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Jeffrey Race is the author of the military classic *War Comes to Long An* and numerous shorter studies on conflict and strategy. He is a retired Army officer, consultant, and a founder of high-tech telecommunications firm Cambridge Electronics Laboratories. Race volunteers in a wide range of social and spiritual programs in the United States and Asia. His current research interests include corruption and the pathologies of public decision making. Race holds a Ph.D. from Harvard University and has lived in Asia since 1965.



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## PROPOSAL TO ASH CENTER BY JEFFREY RACE

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### SUBJECT OF THIS PROPOSAL

If one believes in cause and effect in the physical world and in human affairs--as do most at Harvard--then an important scholarly and practical issue cries out for study and resolution: the immense divergence in the last 50 years in the United States between policy goals and resulting outputs in several governmental programs, with catastrophically damaging consequences. These divergences have not resulted from absence of information on which to base appropriate decisions. Nor was there any lack of extremely intelligent and highly trained decision-makers or supporting staff: decision-making in famous cases over these decades is covered with the fingerprints of those educated at well-known universities in the northeastern region of the United States.

No systematic study exists of why this odd situation persists, in contrast say to expert studies of how dams collapse and why planes crash.

No canon or body of knowledge exists to preclude such unhealthy results, in

contrast say to mandatory SOPs, checklists and assembly manuals used in domains such as nutrition, surgery or rocket design and launching.

It is past time to do this study and I propose to do it.

## BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSAL

The first gleam of recognition of this issue came to me when I was a bit player during 1965-67 in one decision-making catastrophe of great relevance: the Vietnam war. I quickly recognized that military and civil programs were ill adapted to the nature of the conflict but no one who ought to have known could say why this was so. After my separation from military service I returned to Vietnam using my own funds to examine how (but not why) the programs were so ill adapted. In 1972 my results were published in book form as *War Comes to Long An*<sup>1</sup> and later submitted (with additional material) to the Harvard Government Department as my doctoral dissertation. The book (continuously in print for 40 years and just republished in an expanded edition by the University of California Press) is now considered to be the official canonical explanation of why the war turned out so badly for the United States. It is used as an instructional text in the curriculum of all the U.S. senior military schools.<sup>2</sup>

*War Comes to Long An* is widely used mainly because it was among the first to employ behavioral analysis in the study of political change and revolutionary warfare. A recently published academic journal devotes 100 pages to an analysis of my innovations in this area.<sup>3</sup>

In this my first personal and professional encounter with pathological decision making, I clearly understood the outcomes to result from comprehensible distorting processes but limited my analysis to a small range of processes such as cognitive dissonance theory. And I mistakenly thought that the distortions were limited to a small range of issues such as interventions in foreign civil wars.

However with more maturity, and more catastrophes since Vietnam, I have come to see that there is a considerable number of distorting processes which introduce decision-making pathologies, and into more domains. I identified 18 such processes in my 2009 paper ""The Uses of History, or How Do We Escape Sturgeon's Law?"<sup>4</sup> which is the intellectual starting point for this proposal.

## **THE APPROACH**

My previous work generated sound conclusions because it utilized close analysis of case studies and documentary evidence. I plan to approach the present work in the same way.

To achieve persuasive generality of the conclusions, I will draw case studies from several domains, likely one in foreign policy (maybe Vietnam which I know well), one in strategy for military intervention (maybe Iraq on which much excellent research already exists and on which an important new study is about to be published), one in economic policy, and perhaps one in a functional area such as anti-corruption which I know well from current research in Asia.

Adequate documentary resources exist to support most of the work but I may elect to conduct some challenge interviews to test ideas on decision makers in past, present or future pathological cases.

## **THE STEPS**

- 1 Review of current literature.
- 2\* Evaluation of shortcomings of current literature in both scope, analysis, and uptake.
- 3 Selection of case studies (key is delimiting the examined decisions for amenability).
- 4\* Analysis of case studies.
- 5 Writeup of analysis.
- 6\* Writeup of guideline materials.

## **ANTICIPATED DELIVERABLES**

- 1 Seminars on starred items above
- 2 One or more interim papers
- 3 A book length work

4 Guideline materials for use by decision-makers, supporting staffs, Congress, and the public/press, both descriptive and go/no-go checklists such as are now becoming popular in other troubled domains of human activity. (Work of Atul Gawande refers.)

## LIMITATIONS

Done correctly to achieve persuasiveness (and adoption in practice), the work must be strongly supported by evidence and indisputable reasoning, as was my Vietnam study. More than one year of effort will be required. To maximize effort that can be devoted to this project, I will search for funding sources.

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1. Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972; updated and expanded version 2010).
  2. Jeffrey Race, "War Comes to Long An: Back Story to the Writing of a Military Classic," *Small Wars Journal*, March 1, 2010, <<http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/340-race.pdf>>
  3. Michael J. Montesano, "War Comes to Long An, the Classic We Hardly Know?" *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Winter 2011), pp. 87-122, downloadable at <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/vs.2011.6.1.87>> and Michael Montesano, "War Comes to Long An, Its Origins and Legacies: An Interview with Jeffrey Race" *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 6, Issue 1 (Winter 2011), pp. 123-183.
  4. Jeffrey Race ""The Uses of History, or How Do We Escape Sturgeon's Law?", a review and discussion of three recently declassified CIA studies for the Vietnam Center Conference on Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and the Vietnam War, at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, March 13-14, 2009, downloadable at <<http://www.camblab.com/misc/ttu09.pdf>>.