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I

I am delighted today to attend this conference, which has such distinguished speakers, and it is a great honor for me to comment on Dr. Mori’s discussion. I would like to make four general comments and then ask four questions about the paper he has presented.

II

First, let me start with general comments. Dr. Mori is one of the leading Japanese experts on the history of the Vietnam War and especially on U.S. relations with its Western allies over the conflict. He has published a prize-winning book on alliance politics between the United States, the United Kingdom, and France during the Vietnam War. One of the main features of Dr. Mori’s analysis is his attention to U.S. susceptibility to its major allies’ views on the war. Existing literature on the Vietnam War tends to focus exclusively on Washington’s decision-making and either neglects or underestimates the influence of the Western allies. In contrast, Dr. Mori argues that the Johnson administration was more influenced by Western allies such as Britain and France in the formulation of policy towards Vietnam than has hitherto been thought. In this sense, the United States was far from making independent, unilateral decisions and was indeed careful to accommodate its allies’ views in order to sustain its leadership and allied unity in the Western camp during the war. Dr. Mori’s study is among the very few that analyze the Vietnam War in the framework of multilateral allied relations and clarify the mutual influence between the United States and its allies, Britain and France.

Second, Dr. Mori’s discussion is interesting in that he stresses the structural, economic, financial, and societal factors that defined the alliance politics between the Western countries during the Vietnam War. Most of the preceding studies on this subject focused on human relations at the top level between Washington and its allies’ capitals. For instance, personal discord between President Johnson on
the one hand and British Prime Minister Harold Wilson and French President Charles de Gaulle on the other was a primary source of contention between the three countries. Although such human relationships indeed had a crucial impact on specific decisions made during the Vietnam War, it should also be noted that those personal disagreements were partly based on the structural conflict of interests between the three countries.

In addition, existing works on alliance politics during the Vietnam War are dominated by studies that deal with the political and military aspects of the war. This is one of the reasons that Western allies such as Britain and France, which opted to stay out of the war, have been marginalized in the historiography of the Vietnam War. However, by looking at economic and social aspects of the war, Dr. Mori demonstrates that France and Britain were deeply concerned with the war, even though they were not militarily involved.

Third, and I am afraid this may be a misinterpretation, but it seems to me that Dr. Mori describes alliance politics between the United States, Britain, and France as interactions between three empires of different sorts in Southeast Asia. The United States had emerged from the Second World War as a new sort of empire. It had possessed few tangible interests in Indochina before the World War, but as the Cold War spread to Asia, the United States sought to establish a so-called liberal democratic empire which was to cover the former French colonies—the Indochinese countries. In this context, the United States fought the Vietnam War to promote the globalization of democracy.

Britain and France refused, however, to provide any military assistance to the United States to promote democracy in Vietnam, and they quite often disagreed with Washington over their Vietnam policy. While Britain and France were two of the greatest Cold War allies of the United States, they had long held imperial interests in Southeast Asia and quite often watched with apprehension the U.S. ideological crusade against the Vietnamese communists, as undermining their vested interests in the region. As Dr. Mori argues, it is important to note that France had maintained significant economic and social ties with South Vietnam even after the termination of its colonial rule and that it construed the expansion of U.S. presence as eroding French influence in the country.

Lastly, in Section 3, Dr. Mori introduces a case revealed by a New York Times journalist, of a secret U.S.-North Vietnam negotiation codenamed Marigold in the autumn of 1966, to show that global media had a significant impact on the developments of the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War was the first internationally-televised war. Global broadcast of the Vietnam War contributed to impairing the Cold War consensus on U.S. containment policy and to diminishing public support and fuelled burgeoning anti-war demonstrations in the United States and Western allied countries. In this sense, the Vietnam War became a watershed, after which subsequent U.S. administrations have been required to make their conduct of war more accountable to the public, and their war policy has been much restricted by global media attention. If Dr. Mori has any additional
comments on the role of the media during the Vietnam War, I welcome his further comments.

III

Now let me turn to the questions.

My first question concerns U.S.-French relations, as described in Section 1. Dr. Mori points out that Paris had vested interests in South Vietnam even after its military withdrawal and that France’s desire to preserve its economic and cultural ties with South Vietnam was one of the primary reasons for de Gaulle’s strong opposition to the U.S. intervention in the country. It is interesting to hear Dr. Mori’s argument that the French government viewed the U.S. intervention in Vietnam as undermining its ‘socio-economic space’ in South Vietnam, ‘which was a remnant of globalization in the era of empires.’

If the economic and social associations with South Vietnam were so important to France, I wonder how France could have maintained its assets in the face of the danger of communization of South Vietnam. While expanding U.S. influence in South Vietnam was considered a threat to the French, was the U.S. presence necessary, if not desirable, to resist a communist domination that would imperil the French interests in the country? How could de Gaulle have tried to protect French interests from the communists without the U.S. military counterbalance? Perhaps his solution was a neutralization of Vietnam, but I wonder how de Gaulle could think the Vietnamese communists would abide by the neutralization and continue to respect the French assets in Indochina. This is a question I have long held, and I would appreciate Dr. Mori’s response to it.

The second question concerns the interesting generalization that Dr. Mori makes at the end of Section 1, on globalization and alliance politics: ‘in the modern globalized world, there might be several stakeholder states involved in a target state of a U.S. intervention.’ Consequently, ‘out-of-area disputes could cause several U.S. allies to oppose U.S. intervention and bring about a crisis of alliance cohesion’. This suggests that in a globalized world, where political, economic, and cultural interests of multiple countries are interwoven beyond borders, it is becoming more and more difficult for great powers to acquire their allies’ consent to unilateral intervention. If this is the case, it could be possible to argue that globalization will have an increasingly deterrent effect upon intervention by major powers. This is because great powers need to refrain from intervening in any region where their allies’ stakes are involved, in order not to damage allied unity. I would like to draw Dr. Mori’s extra comments on the future prospects of alliance management in the age of globalization. For instance, is it possible to say that, in a more globalized world, alliance will be a surer way to restrain great powers from unilateral intervention?

My third question concerns Anglo-American relations during the Vietnam War. Dr. Mori contends that the fundamental reason for Britain’s mediation of
the war between the United States and the communist states lay in London's desire to facilitate its military withdrawal from East of Suez, so as to reduce the balance of payments deficit and defend the value of the British pound. The U.S.'s direct military intervention, which began in March 1965, coincided with Harold Wilson's historic decision to retreat, and, as Dr. Mori argues, the Wilson government was apprehensive that the intensification of the Indochinese war would impede the British disengagement. I totally agree that the imperial retreat was one of the chief reasons for Wilson's mediation.

Yet, as Dr. Mori also recognizes, there were other factors behind British mediation of the war. The British government had been long involved in the Vietnam problem since the Geneva Conference of 1954, when it acted as co-chairman. The previous Conservative governments led by Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan, and Alec Douglas-Home were all concerned with resolving the conflict in Vietnam. Wilson also had expressed his interest in settling the Vietnam conflict well before taking office, but he had other motives for dealing with the Vietnam problem, such as appeasing domestic opinion, enhancing his personal prestige, and restoring Britain's international influence. On one occasion at a summit meeting with Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin in 1966, Wilson cited three reasons for which the Vietnam War should be settled: first, 'it was a terrible war involving casualties on both sides'; second, there was 'a danger of its escalating into a major Asian land war'; and third, it would destroy 'hopes of improving East-West relations' by 'upsetting a European strategic balance.'

Moreover, several studies demonstrate that the Wilson government had been preoccupied with the Indonesian-Malaysian military confrontation, in which British forces were heavily engaged until the summer of 1966, and therefore, that Britain tried to promote peace in Vietnam to enable it to concentrate its military resources on the defense of Malaysia. I would like to ask how Dr. Mori relates these plural factors and puts the imperial retreat factor above the others.

My last question concerns the relation between globalization and the Vietnam War. Dr. Mori titles his paper 'Globalization, U.S. Alliance Politics and the Vietnam War.' I well understand from his paper the relevance of alliance politics to the Vietnam War, and I would like more insight into the connections between globalization and the war. Dr. Mori shows that 'the Vietnam War had a “globalizing” effect on South Vietnamese trade.' My question is, what other effects did globalization have upon the Vietnam War? For instance, is it possible to say the Vietnam War was caused, intensified, and prolonged by globalization? If this can be said, in what sense, and to what extent, was the Vietnam War affected by globalization? I think the Vietnam War was partly caused, much aggravated, and prolonged by the Cold War, which was defined as a confrontation of the two globalization projects between liberal democracy and communism. The United States, it seemed to me, intervened in Vietnam not so much because the Southeast Asian country was indispensable to its security and interests but because the U.S. needed to prevent communization of South Vietnam as part of its effort to
globalize liberal democratic institution. I am interested to know Dr. Mori's ideas on the correlation between globalization and the Vietnam War in general.

Notes


3. The National Archives (U.K.), PREM 13/1216, Record of a Meeting between Wilson and Kosygin at 10 a.m., 22 February 1966.