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Prof. Terachi Koji presented his paper, titled: “‘Every War Must End’ or Ending a Quagmire for the United States: Laos, Vietnam and...” Prof. Terachi’s presentation was followed by Prof. Matsuoka Hiroshi’s presentation of his commentary paper, titled: “What Laos and Vietnam Are Still Telling US.” Then Prof. Andrew Rotter made additional comments. After a break, Prof. Terachi responded to questions and comments made by Professors Matsuoka and Rotter. Then the discussion was opened to the floor.

Prof. Terachi’s paper focused on the “the often-forgotten U.S. involvement in Laos” between the mid 1950s and early 1960s in “the larger framework of U.S. involvement leading to Vietnam.” Challenging the widespread perception regarding the Laos case that “the United States had successfully achieved its neutralization in 1962 and stopped on the brink of intervention,” Prof. Terachi argued that “the U.S. involvement itself and the path to ‘neutralization’ in Laos represented serious failures in U.S. policy.” He even likened the U.S. “failures” in Laos to the “failures in the U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the path to the ‘peace’ agreement achieved in Paris in January 1973.”

In an effort to “provide a more detailed analysis of the American side of the story leading to Geneva Accord on Laos than had been remembered in the past,” Prof. Terachi closely followed the decision-making process of the Kennedy administration between 1961 and 1962 in Sections I and II by an extensive use of archival sources of the administration. In the process, Prof. Terachi showed “how futile the U.S. policy was in propping up the U.S.-supported government and how ineffective the U.S. pressure was in the process leading to neutralization.” In Section III, Prof. Terachi went on to compare America’s Laos and Vietnam experiences and found “many similarities in America’s involvement in and ‘extrication’ from” both countries.

In the conclusion, Prof. Terachi pointed out that “the American experience in Laos was soon forgotten in the midst of the mounting crisis in Vietnam” not only by “contemporary policymakers but also [by] historians and the public.” Because of this “loss of collective memories,” no lessons of policy failures were learned or passed on “under the guise of ‘neutralization’ and ‘peace agreement.’” He also reminded us that “with the façade of neutralization or peace, many people scarcely realize the disproportionate human costs that the United States inflicted

directly or indirectly on the other side.”

In his commentary, Prof. Matsuoka questioned whether neutral Laos was “really a failure.” He argued that “America’s escape from Laos by negotiated agreement” could be “regarded as a success for American diplomacy” because “it was the best solution that the United States could have expected” given the worsening situation in Laos and Kennedy’s weak political standing at the time. He also pointed out, however, that under the “illusion of conflict-localization magic,” the United States sought to “localize the conflict by building a strong army and a stable government so that the victory could be achieved without massive American involvement.” Prof. Rotter, while congratulating Prof. Terachi for his efforts on the Laos case, raised several questions, such as the lack of detailed analysis of Soviet policy on Laos as well as the very notion of U.S. “extrication” from Laos in 1962.

In response to the question of success or failure of the Geneva solution brought up by Prof. Matsuoka, Prof. Terachi said that there were other serious proposals at the time such as the 1961 proposal of international conference by Prince Sihanouk and that President Kennedy could have put a more effective pressure on intransigent Laotian leaders. In response to some of Prof. Rotter’s questions, Prof. Terachi said that he was well aware of the post-1962 U.S. involvement in Laos but that he largely omitted it in the paper because of space limitation. Regarding Soviet policy, he pointed out that the Soviet Union delegated Asian policy to China at the time. There were several questions from the floor regarding lessons of Laos and Vietnam, the issue of success or failure of U.S. Laos policy, the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, etc. A lively discussion continued until the time was up.