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H-**Diplo | ISSF Roundtable** on **Mai Elliott.** ***RAND in Southeast Asia: A History of the Vietnam War Era***

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Introduction by Edwin Martini, Western Michigan University

All specialists on the Vietnam War are likely well aware of the involvement in the conflict played by the RAND Corporation, the California based think-tank closely tied to the defense and intelligence establishments in Washington, D.C. Many, if not most, have also made use of some of RAND's documents in their own research. Recently, however, RAND has experienced something of resurgence in Vietnam War studies. Several books about the Vietnam War have made extensive use of RAND documentation to attempt to reconstruct the history of the American war from the ground up. David Elliott's unparalleled *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975* draws on the author's own extensive work for RAND during the war and the extensive collection of interviews conducted by analysts and employees of RAND. (David Elliott, as several of the reviewers here note, is the husband of Mai Elliott, who also worked for RAND during the war). David Hunt's *Vietnam's Southern Revolution: From Peasant Insurrection to Total War* relies heavily on the interviews conducted by RAND employees, and his appendix, "The Uses of a Source," is a very helpful starting point for scholars new to the documents and seeking to understand the complex context within which they were collected.[1]

Another likely reason for the renewed interest in RAND is the explosion over the past decade of scholarship on modernization, development, and social science during the Cold War. Scholars such as Nick Cullather, David Engerman, David Ekbladh, Nils Gilman, and Michael Latham have been at the forefront of much of this movement, drawing attention to the intersections of knowledge production, development policy, and the state. Attention to major figures in modernization theory such as Walt Rostow has followed closely in their wake. Far less attention, however, has been given to the think tanks like RAND and the specific roles they played in Cold War events.[2] In her book, *RAND in*

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[1] David Elliott, The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975 (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2002); David Hunt, Vietnam's Southern Revolution: From Peasant Insurrection to Total War (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).

[2] See, for example, Nick Cullather, "Miracles of Modernization: The Green Revolution and the Apotheosis of Technology," Diplomatic History 28 (April 2004), 227-254; Nils Gilman, Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Michael E. Latham, Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000); David Ekbladh, The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) and the H-Diplo roundtable on his book at http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XI-35.pdf ; and David Engerman et. al, eds., Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003. For an excellent overview of current and future trends in the study of modernization from global perspectives, see the special issue of Diplomatic History, Vol. 33, no. 3 (June 2009), particularly the excellent introductory essay by David Engerman and Corina Unger and the H-Diplo review at http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR238-A.pdf and http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR238-B.pdf .

Southeast Asia: A History of the Vietnam War Era, Mai Elliott attempts to fill some of this gap.

In his foreword to the volume, which was commissioned by RAND, the organization's President James Thomson writes that

> There are many accounts of the Vietnam War that claim to describe RAND'swork there. And too often uninformed speculation or persistent but incorrect information has made its way to print and film. I didn't approach Ms. Elliottt to set that record straight, or to undertake a comprehensive history. I approached her because I didn't want to lose the narratives of the men and women who worked together at Rue Pasteur [RAND's Saigon Office] or who conducted their analyses only in the United States. (iii)

Elliott has reconstructed a remarkable account based on those narratives, and has done so without the benefit of easily accessible records. As she notes in her introduction, Elliott discovered that much of the internal correspondence from this period had been destroyed in a "file-clearing effort," and, without a security clearance, she did not have access to other, classified documents. Even without those sources, however, she has conducted extensive interviews with a number of key figures from RAND, all of which add rich contextualization to the hundreds of documents, reports, and memoranda RAND analysts produced during the American War in Vietnam. The result is a lengthy, comprehensive account of RAND's involvement in Vietnam that explores and illuminates the ways in which its work supported, and challenged, the American War in Southeast Asia.

The reviewers find much to commend in Elliott's volume. All three find Elliott's discussion of the famous 1964 "Viet Cong Motivation and Morale Study" to be very effective, particularly her reconstruction of the path the report and its authors followed through the Washington corridors of power. In revealing to American policymakers and military officials how and why their policies were strengthening, rather than weakening the Vietnamese revolution, RAND ultimately produced, in Brigham's words, "a bombshell that produced no damage." After that, the organization sought to develop reports that were more "relevant," and above all, "actionable." (89)

Brigham and Young praise Elliott's work for "putting to rest," as Brigham describes it, perhaps once and for all, the persistent myth that members of several administrations could have made wiser decisions had they only more access to knowledge about the Vietnamese, their history, and their culture. "What Mai Elliott's work makes abundantly clear," Marilyn Young notes, "is that, from Kennedy to Nixon, policymakers either knew or could have easily found out all of the above and much more. It made no difference." Elliott's book is full of examples of RAND exposing the central contradictions of the war from the ground up, yet its studies falling on deaf ears.

Perhaps the most famous story of RAND and the Vietnam War is that of Daniel Ellsberg , Anthony Russo, and the Pentagon Papers. Despite the familiarity of this tale, all three reviewers find Elliott's chapter to be among the strongest. Edwin Moise writes that Elliott's account contains much information that was new to him, and among the many volumes written about this episode; Brigham claims, "none [are] more interesting or arresting than Elliott's."

Moise raises the most concerns about the book, including its size and scope and occasional errors of accuracy in the details that accompany what he describes as a "big, sprawling book." Marilyn Young adds a note of related concern about the number of names included in Elliott's lengthy account, which she found difficult track. Moise also wishes that Elliott had made more clear her own involvement in the story of RAND, particularly her work as an interviewer and translator in Vietnam. Moise is not concerned about bias; quite the opposite. He wishes she "had not suppressed her viewpoint and her own experiences so completely." In her thoughtful reply to all the reviewers, Elliott addresses all of these concerns and offers a bit more context on the role she and her husband, David, played with RAND in Vietnam.

List of Participants:

Mai Elliott Mai Elliott, a native of Vietnam and a writer, is a graduate of Georgetown University. Upon her graduation, she returned to Saigon where she joined the RAND Corporation, the think tank headquartered in Santa Monica. As part of her work for RAND, she interviewed Viet Cong defectors and prisoners-of-war during the Vietnam War for a research project commissioned by the Defense Department to determine the motivation and morale of the insurgents. After settling with her husband in California in 1977, she worked in banking before retiring to write her family memoir which weaves personal stories with the events of modern Vietnamese history. This memoir, *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family*, published in 1999, was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. She is currently writing a novel set in Vietnam.

Robert K. Brigham is Shirley Ecker Boskey Professor of History and International Relations at Vassar College and author of numerous books on American foreign policy, including *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF's Foreign Relations and the Vietnam* War (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: Public Affairs,1999) written with Roberts S. McNamara and James G. Blight; *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); and *Iraq, Vietnam, and the Limits of American Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008).

Edwin Moise is a professor of history at Clemson University. He is the author of *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996), and other works on the Vietnam War and the modern history of China and Vietnam.

Edwin Martini is Associate Chair and Associate Professor of History at Western Michigan University. He received his Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Maryland in 2004. His first book, *Invisible Enemies: The American War on Vietnam, 1975-2000*, was published by the University of Massachusetts Press in 2007. He is currently finishing work on a book project entitled "Agent Orange: A History," (under contract with the University of Massachusetts), which explores the global histories and legacies of the use of chemical agents by the United States during the Vietnam War.

Marilyn Young is professor of history at New York University. She is the author of numerous publications on U.S. foreign policy and U.S-East Asian Relations. Her previous books include Revolutionary Struggle in the 20th century: Transforming Russia and China, with William Rosenberg (Oxford, 1982); *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (HarperCollins, 1991); *Human Rights and Revolutions,* edited with Lynn Hunt and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam, edited with Lloyd Gardner (New Press 2007); *The New American Empire: A 21st Century Teach-in On US Foreign* Policy (edited with Lloyd Gardner); and *Vietnam: A History in Documents* (edited with John J. Fitzgerald and A. Tom Grunfeld; Oxford, 2000). She is currently working with Lloyd Gardner on a book on counterinsurgency.

Review by Robert K. Brigham, Vassar College

On the surface, Mai Elliott's massive study seems an ordinary institutional history of an important yet peripheral player in the Vietnam War drama, the RAND Corporation, which was subcontracted to conduct social scientific research by various governmental agencies. But from the first pages of this important work it is clear that the arch of RAND's history and experience in Vietnam very much mirrors the war's own trajectory. Elliott's description of the origins and evolution of the RAND projects is a wonderfully interpretative history of just what went wrong in Vietnam when everything should have gone right.

Elliott, who worked for RAND on some of its most important projects as an analyst and translator, begins her study with a provocative explanation and analysis of RAND's early work on the revolution's motivation and morale. In late 1963, Harry Rowen at the Pentagon budgeted funds for a limited study of the Viet Cong. Rowen had been impressed by questions raised in a joint task force meeting by Robert H. Johnson at the State Department's Policy Planning Council. Johnson proposed to Rowen a study on "why people joined the Viet Cong, what their motivations were, how they were hurting, how were the Viet Cong exploiting grievances…" (51) Little work had been done on the enemy to that point, and with political events in Saigon taking over much of the Johnson administration's time, it seemed appropriate to get to know the Viet Cong. Rowen turned the work over to RAND, which gave the project to Joe Zasloff, an academic with extensive experience in Vietnam. Zasloff produced a preliminary report from his desk in Washington titled "The Role of North Vietnam in the Southern Insurgency." This first report, as the title suggests, followed the conventional wisdom of the day, claiming that the Communists in Hanoi controlled and directed the ongoing insurgency in South Vietnam. Zalsoff traveled to Vietnam in early 1964, taking leave from his post at the University of Pittsburgh, to head up the second phase of the study that involved interviewing captured Viet Cong prisoners. In these interviews, a very different picture of the Viet Cong began to emerge.

Zasloff and his colleague, John Donnell, spent most of 1964 developing the "Viet Cong Motivation and Morale" program to answer Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara's question, "Who are the Viet Cong and what makes them tick?" (53) They concluded that the backbone of the insurgency was men in their thirties who had experienced the French War and who "believed they were fighting to bring about social justice, to eradicate poverty, and to redistribute land to the peasants." (70) The Viet Cong were not accidental guerrillas or casual observers of the conflict, they concluded, but were rather highly disciplined and extremely committed to the revolution and its goals. In one of the reports' most disheartening sections, Zasloff and Donnell concluded that ordinary peasants were angry at the level of violence in the countryside, and were particularly incensed at the use of air power in South Vietnam. The report suggested that there was a strong correlation between the use of firepower and the growing support for the Viet Cong. In late 1964, Zasloff and Donnell met with U.S. military leaders in Saigon, including General William Westmoreland, to debrief them on the report's findings. Most sat silenced and stunned as the two RAND researchers explained that American policy and Saigon's brutal treatment of peasants was filling the Viet Cong's ranks. Zasloff and Donnell toured Washington giving the same dire news.

Finally published in March 1965, the same month as the first U.S. ground forces landed in Da Nang, the Zasloff and Donnell RAND report was a bombshell that produced no damage. Along with their conclusion that fire power had pushed many peasants into the Viet Cong's arms, they also contended that the Viet Cong was the "effective government in a significant area of the countryside" and that the insurgency now had to be seen, not as a "jungle insurgency led by a band of committed Communist cadres," but as "a war waged by an alternative government." (71) This reporting was simply too pessimistic to have had much of an impact on decision-making in Washington. Even though many in the Johnson administration, especially McNamara and his deputy, John McNaughton, shared the report's pessimism, they had no response to the report. How could the administration take this knowledge and apply it to a theater of operations that was expanding, not contracting? How could Lyndon Johnson Americanize and de-Americanize the war at the same time? And, there was certainly nothing in the report that provided Johnson with any viable alternative to escalation.

For RAND to be relevant, some of its top administrators believed it had to produce reports that were indeed "actionable." (89) Some at RAND wondered how it could use the raw data Zasloff and Donnell collected in a more policy oriented way. Guy Pauker, a Berkeley academic who headed up many of RAND's research projects, decided that RAND needed to change what it studied about the Viet Cong. Instead of focusing on what made the Viet Cong invincible, Pauker wanted to know what made them vulnerable, what did they fear?

At RAND, several researchers shunned this new direction, but Pauker found a willing project director in Leon Goure, a Soviet expert who had been with RAND for a number of years. Goure came to the Viet Cong Morale and Motivation project determined to make his mark on the organization, but also to influence the course and conduct of the war. After just a few months of research in Vietnam, Goure claimed that the Zasloff and Donnell study of the Viet Cong had been too cynical. His research suggested that air power had little impact on peasant loyalties and that the Viet Cong ranks had not grown as a result of U.S. firepower in the countryside. Goure claimed he had reviewed all the evidence and these sources failed "to demonstrate a single case in which a Vietnamese had joined the insurgency directly because of damage or casualties inflicted on civilians by bombing or shelling." (96) Instead, he believed most Vietnamese peasants were neutral in the conflict and would "cooperate with whichever authority is in effective control of his area." [Ibid.] According to Goure, the U.S. could alter its fortunes in Vietnam if it used air power more effectively as a deterrent to Viet Cong activity and to diminish their numbers. He believed that if airpower was fully employed, it might pave the way for more intensive ground attacks and facilitate pacification. Following Goure's initial report, RAND's research budget for Vietnam grew from $100,000 to $1 million almost overnight. Much of that new funding came from the Air Force.

It is clear that many in RAND thought that Goure crossed a line with his research, threatening the independence and integrity of the entire RAND project. Many challenged his research methods while others took exception to his findings. History dismissed both. Goure's studies were immediately challenged by many of the "in house" government intelligence reports on the efficacy of air power in Vietnam, including the highly influential Jason Report. Eventually, the integrity of Goure's reports drew so much internal criticism that Goure was relieved of the project's directorship. Elliott's portrayal of the rise and fall of Leon Goure is the brightest of many such moments in the book..

This chapter in RAND's history is as important as it is fascinating. To see the influence of expert opinion on those who walk the corridors of power in Washington is to see the intractable problems this war produced. Following the RAND reports in Elliott's capable analysis is to see how government works—or doesn't work—and this should be required of every serious student of U.S. foreign policy.

Equally as important is Elliott's treatment of RAND's provincial studies in South Vietnam. Some of RAND's best work came from these provincial studies, and many are still used today to refute the claims of some that the Accelerated Pacification was successful. RAND analysts Bing West, Charlie Benoit, and David Elliott concluded that the U.S. pacification program's immense use of firepower actually depopulated the countryside rather than secured it. Saigon had not expanded its political control in the countryside, but rather had forced peasants into areas controlled by the government through the use of extraordinary firepower. This forced-draft urbanization would haunt the Saigon government as it struggled to provide for the new urban refugees under its care. These RAND reports also challenged the findings of the controversial Hamlet Evaluation Surveys used to calculate security and stability in the countryside. To summarize David Elliott, "the impressive appearance of pacification… as it turned out was not as impressive as we thought." (412) Though weakened, the Viet Cong held on during pacification and its recouped strength was sufficient to allow it to win the comparative conflict against the Saigon government with the help of the PAVN's main force infantry units.

The last major section of Elliott's work is the controversy surrounding the "Pentagon Papers." Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the papers to several reporters, was, after all a RAND analyst. There have been thousands of pages written about the "Pentagon Papers," but none more interesting or arresting than Elliott's. She takes the reader on the emotional roller-coaster ride of the impact of the papers on the Nixon administration, the American public, the war, and on RAND itself. In short, Elliott provides a fascinating narrative of this major issue from the war.

Elliott's study of RAND is instructive in many ways, but perhaps none are more important than putting to rest the idea that U.S. policy makers had no idea what was going on in Vietnam and that political and cultural differences made the war's major problems impenetrable to the American mind. From the RAND reports, and Elliott's telling of them, it is clear that the Defense Department and the State Department, as well as MACV and the U.S. Embassy team in Saigon, all knew the problems in Vietnam. Like the CIA's Saigon station, the RAND team in South Vietnam was filled with experienced former U.S. Army and Marine officers and academics, most of whom spoke and read Vietnamese fluently and had spent years in South Vietnam. They knew the problems the United States faced in Vietnam, they researched them thoroughly, and they explained them to the people who made decisions. And the war dragged on.

Review by Edwin Moise, Clemson University

The RAND Corporation was originally established in the late 1940s as a “think tank” serving a single client, the Army Air Force, soon to become the U.S. Air Force. By the 1960s it was spreading itself only a little wider working for other organizations in or under the Defense Department, such as the Advanced Research Projects Agency. But the clients did not exercise tight control over the work. RAND researchers often enjoyed a remarkable degree of freedom to set their own research agendas, or in a few cases not even to do very much research. Until about 1970 Gerald Hickey, an expert on the Montagnards (ethnic minorities who lived in the highlands of Central Vietnam), “came and went as he pleased, and no one at RAND questioned what he was doing, or how he went about doing it, or challenged his findings.” (277) They did not even force him to work full time on his research. His output was rather modest, because he devoted as much time and energy to assisting the Montagnards as to writing the papers and monographs that were supposed to be his job. Some of the research he did do, such as a 1962 report critical of the strategic hamlet program, offended powerful people in the Pentagon. (28) But Hickey remained on the RAND payroll in Vietnam longer than any other researcher.

RAND recently invited Mai Elliott, one of its former Vietnamese employees, to write a history of RAND’s activities in regard to Vietnam (and to a much smaller extent, Laos and Thailand), during the Vietnam War. She was given access to the portions of RAND’s archives that are not still classified, and she interviewed many people who had worked for RAND during the war.

Elliott makes it clear that the number of RAND researchers and analysts who worked on the Vietnam War was limited; this was never the central focus of the RAND Corporation’s activities. Even fewer chose actually to endure the hardships and possible risks of conducting research in Vietnam. A large proportion of RAND’s studies of the war were written by analysts at RAND headquarters in California, using information sent back by the smaller number of researchers actually in Vietnam.

Given the sources of its funding, one might have expected RAND and its employees to have supported U.S. policy in Vietnam, but this was not always the case. The people RAND hired usually started out as “hawks,” but those who worked on Vietnam did not always remain so. A number of them became critics of the American war in Vietnam, with Daniel Ellsberg as the most extreme, and as a result the most famous, case. Those whose work supported the government’s line might find it getting wide distribution; Stephen Hosmer’s study predicting that the Communists would execute very large numbers of people if they won the war was a conspicuous example. Those whose work offended the government might find have difficulty getting RAND to release it even as a classified publication, but they were not usually prevented from spending their time on such work, and only if they were really extreme in their sentiments would their jobs be at risk.

What was to become RAND's most important Vietnam-related activity, in which American and Vietnamese interviewers working for RAND questioned Communist defectors and prisoners about their life histories and motivations for serving in the Viet Cong, began with the Viet Cong Motivation and Morale project about the middle of 1964. The results of the original project, in the second half of 1964, offended many American military officers, who did not want to believe that the Viet Cong were motivated by genuine grievances against the United States and the Saigon government. In 1965 a new version of the project under a new manager, a former Soviet specialist named Leon Goure, began producing more congenial results, emphasizing the vulnerabilities of the Communists rather than their strength and determination, and denying that Vietnamese peasants were outraged by the destruction the American military was inflicting on their villages. Indeed, there was soon criticism from others at RAND that Goure was biasing his results to tell the government, especially the Air Force, what it wanted to hear. Even General William Westmoreland found Goure's optimism a bit extreme. (172) RAND pulled Goure out of Vietnam in April 1967, although he later returned for another project, during which he adopted a much less optimistic tone.

When David Elliott, who had worked very effectively on earlier efforts, proposed to return for one more interview project in 1971, Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) barred him from Vietnam until members of the White House staff applied pressure to get him into the country. His reports must have confirmed MACV's belief that he should not have been admitted; they discussed the way American and South Vietnamese operations had devastated the countryside, and were not optimistic about the likely course of the war.

As overall American enthusiasm for the war declined, so did RAND's enthusiasm for studying it. The office RAND had maintained for years in Saigon was closed late in 1968, and the remaining personnel shifted to smaller quarters.

RAND usually kept a low profile during the war. Indeed, most of its work was classified. The organization drew an unusual level of public attention in October 1969 with the appearance of dueling letters to the editor, published by the *Washington Post*. First, six RAND researchers wrote a letter advocating a rapid unilateral U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. Four other researchers quickly responded with a counter-letter opposing such a withdrawal. An interesting point that Ms. Elliott does not discuss is that the signers of the letter advocating withdrawal had done considerably more work on Vietnam than the signers of the counter-letter. Support for the war was the norm at RAND. Those who deviated from the norm tended to be people who had been exposed to a lot of information about Vietnam.

There was far more publicity, which for a while seemed to threaten the very existence of RAND, after Daniel Ellsberg leaked to the press the huge compilation of classified material commonly called the "Pentagon Papers" in 1971. The chapter that Elliott devotes to this episode contains much that was new to this reviewer.

RAND in Southeast Asia does not have a central argument. It is a big, sprawling book, giving detailed accounts of far more RAND researchers and issues than can usefully be discussed in a review. The volume also summarizes various aspects of the history of the war, as context for what it says about RAND's research on the war. The general level of accuracy is good, but Ms. Elliott's coverage of so many topics has inevitably led to some errors, of which the most conspicuous is perhaps her exaggeration of the proportion of dioxin in the herbicides that the United States sprayed in Vietnam. (32).

The book is relatively free of bias. Indeed, one wishes that Mai Elliott had not suppressed her own viewpoint and her own experiences so completely. The fact that she was among the Vietnamese who worked as interviewers for RAND in Vietnam is almost invisible. The text mentions that David Elliott had a Vietnamese wife who worked with him, but one has to go to the footnotes to confirm that this was Mai Elliott, and neither text nor notes says much about what work she did. Her book is based mostly on interviews with, and things written by, American employees of RAND. Ms. Elliott does not even list, in her extensive bibliography, the memoir she published some years ago, which included a bit more about her work for RAND.[1]

Almost anyone interested in the Vietnam War will find some section of *RAND in Southeast Asia* useful, but the number of people who will want to read it straight through may be limited.

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[1] Duong Van Mai Elliott, *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Review by Marilyn Young, New York University

Mai Elliott's monumental account of the RAND Corporation in Vietnam is both an institutional history of one of the first think tanks in the country and a history of the Vietnam War as these RAND reports analyzed its various aspects. There are no doubt some who still believe that if only U.S. administrations from Kennedy through Nixon understood the culture of Vietnam, its history, its long-standing divisions, the ferocious mix of nationalism and social revolution that inspired first the Viet Minh and then the National Liberation Front, the fecklessness and corruption of Saigon governments, the pointlessness of intervention in Vietnam, then of course the war would have ended before it began. What Mai Elliott's work makes abundantly clear is that, from Kennedy through Nixon, policymakers either knew or could easily have found out all of the above and much more. It made no difference.

Take, for example, the response of both military and civilian policymakers to the briefing given by the RAND team, led by Joseph Zasloff and John Donnell, investigating Viet Cong (as the NLF was designated at the time) "Motivation and Morale" in December 1964. General Westmoreland was briefed first. He was told of the complex composition of the enemy, from committed, deeply nationalist old Viet Minh cadres, to younger peasants in it for a variety of reasons ranging from the righting of social wrongs to the possibility of adventure. The team insisted that the Viet Cong should be thought of "not as a single insurgency led by a band of committed Communist cadres,'" and their struggle should be understood "as a war waged by an alternative government,'" whose cadres saw themselves as patriots "'fighting to liberate the country and redistribute the land.'" (71) Joseph Zasloff told Elliott in a 2003 interview that this description is "'old stuff by now, but in 1964 it was fresh and new.'" General Westmoreland listened carefully, asked a question that continues to puzzle Zasloff as it will the reader ("do they believe in God?") and passed the pair onto General Maxwell Taylor and thence to the senior staff at MACV headquarters. (71) There, according to one observer, the report "'burst like a bombshell,'" the listeners basically covering their ears against the blast. The RAND report had to be wrong because it "didn't make any sense in the context of American strategy." (72) They insisted that the Americans were "'the good guys' in Vietnam. … 'How could they [the peasants] be so angry at us when we're offering…roads, and we're going to give them electricity and running water?' 'Aren't they [the Viet Cong] evil?' … It can't be true…' that the Americans were not being looked upon as the 'good guys' fighting on the right side." (73) David Morrell, the young MACV staff officer who served as liaison with the RAND team, was convinced that had MACV senior officers known what the study might yield, they would have squashed it before it began. (73) So much for the value of intelligence to military strategists.

The team next went to Washington to brief John McNaughton, Assistant Secretary of Defense, who had initially sponsored the study. Harry Rowen, then Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense and later president of RAND, remembered the silence that followed the briefing: "McNaughton and I looked at each other," Rowen recalled, "and I said, 'John, I think we're signed up with the wrong side – the side that's going to lose this war.' And he agreed." For McNaughton, understanding what motivated the enemy was irrelevant. Before hearing a word of what the RAND people had learned, McNaughton, according to Elliott, had concluded the U.S. must be "'willing to keep promises, be tough, take risks, get bloodied and hurt the enemy badly.'" Even if it failed, its "'willingness to go to the mat'" would do it credit with its allies. What was at stake in Vietnam was the "'buffer real estate near Thailand and Malaysia. '" (75) Nothing Zasloff and Donnell had uncovered could make a difference to such an analysis; their work simply wasn't "*actionable*." (89)

Looking around for something RAND could do in Vietnam that *was* actionable, Guy Pauker, a committed anti-Communist who moved to RAND from the Berkeley political science department in 1963, thought the interviews on which Zasloff and Donnell had based their report might yield other information – not what drove the Viet Cong and made them fight, but rather what frightened them, what them vulnerable. Leon Goure, a RAND Soviet analyst, whose Menshevik father had fled the Soviet Union and whose alarmist reports of Soviet civil defense efforts delighted the Air Force, took a quick trip to Vietnam in the fall of 1964, skimmed the interview material and concluded that the Viet Cong feared U.S. air power above all. This was obviously good news for the Air Force;RAND's Vietnam budget went from $100,000 to $1 million overnight (125). Here was objective proof that U.S. tactics in Vietnam were working. Leon Goure had the privilege of personally briefing McNamara – as well as Congress and the news media – on a regular basis. (127)

Not all of the press was convinced by Goure's arguments. Arthur Dommen of the *Los Angeles Times,* for example, wondered why, if bombing was so effective, were the Viet Cong able not only withstand it but continue to grow? And what about civilian reaction? Were not U.S. tactics alienating the very people upon whom an American victory depended? (130, fn161) Goure's answer was firm: 'not at all'. Villagers understood that it was the presence of the Viet Cong that brought the bombs down upon them and reacted accordingly. The generation of refugees was also good thing. Viet Cong morale sank as people fled to areas controlled by Saigon, the economic base of the insurgency shrank, and the Viet Cong found itself ruling by intimidation rather than persuasion.

As was to be the case with other analyses that so seamlessly offered objective scholarly support for American policies, Goure's reports were challenged inside the organization. Researchers who had themselves participated in or reviewed the Morale & Motivation interviews protested that Goure was, deliberately or not, misreading the evidence. Rather than ask for Goure's resignation, RAND recruited another researcher, Konrad Kellen, to review the evidence. Kellen, like Goure, came from a family of European refugees. During the war he had served in Army intelligence and stayed on to work with Radio Free Europe. Like Zasloff and Donnell, Kellen was interested in the sources of Viet Cong strength rather than their vulnerabilities. But beyond that, Kellen raised questions both moral and strategic about the bombing of South Vietnamese villages. In a memorandum to Goure written at the end of September, 1966, Kellen asked whether anyone could "'guarantee that villagers will not join the VC when bombed and shelled.'" Were "'tactical considerations'" the only criterion "'when it comes to killing people, or engaging in operations that make such killing likely'"? (169)

Questions about the integrity of Goure's research multiplied, leading RAND to send someone to Vietnam to check it all out. Gus Shubert arrived in Saigon to find the RAND office, with the exception of Goure himself, deeply demoralized. He concluded that Goure's research methods were shabby, his conclusions untrustworthy and that controlling his freewheeling briefings of top administration officials was essential. Shutting Goure down was important because, as Schubert recalled decades later, his study "'was one of the few RAND projects that really affected people's lives, and it deserved a lot more care than it got.'" Looking back, Schubert shook "'with anger and frustration at the thought of [his] inability to control [Goure].'" (185) But he couldn't control him, and Goure's abuse of the evidence remained influential: the efficacy of crop destruction; the decline in Viet Cong morale and the conviction that victims of bombing blamed the Viet Cong and not those who did the bombing. Walt Whitman Rostow found Goure's work useful in writing upbeat speeches for Lyndon Johnson.

Elliott also details the reports written and not circulated to the press or Congress – on the devastating impact on the countryside of the generation of refugees, on the atrocities committed by South Korean troops – and of those that were writtenwith immense skill, dedication and lasting value by Mai Elliott herself and her husband David. Among the more telling incidents Elliott discusses is a paper written by David Mozingo in 1966 which anticipated the capacity of Hanoi to launch an offensive in the South. The paper was "reviewed to death" and while some of the criticism may have been useful, Mozingo is convinced "'they didn't want it to get out.'" Until that is, after Tet, when the paper was released so as to demonstrate that "'RAND…knew it all along.'" (296)

Elliott has interesting things to say about Daniel Ellsberg and the near-devastating impact on RAND of the release of the Pentagon Papers. Ellsberg was not the only RAND researcher whose growing despair over the war led himto public protest. In the fall of 1969 a small group of RAND researchers wrote a letter to the *Los Angeles Times* calling for complete U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam within the year. "'We do not predict that only good consequences will follow for Southeast Asia or South Vietnam (or even the United States) from our withdrawal. What we do say is that the risks will not be less after another year or more of American involvement, and the human costs will surely be greater.'" (444) Publication of the letter radically shifted the atmosphere within the corporation. Heretofore, hawks and doves dined together peacefully and dissent was tolerated, according to one of the signatories, Mel Gurtov, so long as it remained "'within the boundaries of secrecy and privacy.'" But the letter "hit RAND 'like a bombshell,'" the majority arguing vociferously that the relationship between RAND and the government was analogous to that between a lawyer and his client, that the letter writers were

“’simply gutless bastards’” who should resign if they felt so strongly about the war and, worst of all, that the group had endangered RAND Air Force funding. (449)

It is intriguing, for any scholar or analyst who has used RAND reports (and who has not?) to read these detailed accounts of their composition, the internal struggles around their circulation, and their irrelevance to policymakers beyond reinforcing policies already decided upon. Possibly the greatest service RAND performed for the Nixon administration was Stephen Hosmer’s report on the certainty of a “bloodbath” in the aftermath of U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. Internally, the report, marked Confidential and published in April 1970, was criticized for its deeply flawed reasoning. Nevertheless, the Pentagon declassified it only a month later, and then immediately circulated it to the press. In June, D.C. Heath Co. agreed to print it as a book (Elliott does not make clear who pushed for trade publication). In the words of the report’s most severe critic, Michael Arnstein, “’Rarely, if ever… has RAND achieved instant communication with a mass audience; up to now this has never happened to any RAND publication on Vietnam.’” (505)

At times the reader is in danger of drowning in a sea of names of people whose functions and histories can only be ascertained by constant cross-checking with the index. This is a minor annoyance. That criticism aside, Elliott's work is an invaluable addition to the literature. One would hope that *RAND in Southeast Asia* will one day outstrip Hosmer’s record. Michael Arnstein, I’m sure, would approve.

Author's Response by Mai Elliot, Independent Scholar

In their reviews of my *RAND in Southeast Asia* book, both Professor Robert Brigham and Professor Marilyn Young see its larger dimensions. As Brigham points out, my book is not merely "an ordinary institutional history of an important yet peripheral player in the Vietnam War drama" but a story of the trajectory of the war itself – from commitment to stop communist expansion to disillusionment. Indeed, the Cold War consensus – that communist expansionism should be defeated wherever it reared its ugly head – reigned at RAND as it did in the U.S. at large as its analysts embarked on researching the insurgency in Vietnam. Then, when the war became intractable, questions about the wisdom and efficacy of U.S. policies as well as about the futility of the war itself eventually led to the breakup of the Cold War consensus at RAND as it did in the rest of the country.

Both Brigham and Young point out that good research producing good information made no difference in Washington, unless it validated official policies. Brigham writes that *RAND in Southeast Asia* puts "to rest the idea that U.S. policy makers had no idea what was going on in Vietnam and that political and cultural differences made the war's major problems impenetrable to the American mind." He adds that RAND analysts, along with those in the CIA station in Saigon, "knew the problems the United States faced in Vietnam…researched them thoroughly, and they explained them to the people who made decisions. And the war dragged on." Marilyn Young states, "What Mai Elliott's work makes abundantly clear is that, from Kennedy through Nixon, policymakers either knew or could easily have found out" all the information they needed about Vietnamese history and culture, the flaws of the Saigon government -- "and much more. It made no difference." Brigham goes further and sees another implication. To him, "To see the influence of expert opinion on those who walk the corridors of power in Washington is to see the intractable problems this war produced. Following the RAND reports [as described in *RAND in Southeast Asia*] is to see how government works—or doesn't work," and this should be of interest to "every serious student of U.S. foreign policy."

Both Brigham and Young discuss the effect the extensive use of U.S. military power had on Vietnam and its people as seen through the RAND reports. Brigham focuses on the indiscriminate reliance on airpower to "pave the way for pacification" and in pacification itself by depopulating the areas controlled by the Viet Cong with bombardment. Young discusses more the moral implications raised by some RAND analysts – in particular by Konrad Kellen – of bombing and killing innocent civilians. The use of airpower is once again fore and center in the debate about the pursuit of the war in Afghanistan. Just as in Vietnam, the suffering inflicted on civilians by bombing can stoke the very forces that the United States wants to vanquish. Among the many lessons the Vietnam War offers, this should represent a major one for Washington.

Among the aspects Marilyn Young finds intriguing – besides the "irrelevance" of the RAND reports to "policymakers beyond reinforcing policies already decided upon" -- is my "detailed accounts" of the "composition" of the RAND reports, and "the internal struggles around their circulation…" Discovering the "internal struggles" at RAND over the interpretation of data, the conflict over airing dissent in public, as well as the clash over the circulation of reports supporting government policies versus the circulation of those criticizing such policies, was one of my surprises in researching my book. I had not been privy to this information. I worked for RAND for a brief period of time (see below) in Vietnam, in a limited capacity, and was not aware of what was happening in the corridors at its headquarters in Santa Monica which, in the mid-1960s devoid of the advanced communication we have today, seemed like a world away.

Finally, Young finds the "sea of names" difficult to keep track of. After hearing complaints about the large number of unfamiliar Vietnamese names in my family story (*The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family*) I thought that this time around, since the names are overwhelmingly American, readers would have no trouble keeping track of who's who. I guess I was overly optimistic.

In his review of my book, Professor Edwin Moise discusses the paradox of RAND, a think tank most of whose research was funded by the U.S. Air Force and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. One would expect that such funding would curtail RAND's intellectual freedom, or that analysts who work for it would *ipso facto* support government policies. As Moise points out, and as my book *RAND in Southeast Asia* shows, such was not the case when it came to research pertaining to the Vietnam War. Although RAND did not always live up to its objective of being "a hair shirt" to the U.S. Air Force – and by extension to its government clients in general – it did on many occasions tell officials in Washington what they did not want to hear about the policies they were pursuing in Vietnam.

I agree with Moise that those analysts at RAND who opposed the war "tended to be people who had been exposed to a lot of information about Vietnam." This is another irony in the story of RAND's involvement in the research about the Vietnam War. As one of the RAND analysts pointed out, one would expect that the "information rich" environment of RAND would solidify support for the war among the analysts. In fact, for some, the opposite happened. The more they immersed themselves in information about the war, the more they saw its complexities, and the more they began to question – if not to oppose – U.S. involvement.

Another irony in the RAND's story as it relates to the Vietnam War is that although it devoted a very limited portion of its resources on researching various aspects of the war, it almost got done in by its involvement. The unauthorized disclosure of the secret Pentagon Papers by Daniel Ellsberg, one of its analysts, with the help of Tony Russo, a former staff member, "for a while seemed to threaten the very existence of RAND."

The fact that my book is "sprawling" and lacks "a central argument," as Moise points out, is the result of my effort, at RAND's behest, to capture as comprehensive a history of its Vietnam research activities as possible. In fact, one of my challenges in writing the book was to be as complete as possible while at the same time giving it a flowing narrative and keeping it from becoming an encyclopedic compendium. Limited as RAND's research activities about the Vietnam War were, they did range over a large number of issues pertaining to the war – not always and not necessarily inter-related – and produced over five hundred reports and papers of various length and substance. Writing a narrative that was neither "jumpy" nor too lengthy was a challenge for me.

Professor Moise thinks that I should have inserted myself into the narrative. The reason I did not do so was because I believed that, by keeping myself out of it, I would maintain the objectivity of the book. Moise's statement that my book is "relatively free of bias" indicates to me that I achieved this objective, Also, my view about the Vietnam War evolved, as I explained in my family story *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family*, which Moise kindly mentions. It would have been cumbersome for me to keep saying, at many junctures, something along the line of "at the time I would have agreed with the RAND research findings but later on I would not have." Besides, since I had written extensively about myself in my previous book, my objective in this one was to talk about the other Vietnamese who worked for RAND and to focus on the RAND analysts and their views on the war and, for those who went to Vietnam to conduct field research, on their experiences there.

I should point out that my work for RAND in Vietnam was limited both in terms of the duration of employment and in terms of my responsibilities. I was a newly-minted Georgetown graduate when I was hired in around December 1964 to interview Viet Cong and North Vietnamese defectors and prisoners-of-war and to translate the interviews I conducted. My interview output declined while my translation duties increased after I moved to the Mekong Delta to assist my husband, David Elliott, in his own research project for RAND. There, my skill as a translator became more valuable than my skill as an interviewer, so I devoted most of my time to translating the interviews conducted by the very capable Vietnamese interviewers, none of whom knew English. My husband and I left Vietnam in the Fall of 1967 for Taiwan where he began studying Chinese. I continued working for RAND part-time for a while as a translator of the captured documents which my husband analyzed and which RAND published as *Documents of an Elite Viet Cong Delta Unit: The Demolition Platoon of the 514th Battalion* in 1969. My work for RAND ceased when we moved to Ithaca, New York, in 1968 where my husband pursued his doctorate at Cornell University. I went back with him to Vietnam in 1971 when he was asked by Robert Sansom, then on the staff of the National Security Council, to conduct further research in the Mekong Delta. I rejoined RAND as a translator of the interviews my husband's team of interviewers produced. When this project ended, I ceased working for RAND altogether.

As to some of the errors that might be contained in my *RAND in Southeast Asia* book, if they came from the sources I used to construct the historical context within which RAND research about the war was conducted, then my mistake was in taking these sources at face value and in assuming that their authors who seemed to be experts knew what they wrote about. For example, in the case of the proportion of dioxin in the herbicides that the United States sprayed in Vietnam on page 32, which Moise mentions, I used the sources I cited in my footnote 67.[1] I did not perform primary research on *any* of the issues which I wove into my narrative to provide the historical context, and relied instead on existing sources. My main focus was the RAND story. The context served only as a kind of "coat rack" to which I tied this story.

One of the surprises for me in writing *RAND in Southeast Asia* was to discover the extent to which Washington enlisted social science to research the insurgency in Vietnam in the belief that the knowledge gained would assist its war efforts there. Recently, the Pentagon has begun to hire anthropologists to work with the military in the field in Afghanistan in Human Terrain Teams. It has also started a project called Minerva to enlist social scientists inside and outside of academia to – among other things -- help in the fight against jihadist extremism by researching such fields as religion and ideology. So, in view of this development, I hope that more people would read my *RAND in Southeast Asia* "straight through" than Edwin Moise believes to see how social science was enlisted in Vietnam and what the results were.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Robert Brigham, Marilyn Young, and Edwin Moise for devoting some of their precious time to reading and reviewing with a great deal of thoughtfulness my *RAND in Southeast Asia: A History of the Vietnam War*. I would also like to thank Edwin Martini and H-Diplo for requesting the reviews and allowing me to respond.

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[1] Lindsey H. Arison III, "Executive Summary: The Herbicidal Warfare Program in Vietnam, 1961-1971, *Operations Trail Dust/Ranch Hand,*" is an article posted online by Arison that is based on William Buckingham [Buckingham, William., Jr., *The Air Force and Herbicides in Southeast Asia,1961-1971*, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, United States Air Force, 1982.] and on Paul Frederick Cecil, *Herbicidal Warfare--The RANCH HAND Project in Vietnam*, New York: Praeger, 1986.