

WASH POST 7 NOV 67

THE WASHINGTON POST Tuesday, Nov. 7, 1967 A17



David S. Broder

Young House Members Seek Over-All Viet Strategy Review

SOMETHING IS happening that could alter the view, often expressed by this reporter, that the louder and longer the debate on Vietnam, the less useful it becomes.

Instead of sloganeering, some politicians in Washington are at last beginning to raise into public view the fundamental policy questions involved in the war.

The effort is not being led by the senior spokesmen for the two parties. Most of them are so committed to specific viewpoints that they are unable to take a fresh look at the issue. Rather, it is the younger House Democrats and Republicans who are bringing fresh thinking and fresh information into the stale Vietnam discussions.

Some 66 of them have joined Rep. Paul Findley (R-Ill.) in a resolution calling for formal congressional debate on the Vietnam alternatives. The discussion of the resolution on the House floor the other day, involving such able younger members as Findley, Rep. Morris Udall (D-Ariz.) and Rep. F. Bradford Morse (R-Mass.), established the fact that despite the Capital's weariness with the topic, there is still fresh food for thought on Vietnam.

The young House members' approach is characterized by an insistence that the whole U.S. strategy in Vietnam, its costs and its consequences, be examined and debated—and not just a single aspect of the war.

AN INTERESTING example of this developing drive for a systematic look at Vietnam policy is the work of Rep. Donald W. Riegle Jr., a 29-year-old freshman Republican from Flint, Mich. Despite his lack of seniority, status and renown, Riegle is making a significant contribution to the process that must precede

any intelligent reappraisal of American policy in Vietnam.

As a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Riegle conducted an examination of Rutherford M. Poats, deputy foreign aid administrator, that shed important light on the "other war" in Vietnam, the effort to construct a stable, self-sufficient society.

It is impossible to summarize in a few sentences the testimony Riegle extracted from Poats in their four-hour colloquy. But one can fairly say that it raises serious questions as to whether our "nation-building" program in South Vietnam can succeed without a massive semi-permanent investment both of American money and of American civilian manpower.

The testimony has received too little public attention, but Riegle has circulated it among his colleagues in the House. There, it has become a major text in the debate between those who accept and those who reject the Administration's argument that the United States is simply providing a temporary military shield behind which the Vietnamese are reorganizing and rebuilding their own country.

Now, Riegle has moved on to an examination of the military side of the war and of the Administration argument that the United States has a vital national security stake in Vietnam.

HE HAS UNUSUAL credentials for this task. He is, like Secretary of Defense

McNamara, a product of the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration and, after working in systems analysis for IBM, he discourses easily in the "cost-effectiveness" language McNamara uses to buttress the strategic decisions in Vietnam.

Last week Riegle sent the Secretary a letter that must have been unique in McNamara's huge correspondence from Capitol Hill. Asking for weekly tabulations of 85 specific statistical measures of the Vietnam fighting, Riegle explained, "I have designed an information matrix to collect data that I believe is germane to the problem."

In reply to his request for a precise statement of the strategic importance of South Vietnam to the defense of Southeast Asia, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard C. Steadman last week wrote Riegle a letter stating:

"From a strictly military viewpoint, the United States does not require control of the land mass of South Vietnam to meet possible further Communist aggression against countries with which we have treaty obligations (although our problems in this regard could be greatly compounded were South Vietnam to be controlled by a government hostile to the United States and its allies.)"

Raising questions is only a first step, of course, but it is immeasurably more useful than most of the shouting that has passed for debate on Vietnam.

© 1967, The Washington Post Co.