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Transatlantic Studies

PhDr. Evaluation

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*Combined Action Program (CAP) jako účinný nástroj protipovstalecké strategie USA ve vietnamské válce*

Miroslav Bálint has produced a PhDr. dissertation on the Vietnam War and its impact on American counterinsurgency policy. My colleague, Jan Hornát, who devoted much time to this project, supervised the work. Mr. Bálint has divided the dissertation into an Introduction, three main chapters, and a Conclusion. The referencing is good and Mr. Bálint has made every effort to provide an objective, balanced account. Additionally, there are a number of colorful, informative illustrations. In the ensuing paragraphs, I will offer some comments on each section.

In the Introduction, Mr. Bálint clearly spells out the aim of the work, which is to answer the following research question: Why did the United States choose a strategy that was doomed to failure in spite of recommendations by military and civilian counterinsurgency specialists to adopt a different one? The remainder of the Introduction provides the reader with an idea of what to expect in the body of the dissertation.

Chapter 1 represents the so-called theoretical part of the treatise. Precise definitions of terms are explained in the individual chapter sub-sections. The main concepts covered here are strategy, insurgency, and counterinsurgency strategy. The definitions and explanations provided are more than adequate for Mr. Bálint's purposes. The content and organization of the chapter demonstrate a key understanding of the subject matter and I have no problem with this chapter, which naturally leads into the next one.

In Chapter 2, Mr. Bálint provides historical and practical information about Vietnam and the American involvement there. I admire the detailed depiction of Vietnam's geography. In addition, postwar events are discussed, particularly the French war against Vietnamese nationalists. The French commander Navarre and his strategy at Dien Bien Phu is discussed and how this led to French withdrawal and American entry. American thinking and policymaking were heavily influenced by Mao's victory in China in 1949. The Americans created a system of collective security as witnessed with the establishment of SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization). Later, the history of the American involvement is meticulously scrutinized. Mr. Bálint properly identifies three phases of U.S. engagement. The changing conventional American strategy is explained and the reasons for its failure are elaborated upon. This chapter is both illustrative and informative.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the deployment of the United States Marine Corps in the conflict and the implementation of the so-called Combined Action Program (CAP). The content and success of CAP are robustly analyzed. Though participants in CAP considered it to be a success, the Tet Offensive of 1968 and its psychological impact on Americans at home took its toll on overall American morale. This led policymakers to make decisions that were not in the best interests of the mission. Another factor is that CAP was put into practice far too late in the conflict and other factors meant that the tide could not be turned in favor of the Americans. I think that this chapter serves its purpose.

The Conclusion summarizes the main points of the dissertation and Mr. Bálint asserts that no one factor was responsible for America's unsuccessful war in Vietnam. The main reasons include a lack of familiarity with the terrain, as well as initially flawed strategic decisions. Mr. Bálint claims the war could have been won had decisions been taken on the basis of advice provided by those actually doing the

fighting rather than those observing the conflict from afar.

Miroslav Bálint has written a good dissertation and my recommendation is that he should proceed to the oral defense. I wish him best of luck.

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