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The Harris Survey

Public Taking 'Get-It-Over-With' View on Vietnam

By Louis Harris

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American public opinion is rising toward increased militancy about the Vietnam war and a "get it over with" mood. This, rather than a massive movement toward the so-called "dove" position, is behind the increased criticism of the way President Johnson is handling the war.

The people show a distaste for what they regard as an indecisive stalemate in which American lives are being spent, but they cannot arrive at any firm conclusion about what should be done to end the war.

Recent soundings of cross-sections of the American people reveal these facts:

- Public opinion is changing about bombing the North Vietnam capital of Hanoi and the port of Haiphong. In 1965, the people were 2 to 1 against bombing these key population centers. Now, opinion is split down the middle, with one in three still uncertain about which course to take.

- By nearly 3 to 1, most Americans now favor blockading North Vietnam ports, although 3 in 10 cannot make up their minds.

- In January, by a slight margin, the people were willing to accept free elections in South Vietnam which might result in Vietcong representation in government. Now, by a slim margin, most Americans reject this as unacceptable. One in ten of those who once favored such elections now say they are not sure.

- The margin by which the public would accept a neutralist South Vietnam after negotiations was over 3 to 1 in January but is less today.

- Even the heavy majorities who oppose bombing the mainland of China, or using atomic ground weapons, have shrunk in the past two months.

- The oft-repeated desires of President Johnson's critics that he adopt an enclave strat-

egy and resume the bombing pause are rejected by margins of better than 2 to 1.

In short, critics of Mr. Johnson who argue that the escalation of the war in Vietnam has been the wrong emphasis in the wrong place at the wrong time have not convinced American public opinion that the issue is as simple as that.

The following tables represent results of repeated questioning of comparable cross-sections of the American people since last September:

"I want to read off to you a number of positions the Administration has taken on Vietnam. For each, I wish you would tell me if you think the Administration is more right or more wrong."

KEY MILITARY DECISIONS IN VIETNAM

	North Vietnam		Ports	
	Right	Wrong	More	Not
Not Blockading				
May 1966	18%	52%	29%	
Feb. 1965	24	50	26	
Sept. 1965	31	38	31	
Not Bombing Hanoi or Haiphong				
May 1966	34	34	32	
Feb. 1966	41	30	29	
Sept. 1965	47	28	33	
Not Using Atomic Ground Weapons				
May 1966	64	13	23	
Feb. 1966	80	9	11	
Not Bombing China Mainland				
May 1966	65	12	23	
Feb. 1966	71	10	19	

Two key possible peace-making propositions have found dwindling public sup-

port since they were put forth last January:

"Suppose part of a settlement of the Vietnam war was to hold free elections in South Vietnam which could result in the Communists being part of the government. Would you favor our agreeing to such an arrangement, or would you be against such an agreement?"

COMMUNIST REPRESENTATION

	May 1966	Jan. 1966
Favor such an election	37%	47%
Oppose such an election	40	41
Not sure	23	12

"Suppose, after negotiations, the government of South Vietnam were neutralist—neither on our side nor on the side of the Communists—would you favor or oppose that way to end the war?"

NEUTRALIST SOUTH VIETNAM

	May 1966	Jan. 1966
Favor	54%	52%
Oppose	21	20
Not sure	25	18

The real shift in American

public opinion over Vietnam can perhaps best be gauged in a recent re-asking of a question the Harris Survey repeatedly tested in 1965:

"All in all, what do you think we should do about Vietnam? We can follow one of three courses: carry the ground war into North Vietnam at the risk of bringing Red China into the fighting—withdraw our support and troops from South Vietnam—or continue to try to hold the line there to prevent the Communists from taking over South Vietnam. Which do you favor?"

	Hold Line	Withdraw	Carry War to North
May 1966	47%	15%	38%
December 1965	65	7	28
September 1965	49	25	26
May 1965	47	31	22
March 1965	49	38	13

Sentiment for withdrawal has doubled since December, but it still is less than half that of a year ago. The number who feel we should carry the ground war into North Vietnam has almost tripled since March, 1965.