizon.

K. I think it's both. They're not worried about nuclear retaliation but you don't leave sleeping dogs lie. More important there is a widespread belief that the Cold War is over. The usual example used is the Moslem-Christian example. That's a bad example 'cause the Moslems lost that war. If you don't believe that, ask them; they're fair on that. But there are situations, say, the battle between the Emperor and the Pope when the nation ~~state~~ ran away with it or that between the king and the aristocracy when the people ran away with it. And I think most people today tend to feel that the Cold War is basically over.

B. Now, you I gather, dissent from this generality, do you?

K. I dissent with the finality and completeness with which it is stated. I tend to think that the Soviet Union, barring certain possible changes in government, is in fact a relatively cautious state today. Not always cautious. I think that their actions in the Middle East and the Mediterranean were reckless - but not ridiculously reckless, you know. And it's also a state which is not fanatic today. China is in a similar position now. The disunity does not impress you as it impresses most people. Of <sup>Christian?</sup> Krishanti(?) and Moslem in the Moslem world were very aggressive and fine & they were very disunited and in fact Christians fought on the Moslem side, Moslems fought on the Christian side but that was temporary. The real intensity was when Christians fought Moslems, both disunited.

B. Now you reject - as I understand it you begin by saying it doesn't make any sense at this point to ask the question should we be in Vietnam we need only to ask the question what should we do from this point on - this was the beginning of your methodology, is that correct?

K. I would make that stronger. I think one should we be there but the most important question right now is what do we do now.

lot of  
B. Now you reject a fairly popular proposals for proceeding 9.  
successfully against the North Vietnamese which strikes some of your  
admirers as anomolous. For instance, let me ask you this. Could you  
give me the reasons for opposing an intensification of the bombing of North  
Vietnam?

K. Err, yeah, it depends on what kind of intensification. You recommended  
above moving the bombing south of Vin(?) which is roughly 19 degrees and  
that I would intensify enormously.

KB. Yes. I think you said, I think it is clear that we will lose in  
military effectiveness by reducing the bombing ~~XX~~ North of Vin(?) if as  
a result we can reduce the amount of supplies and equipment delivered to  
South Vietnam. But before that you did list the intensification of the  
bombing in the North.

K. Right.

B. As something which you oppose.

K. There are really three reasons for bombing North Vietnam. The first  
and most important reason in February of '65 was to increase the morale  
in South Vietnam. At that point they were close to the state of collapse.  
By and large South Vietnamese feel that Americans just don't lose wars and  
once they felt we were committed the morale situation changed almost overni  
That reason has sort of disappeared really. The second reason is to make  
North Vietnam bear the costs of the war. They, too, should feel some of the  
pain of this issue. Now, by and large, I really thing that they should avoid  
competition in pain as much as possible, as a general principle.

B. Unless it has a strategic utility, right? You don't want poetic justice

K. I accept the that is, if you have a military and  
a small number of civilians get killed it was not intended. You shouldn't



aim at civilians directly. Now you get a very tough problem. I would guess that the pressure on North Vietnam, big as it was, was not big enough to be very useful. You can never tell about this. The Japanese have told us that if we had held ~~X~~ out one more day at Wake Island they would have quit. But they don't say that ahead of time, understand, and you don't notice it. And a number of people thought the pressure on North Vietnam was big enough and there is something to say for their ~~xxx~~ side but I would still tend to reject it and I'm willing to reject it strongly enough to eliminate that particular pressure.

B. That's right, that's right. Now what about your opposition to the mining of North Vietnamese ports?

K. That would be I think a very useful military measure in our terms. It would not be overwhelming. There are other ways boats but it would be useful. The objection is, and let me be frank, you're challenging Russia a bit further. Now I've Russia this thing and I don't see what the Russians could do about it to some degree but they may be able to figure it out.

B. You mean without asking the Hudson Institute?

K. (He laughs) In some sense the United States should be cautious without asking what can you do about it.

B. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But in point of fact there is a considerable unanimity of judgment among the military men, isn't there? Is this simply because they tend not to ask themselves most questions that they consider extraneous. How can the Soviet Union -.

K. They tend to ask themselves - not all of them but some of them - this is useful from our point of view and then not ask what can they do about it - what would the retaliation be. Now the obvious retaliation to armed South Vietnamese with quality weapons is to some degree. They could improve that quality.

B. You do have a real logistical problem, don't you if you successfully patrol the access to North Vietnam by the sea, don't you, because the areas coming down through China are subject to a lot of interruption.

K. I think that's partly true. You see you're not really planning on a blockade of North Vietnam - you're not planning to stop Russian ships; all you're planning to do is make their boating (?) more difficult.

B. Supposing I ask you to bounce off the proposal of stopping Soviet ships, a blockade.

K. I'd make a declaration of war against North Vietnam first.

B. Are you in favor of that?

K. Today, no. I can imagine many circumstances in which I would be in favor of it; I'd be against it now.

B. When you say, now, do you mean because there is a period of negotiations

K. No. That's not the crucial issue. This is an incredibly unpopular war at this point. Any increase in escalation unless accompanied by all kinds of measures to change the character of the war I think would be counter-productive.

B. It's politically unfeasible, isn't it.

K. Unfeasible politically and destructive politically. Now probably a declaration of war against North Vietnam is also a risky act but I say it is less risky than a blockade without the declaration.

B. You say in your book, quotes, "it seems inconceivable that even today North Vietnam would accept any settlement that included as a serious possibility the long-term independence of South Vietnam or even an eventual non-communist domination of a coalition government in Saigon. Does that mean that in connection with the Paris talks you simply flatly predict failure, or else capitulation by America?

K. Flatly is too strong. If I was asked to bet on it, I would bet that they would not result in anything. I think that for various reasons you have to



try to pursue it. You can't just go by the war doctrine. 12. You have to prove to yourself that peaceful means are inadequate. You've got to try; people may be clever. We have looked at promised settlements for quite a while and I can draw up settlements that would be a kind of agonizing compromise between the United States and North Vietnam. Things that would satisfy both sides' minimum objectives, absolute minimum, you know, would be completely unacceptable to the South Vietnamese<sup>or</sup> National Liberation Front as this would be imposed on them. Looking at these settlements I cannot believe that anything can be negotiated.

B. Well, let's pause for a moment because I want to ask you something that I think will bring out the best in you.

STATION BREAK

B. Now, Mr. Kahn, as I understand your present position it is this: we might have won in the past had we behaved differently. Had we behaved differently in the past we might have gotten away with doing so had we better protected ourselves with a useful and realistic rhetoric but in point of fact in 1968 most of the orthodox means of closing out this war are unavailable to us. But you nevertheless, as I understand it, believe that even given the divisions in America, and given the hostility abroad, we still can win the war in an acceptable way.

K. Yeah. I believe that quite strongly.

B. Could you tell us what some of these --

K. There are a number of things that could be done, the most important thing being just to improve the efficiency of the operation as a whole -- a military operation a military operation. Let me just give you one small point. We have about 550,000 soldiers in that theatre, almost all of them on a 12 month rotation. It's a very complicated job 12,000 miles away; a foreign country, foreign problems. I couldn't run a 72 man operation on a 12 month basis



of rotation where everybody started from scratch; it just can't be done as far as I'm concerned. .13.

B. But this is true only of certain soldiers surely; it is not true of generals.

K. It is not true of a number of the top officers but I couldn't have my secretary changed every 12 months, with a 30 days off inbetween. Now it's done for good reasons; if it's business United States it's hard to make soldiers to make sacrifices. It's hard to ask an officer to stay 24 months away from his family. I would suggest that for the combat soldier 12 months is reasonable. They learn much in combat here but they learn faster over there. For the others, and that's the bulk of people don't forget, 80%, I would suggest a 24 month tour for most of them and do something for the family. First of all, a big bonus, money is very helpful possibly a trip home or around the world, or half-way around so you can go back to the wife - maybe you could invite your wife out twice - this kind of thing. There are things that can be done. It will be costly but you get some reservations for some of the officers. But the improvement in performance would be enormous.

B. Has this been seriously considered by the pentagon?

K. Everybody has suggested it. It's always been turned down on the ground that it would be disastrous for morale. I would like to separate morale of a combat soldier from the non-combat. Take a point like this. You're an officer, say, who's been assigned to a non-combat role. You say, I'd prefer fighting in combat. Through no choice of mine I'm in a non-combat role and penalized by an extra 12 months of duty; it seems very unfair. Yes, but his morale goes down but his performance does not go down. In a combat officer morale and combat are very closely related. In a word it was unfair; it often is and will be in the future

B. He won't type more slowly or anything like that. I know that you've made several suggestions. What about another enforceable suggestion that wouldn't run athwart political realities.

K. Well, the most important one is now being done. We kept the South Vietnamese army badly underarmed - all World War II equipment - they didn't even have enough rounds to practice.

B. Why?

K. Well, one of the reasons had to do with the fear, excessive fear, that some of this equipment would find ~~xxxxxx~~ its way into the VC hands. Here you have a funny reaction. If you issue 200 rifles and they kill say 50 people with those rifles and the VC capture 5 rifles, you say, ah, they're fighting with our guns and you feel in a state of collapse. It's an excessive reaction. Today the VC have such good equipment that they would laugh at our M1 rifles.

B. Is it M1 that we are sending to the South Vietnamese?

K. As of last week or so, that is, fairly recently.

B. But this situation is being corrected.

K. This is now being corrected.

B. Now, what about the role of democracy in South Vietnam which is something that the critics of the war pay a great deal of attention to - you've been there recently and spent a lot of time studying it - do the South Vietnamese have a feeling that they are being put upon by their own rulers who are not genuinely representative? What is your feeling about the relationship of democratic institutions to the morale of the South Vietnamese.

K. Well all Vietnamese, even in many cases the VC, feel put upon by their leaders. It's a completely cynical country; we seem somewhat less cynical. I think the more crucial question is to what extent do the people support the VC. I would argue something between 50-70 percent, more or less against.



If you find that the bulk of the people ~~are~~ against the VC are various minorities they'd be hurt if the VC came in. (Mr. Kahn then enumerates several names of these minorities which I wouldn't attempt to spell.)

These are all people who tend to feel that a VC victory would be very bad. The city people are against the VC; this is a rural movement; the country is now almost half city and there is very little support from the cities. No American need feel that he is opposing a popular movement when he opposes the VC. I'd like to be fair about this; very few revolutionary movements are popular. The U.S. revolutionary movement was not very popular. The VC has earned their right to victory in that sense, but in the other sense we don't have to feel that we are opposing it. So far as governments operate, in a funny way, the South Vietnamese government may be the most democratic government in that entire area. The current (?) government I'm talking about now. Possibly the Philippines would be more democratic.

B. Those who side with the VC - what percentage of those would you guess do so simply because they have become convinced that the VC is going to win and under the circumstances it doesn't pay them to be heroic in their resistance?

K. Well those tend not to side; they can be.

The Old Vietnam controlled about 20% of the South Vietnamese population and the VC still controls those areas pretty well. These people have been

VC for 25 years; it's just their government. You know, it's ~~xxxx~~ sort of an infrastructure situation.

B. Suppose you attempt to answer the question that is so often made public - they cite President Eisenhower as saying that if there had been a free election in 1954 it ~~it~~ would have been won overwhelmingly by Ho Chi Minh.



K. They don't quote it accurately. It was a free election of Ho Chi

Minh versus Bao Di and that I would guess is probably right

very popular. I don't think Ho Chi Minh would win an election today against almost any reasonable candidate.

B. Why?

K. Because he's a communist. Now if he dropped communism he would win automatically. See, people tend to think of the National Liberation Front as carrying the banner of nationalism but actually nationalism is loose in that country. There are at least 8 or 9 parties that are very nationalistic intensely - and nobody owns that issue.

B. How could Ho Chi Minh drop communism?

K. He can't; it would present trouble. Now he did drop it in '46-52. He is an authentic national hero but the country is basically anti-communist.

B. Then you would predict that in a free election in North Vietnam even that Ho Chi Minh would very likely to lose assuming the opposition had a chance to promulgate its -.

K. I don't know about North Vietnam; it's hard to tell the state of its moral and so on. He would have lost a free election in '56 in North Vietnam I think

B. There weren't too many voters left.

K. Well they had the big purges then and overshot. It's hard to tell. I would not be surprised if he could win the election today in North Vietnam.

it looks heroic, it feels heroic, that kind of thing.

B. But in South Vietnam you feel that people are ignorant who suppose that the communists speak for the majority of the people.

K. I don't know any serious person who believes that today. They might have believed it 3 or 4 years ago.

B. Why did you use that alarming figure 57% because if you're allowed by

Mr. Kahn to take 50% all you need is to steal one more and you've got a majority

K. I think to be more accurate it would be something like this, something like

20 to 30% would lean toward the VC. Something more than that would

17.

lean toward the government - the rest are fence sitters; very firmly fence sitters and that 70 was supposed to prove the fence sitters.

B. But you think that in a free election the fence sitters would move against the communists.

K. Unless they thought the communists were going to win. You do have this problem in that country - people do very much tend to vote for the winner.

B. Now, what about the other point that's raised so often having to do with the land reform and the peasants? Bernard Fall used to make a great deal about this. I guess everybody knows that land reform laws were enacted 8 or 10 years ago but they haven't been turned over effectively to the peasantry. In your judgment is this something that we should attempt to require the South Vietnamese government to do.

K. Well, the land reform situation is very, very complicated. There are a number of studies and people who do not think that the South Vietnamese peasant has the land hunger usually associated with peasantry. There's no particular social invidiousness in being a tenant. If you talk to many peasants they tell you they'd prefer better rental contracts. In the area that's most important - the Delta -, most of the land reform has already been carried through either by Diem, by the VC or by the current government. There is a very important problem of giving the farmer or peasants any more - certificate of ownership. In fact none of them have valid title to the land they farm.

B. Well then you don't think this is as an important a point from the point of view of increasing the support of the South Vietnamese for the government of South Vietnam as a lot of people maintain.

K., A very important point to make clear to the peasants would be to say that you don't intend to reverse the land reform to the VC - that's very important and things that used to happen 2 or 3 years ago where the army the grants for



landlords on sweeps and never turned the money over to the landlord - 18.  
that doesn't happen any more so far as I know. No, I would say today that much of the land reform problem has worked itself out by itself which is an important which is an important caveat (?) that the peasants are uncertain,

know. There are areas where you can do certain things but there are areas where the situation is complicated and I don't understand it and I don't claim to.

B. You show a considerable disdain for the enclave period withdrawal which Professor Calbraith and General Gavin support, how come?

K. Well, let's assume you send a telegram to General Westmorland or Abrams and ask them how would you go through an enclave theory (?). They would send you a telegram back - Can we first of all treat the conclave as conquered territory; push people around and not worry about their feelings. Secondly, can we cut it off completely from the outside territory. Third, can we bomb freely in the outside territory because you've got concentrations. Can we raid, pursue, despoiling attacks. Under these circumstances we might hold it for a while. If you can't do these things you can't hold it. - Stronger than that -.

B. How come General Gavin who is a trained soldier doesn't know that?

K. Well, first of all, he's a great paratrooper; he was one of our best paratroop generals.

B. You called him brilliant in your book - you didn't restrict it to that - you didn't drop a footnote.

K. One must be polite. He's a very nice guy, General Gavin, and quite talented in every way - almost every way I must say. <sup>Duckley</sup> Everything except military. (Laughter)

K. You said it. I'll observe a quiet silence.



B. Well, Mr. Kahn, I think there are some students here that would like 19.  
to ask questions. I reserve the right to comment, if I may.

K. Sure.

B. Yes, sir. Have you got a mike there.

Aud. Mr. Kahn, when you spoke about South Vietnam now and Ho Chi Minh would probably lose a popular election, there is also the fact that during the negotiations in Paris coming up, do you feel that Ho Chi Minh will be any more obligated to accept elections now which he might possibly lose than he was back in 1956 when the probability was that he would have won the election yet they were taken away from him so to speak - were never allowed to proceed. Do you feel he is obligated to negotiate on the basis that there might be free elections now?

K. Free elections, first of all, are a very odd concept in that country. It takes a certain amount of structure, a certain amount of experience to have a free election, really. Whoever runs that election will win it. The one who looks like a winner will win it overwhelmingly. The people will be by the potential winner, so it's very difficult. If you make the thing look at all reasonable though, I think Ho Chi Minh loses it. I rather suspect that he would have lost it in '56 by the way if you restrict it to South Vietnam. The in '56 Bao Dai and he was running into serious trouble in North Vietnam then; that was probably the counterpoint of his popularity. The point is though, the election concept is really an American concept; they don't accept it for the future of the state there, really. For their sake it is to sort of ratify the mandate of habit (?) not to choose it. in the old-fashioned terms. The peasant tries to guess who has the mandate. That's what he means by voting for the winner. I don't think either side thinks the election as important.

B. Yes, sir.

Aud. Mr. Kahn, you mentioned that in South Vietnam there are about 20. 30% of the people supporting the Viet Cong.

B. Or leaning toward the VC.

Aud. Or leaning. I'd like to know how the VC were so successful in smuggling arms into South Vietnam for the Tet offensive and Hue and other cities.

K. Except for Hue the problem was very simple. Two or three days before Tet the curfew was dropped and you just walked into the town, carrying truckloads in if you wanted to - it was almost that bad. They hitch-hiked through with American troops and armoured troops in many cases.

Aud. Then it is the fault of our government.

K. It's a little complicated. Every year they've had a Tet in obscure places. We announce it to the world - the world shows a massive indifference so we figured well, they surely wouldn't violate Tet (I think this is unconscious rather than conscious) where the foreign newspaper reporters were. That proved they were violating the agreement. So in some aspects I think we tended to feel that the foreign newspaper reporters protected the city at least during Tet. In addition, there is a kind of good feeling during Tet. Every year literally thousands of VC come back to their families during that period and they've sort of never been molested or never seriously molested. It was just hundreds of thousands of people coming into town.

Aud. Every year the Tet offense was always violated.

K. Not where the foreign reporters were. Not where the newspaper reporters were. They were violated in the boondocks, yousee. Another thing, the fact of a Tet truce had some reality. But it's not a violation unless the violence is from 10-20%. You're obviously right; it's a Pearl Harbor kind of thing. We dropped our guard and faced no particular strength



to hit you in that period.

21.

B. Is there any sense of religious profanation in having violated Tet. Did it shock a lot -.

K. It would have shocked any single city. If you had hit just Saigon or just Hue or just Danang, it would have been real aggravation, not <sup>so much</sup> just profanation. Tet, while it has religious significance, they're not religious there but it is a little bit like Easter, Koolhaas and Christmas put together. When you did it that countrywide, the aggravation took a different character, so to speak, it was too big an operation to -.

B. Transcend it.

K. Transcend it, yeah. I do not think it would fit any single city.

B. Right.

STATION BREAK.

B. There's a question over here, Mr. Kahn.

Aud. Mr. Kahn, you were talking about the Fueblo incident. Do you think the ship <sup>wiki</sup> ~~would~~ be returned without the crew or the crew returned without the ship. Do you think the Vietcong will keep the ship with its weapons and return the crew unharmed?

K. I think there's very little chance of the ship being returned. I'm sure the crew will be returned at some point. It would be very startling for them to be kept prisoner for 30 years. I don't believe we'll make any pre-return apologies which the North Vietnamese are asking for and confessions. I certainly don't believe they're justified. So I don't know how it will be settled.

B. Yes, sir.

Aud. With the peace talks due to occur shortly, I hope, do you see any blood-letting as occurred during the same kind of Korean incident.

K. Yeah. I think both sides will try to put themselves in a better bargaining position and I think this will mean to both sides improving the



military position. In our case it's probably improving the armoured troops, that is the South Vietnamese troops more than our own. In their case it probably means battles. I don't consider this bad faith by the way though I think it's to be expected.

B. Do you think that President Johnson is demoralized in the sense of believing that since he has in effect surrendered political power, ~~antisapatorily~~, he oughtn't to act as a chief executive in behalf of a party whose dominant wing desires really a complete quiescence

K. I would guess that he had exactly the opposite feeling. By resigning, - were you at the press conference the other day - much stronger and much tougher than it normally would be done. I would think that by resigning as a candidate he now feels above the battle; and there's been almost criticism of him recently. I think he can now take any action he feels is in the national interest and justify it.

B. And justify it, ha, ha.

K. I think it's the exact opposite of a caretaker government or a lameduck situation for odd reasons.

B. There's a question over here. Yes, sir.

Aud. Eh, Dr. Kahn, I have heard statements recently to the effect that if we pull out of Vietnam the VC will punish all the peasants who have helped ~~us~~ us. How do you feel about this?

K. I think - it's a little difficult - in Vietnam whenever you help ~~the Americans~~ or the GVN the government of Vietnam - you tell the VC they forced us; whenever they help the VC they us the VC forced us; so people have a basic excuse. There were more than a thousand people killed in Hue and they were on lists and Hue is a town which is unfriendly, by and large, to the Saigon government. So it should not surprise us if they killed something like 1% of the actual people available to them. If they did something like that in Vietnam as a whole which would be about 170,000 people I would rather expect that in a large range of circumstances you might get enormous bloodletting or punishment. They might be different - this is a question of policy to some degree. It's a very bitter war, very intense and the feelings run much higher than they did in our Civil War, for example, or any civil war I'm familiar with. It's easier to the Arab-Israeli conflict than this conflict. So it would not surprise me if the blood letting was worse than in say, Indonesia which was supposed to be about 300,000.

B. Would it be as bad, in your judgment, in the event of a victory over the VC. Would it be as bad as for instance in Indonesia when they overthrew the communists. 23.

K. If ~~any~~ any particular took over I think it could be but very likely if the current Saigon government wins it will be a coalition type thing as it is today, you know, with the Americans very much there, we have a tremendous pressure there for reconciliation. I think reconciliation strikes most Saigon Vietnamese as <sup>counting?</sup> commie-nazis. Could we talk about that?

B. Yes.

K. They feel much more strongly, not strongly/ On the other hand, the American presence is very much for the reconciliation thing and it works to some degree.

B. There's one more question we have time for.

K. On both sides it's very bitter, you understand.

B. Yes.

Aud. Do you feel that Vietnam will ever turn into a thermo-nuclear war?

K. I would suggest the changes of that would be quite remote but one can never say that it can't happen but it's a very remote thing as far as I can see.

Aud. Do you think thermo-nuclear war would wipe out most of our population if there was a counter attack on us.

K. In a thermo-nuclear war where the Russians have lost all of their weapons in a surprise attack on American cities out of the blue and did not save any for their strategic forces so they left themselves wiped out, -somewhere between half or 2/3 of the population. That war would be suicidal for the Russians also. It's hard to imagine anybody walking deliberately into suicide. I would guess that if there was a large-scale thermo-nuclear war you'd find both sides being very careful, with interests (?) picking and screaming, not with elation you understand they would have to have a theory as to how they could survive it. In other words it would have to be a very careful war. The usual concept people have that everybody recklessly presses every button in the house out of sheer exuberance does not describe the men in ; they're petrified with fear of those buttons.

Aud. Mr. Buckley, you mentioned peace negotiations and you somehow managed to get in the word capitulation. In your opinion who are we capitulating to if we leave South Vietnam. Is

it to Russia, China, or is it just communism.

B. Well, it's a little bit of each one of them. We would be certainly capitulating in terms of what we said we would never do. <sup>If you</sup> ~~We would like~~ <sup>we could say that we</sup> and prefer ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> capitulate to ourselves.

We have stated that there are certain things we would never do, one of them to permit the Communists getting away with the subjugation of South Vietnam. If, in fact in Paris, it turned out that we had signed a treaty that made that almost inevitable I would call this a capitulation. Call it a capitulation to your muse, if you prefer it that way, but it is a capitulation in the most formal sense of the word/

K. I don't think you'd call it capitulation of the Vietnamese. You're fighting over South Vietnam; they win; you lose.

Aud. Mr. Kahn, I'd like to have your opinion on the legality or illegality of the war. I'd also like to know, do feel that the United States is justified to stop aggression or do you feel that there's so-called aggression there.

K. I do not accept the position of the government that the North Vietnamese presence in the South is aggression. That's a divided country with no recognized frontier. It would be exactly the same as East And West Germany invading each other; it would not be aggression; or North and South Korea; or the two Chinas. On the other hand I do not think that the National Liberation Front is in any sense an independent agent. It's run completely from Hanoi and if that's what you mean by aggression, that's aggression. But those are the Vietnamese, you understand. It happens that we, outsiders, like to make these partition lines sacred frontiers because we don't want to run risks. But no North or South Vietnamese thinks that way. No East or West German or Chinese, you see, so it's not aggression in that sense.

B. Well, now wait a minute. Would you say that the war by the Arabs against Israel was not aggressive?

K. It depends on which one.

B. Ha, ha.

K. The first one was not. They were fighting over land which they thought was their own.

B. What about the last one?

K. The last one was started by Israelis who feared aggression/



B. The point is surely that the South Vietnamese had that particular frontier about as long as the Israelis had the 1948 frontier. In fact the United Nations was willing to recognize South Vietnam as an entity.

K. We, as outsiders, wish to preserve the status quo no matter who suffers by it. It's very ~~strong~~ strong and very legitimate but aggression has a concept of stealing your neighbor's territory; that is not their neighbor's territory; they're both Vietnamese. It is clear that they disturbed the status quo and to that extent we're going to be mad at them; but it's not a status quo they've ever accepted or allowed themselves to accept.

B. In other words you're saying in effect that you have to have subjective acquiescence in order to make for quotes "aggression."

K. Or a legally recognized line. It's not been a legally recognized line.

B. They consider it irredentism.

K. Yeah. It is irredentism, both sides. By the way, the South Vietnamese want to unify the country, too. They don't want to end the war; they want to take Hanoi. You know, they're Nationalists - both sides, you see. Now, the other thing you asked about - the legality of intervention. As a kind of a lawyer--.

END OF PROGRAM