NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE

Sanitized - Approved For Release : CIA-RDP75-00
MAY 15, 1966

The Fatal Arrogance of Power

By J. W. FULBRIGHT

STATINTL

"A great nation is peculiarly susceptible to the idea that its power is a sign of God's favor, conferring upon it a special responsibility to remake other nations in its own shining image."

CPYRGHT

TO criticize one's country is to do it a service and pay it a compliment. It is a service because it may spur the country to do better than it is doing; it is a compliment because it evidences a belief that the country can do better than it is doing.

Criticism may embarrass the country's leaders in the short run but strengthen their hand in the long run; it may destroy a consensus on policy while expressing a consensus of values. Woodrow Wilson once said that there was "such a thing as being too proud to fight." There is also, or ought to be, such a thing as being too confident to conform, too strong to be silent in the face of apparent error. Criticism, in short, is more than a right: it is an act of patriotism—a higher form of patriotism, I believe, than the familiar rituals of national adulation.

Thus, it is not pejorative but a tribute to say that America is worthy of criticism. If nonetheless one is charged with a lack of patriotism, I would reply with Albert Camus: "No, I didn't love my country, if pointing out what is unjust in what we love amounts to not loving, if insisting that what we love should measure up to the finest image we have of her amounts to not loving."

CPYRGHT

What is the finest image of America? To me it is the image of a composite—or, better still, a synthesis—of diverse peoples and cultures, come together in harmony, but not identity, in an open, receptive, generous and creative society.

We are an extraordinary nation, endowed with a rich and productive land and a talented and energetic population. Surely a nation so favored is capable of extraordinary achievement, not only in the area of producing and enjoying great wealth—where our achievements have indeed been extraordinary—but also in the area of human and international relations—in which area, it seems to me, our achievements have fallen short of our capacity and promise. The question that I find intriguing is whether a nation so extraordinarily endowed as the United States can overcome that arrogance of power which has afflicted, weakened and, in some cases, destroyed great nations in the past.

THE causes of the malady are a mystery but its recurrence is one of the uniformities of history: Power tends to confuse itself with virtue and a great nation is peculiarly susceptible to the idea that its power is a sign of God's favor, conferring upon it a special responsibility for other nations—to make them richer and happier and wiser, to remake them, that is, in its own shining image.

Power also tends to take itself for omnipotence. Once imbued with the idea of a mission, a great nation easily assumes that it has the means as well as the duty to do God's work. The Lord, after all, surely would not choose you as His agent and then deny you the sword with which to work His will. German soldiers in the First World War wore belt buckles imprinted with the words *"Gott mit uns."* It was approximately under this kind of infatuation—an exaggerated sense of power and an imaginary sense of mission—that the Athenians attacked Syracuse and Napoleon and then Hitler invaded Russia. In plain words, they overextended their commitments and they came to grief.

My question is whether America can overcome the fatal arrogance of power. My hope and my belief are that it can, that it has the human resources to accomplish what few, if any, great nations have ever accomplished before: to be confident but also tolerant, and rich but also generous; to be willing to teach but also willing to learn; to be powerful but also wise. I believe that America is capable of all of these things; I also believe it is falling short of them. Gradually but unmistakably we are succumbing to the arrogance of power. In so doing we are not living up to our capacity and promise; the measure of our falling short is the measure of the patriot's duty of dissent.

The discharge of that most important duty is handicapped in America by an unworthy tendency to fear serious criticism of our Government. In the abstract we celebrate freedom of opinion as a vital part of our patriotic liturgy. It is only when some Americans exercise the right that other Americans are shocked. No one, of course, ever criticizes the right of dissent; it is always this particular instance of it or its exercise under these particular circumstances or at this particular time that throws people into a blue funk. I am reminded of Samuel Butler's observation: **"People in general are equally horrified at hearing the Christian religion doubted, and at seeing it practiced."**

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J. W. FULBRIGHT, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, delivered three speeches — the annual Christian A. Herter Lectures — at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies in Washington recently. This article is adapted from one of them. The series will be published in book form.

CRITIC—Senator Fulbright talks with members of his audience at the School of Advanced International Studies. His headline-making lectures there on U.S. policy in Vietnam prompted Barry Goldwater to charge that he was lending "aid and comfort to our enemies."

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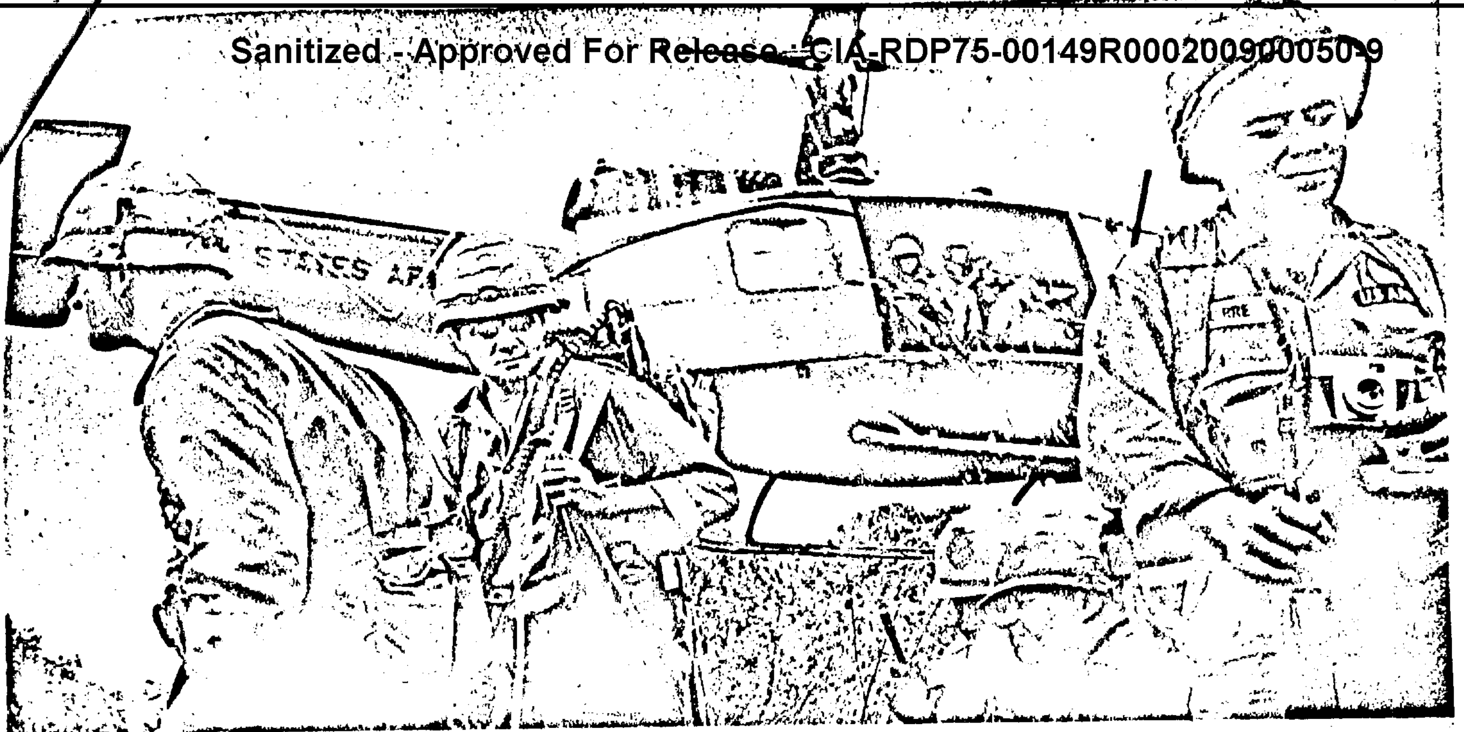

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IN VIETNAM—U.S. troops land by helicopter in search of the Vietcong. There are, says the author, "moral distinctions between one war and another—between resisting Hitler and intervening in Vietnam."

No one challenges the value and importance of national consensus, but consensus can be understood in two ways. If it is interpreted to mean unquestioning support of existing policies, its effects can only be pernicious and undemocratic, serving to suppress differences rather than to reconcile them. If, on the other hand, consensus is understood to mean a general agreement on goals and values, but not necessarily on the best means of realizing them, then it becomes a lasting basis of national strength.

It is consensus in this sense which has made America strong in the past. Indeed, much of our national success in combining change with continuity can be attributed to the vigorous competition of men and ideas within a context of shared values and generally accepted institutions. It is only through this kind of vigorous competition of ideas that a consensus of values can sometimes be translated into a true consensus of policy.

THE correction of errors in a nation's foreign policy is greatly assisted by the timely raising of voices of criticism within the nation. When the British launched their disastrous attack on Egypt, the Labor party raised a collective voice of indignation while the military operation was still under way; refusing to be deterred by calls for national unity in a crisis, Labor began the long, painful process of recovering Great Britain's good name at the very moment when the damage was still being done. Similarly, the French intellectuals who protested France's colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria not only upheld the values of French democracy but helped pave the way for the enlightened policies of the Fifth Republic which have made France the most respected Western nation in the underdeveloped world.

A second great advantage of free discussion to democratic policymakers is its bringing to light of new ideas and the supplanting of old myths with new realities. We Americans are much in need of this benefit because we are severely, if not uniquely, afflicted with a habit of policy making by analogy: North Vietnam's involvement in South Vietnam, for example, is equated with Hitler's invasion of Poland and a parley with the Vietcong would represent another Munich.

The treatment of slight and superficial resemblances as if they were full-blooded analogies — as instances, as it were, of history "repeating itself" — is a substitute for thinking and a misuse of history. The value of history is not what it seems to prohibit or prescribe, but its general indications as to the kinds of policies that are likely to succeed and the kinds that are likely to fail, or, as one historian has suggested, its hints as to what is likely not to happen.

There is a kind of voodoo about American foreign policy. Certain drums have to be beaten regularly to ward off evil spirits — for example, the maledictions which are regularly uttered against North Vietnamese aggression, the "wild men" in Peking, Communism in general and President de Gaulle. Certain pledges must be repeated every day lest the whole free world go to rack and ruin—for example, we [illegible] back on a commitment no matter how unwise; we regard this alliance or that as absolutely "vital" to the free world; and, of course, we will stand stalwart in Berlin from now until Judgment Day. Certain words must never be uttered except in derision—the word "appeasement," for example, comes as near as any word can to summarizing everything that is regarded by American policy makers as stupid, wicked and disastrous.

I do not suggest that we should heap praise on the Chinese Communists, dismantle NATO, abandon Berlin, and seize every opportunity that comes along to appease our enemies. I do suggest the desirability of an atmosphere in which unorthodox ideas would arouse interest rather than horror, reflection rather than emotion. As likely as not, new proposals, carefully examined, would be found wanting and old policies judged sound; what is wanted is not change itself but the capacity for change.

Consider the idea of "appeasement." In a free and healthy political atmosphere it would elicit neither horror nor enthusiasm but only interest in what precisely its proponent had in mind. As Winston Churchill once said: "Appeasement in itself may be good or bad according to circumstances. . . . Appeasement from strength is magnanimous and noble and might be the surest and perhaps the only path to world peace."

In addition to its usefulness for redeeming error and introducing new ideas, free and open criticism has a third, more abstract but no less important function in a democracy. It is therapy and catharsis for those who are troubled or dismayed by something their country is doing; it helps to reassert traditional values,

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clear the air when it is full of [illegible]sion and mistrust.

There are times in public life as in private life when one must protest, not solely or even primarily because one's protest will be politic or materially productive, but because one's sense of decency is offended, because one is fed up with political craft and public images, or simply because something goes against the grain. The catharsis thus provided may indeed be the most valuable of freedom's uses.

WHILE not unprecedented, protests against a war in the middle of the war are a rare experience for Americans. I see it as a mark of strength and maturity that an articulate minority have raised their voices against the Vietnamese war and that the majority of Americans are enduring this dissent—not without anxiety, to be sure, but with better grace and understanding than would have been the case in any other war of the 20th century.

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It is by no means certain that the relatively healthy atmosphere in which the debate is now taking place will not give way to a new era of McCarthyism. The longer the Vietnamese war goes on without prospect of victory or negotiated peace, the higher the war fever will rise. Past experience provides little basis for confidence that reason can prevail in such an atmosphere. In a contest between a hawk and a dove the hawk has a great advantage, not because it is a better bird but because it is a bigger bird with lethal talons and a highly developed will to use them.

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POLICY CHAMPION, POLICY CHALLENGER—Senator Fulbright is greeted by President Johnson at a White House reception for Congressional leaders.

Without illusions as to the prospect of success, we must try nonetheless to bring reason and restraint into the emotionally charged atmosphere in which the Vietnamese war is now being discussed. Instead of trading epithets about the legitimacy of debate, we would do well to focus on the issue itself, recognizing that all of us make mistakes and that mistakes can be corrected only if they are acknowledged and discussed, and recognizing further that war is not its own justification, that it can and must be discussed unless we are prepared to sacrifice our traditional democratic processes to a false image of national unanimity.

In fact, the protesters against the Vietnamese war are in good historical company. On Jan. 12, 1848, Abraham Lincoln rose in the United States House of Representatives and made a speech about the Mexican War worthy of Senator Morse. Lincoln's speech was an explanation of a vote he had recently cast in support of a resolution declaring that the war had been unnecessarily and unconstitutionally begun by President Polk. "I admit," he said, "that such a vote should not be given in mere party wantonness, and that the one given is justly censurable if it had no other, or better, foundation. I am one of those who joined in that vote, and I did so under my best impression of the *truth* of the case."

That is exactly what the students and professors and politicians who oppose the Vietnamese war have been doing: they have been acting on their "best impression of the *truth* of the case." Some of our superpatriots assume that any war the United States fights is a just war, if not indeed a holy crusade, but history does not sustain their view. No reputable historian would deny that the United States has fought some wars which were unjust, unnecessary or both—I would suggest the War of 1812, the Civil War and the Spanish-American War as examples. In a historical frame of reference it seems to me logical and proper to question the wisdom of our present military involvement in Asia.

Protesters against the Vietnamese war have been held up to scorn on the ground that they wish to "select their wars," by which it is apparently meant that it is hypocritical to object to this particular war while not objecting to war in general. I fail to understand what is reprehensible about trying to make moral distinctions between one war and another—between, for example, resistance to Hitler and intervention in Vietnam. From the time of Grotius to the drafting of the United Nations Charter, international lawyers have tried to distinguish between "just wars" and "unjust wars." It is a difficult problem of law and an even more difficult problem of morality, but it is certainly a valid problem.

Under the American Constitution, the Congress—especially the Senate—has a particular responsibility in coping with such problems, yet in recent years the Congress has not fully discharged its obligations in the field of foreign relations. The reduced role of the Congress and the enhanced role of the President in the making

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foreign policy are not the result merely of President Johnson's ideas of consensus; [illegible] tion of a trend in the constitutional relationship between President and Congress that began in 1940—that is to say, at the beginning of this age of crisis.

The cause of the change is crisis itself. The President has the authority and resources to make decisions and take actions in an emergency; the Congress does not. Nor, in my opinion, should it; the proper responsibilities of the Congress are to reflect and review, to advise and criticize, to consent and to withhold consent.

In the past 25 years, American foreign policy has encountered a shattering series of crises and inevitably—or almost inevitably—the effort to cope with these has been executive effort, while the Congress, inspired by patriotism, importuned by Presidents and deterred by lack of information, has tended to fall in line. The result has been an unhinging of traditional constitutional relationships; the Senate's constitutional powers of advice and consent have atrophied into what is widely regarded—though never asserted—to be a duty to give prompt consent with a minimum of advice.

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Two examples will illustrate the extent to which this trend has gone. On the afternoon of April 28, 1965, the leaders of Congress were called to an emergency meeting at the White House. We were told that the revolution that had broken out four days before in the Dominican Republic had got completely out of hand, that Americans and other foreigners on the scene were in great danger, and that American marines would be landed in Santo Domingo that night for the sole purpose of protecting the lives of Americans and other foreigners. None of the Congressional leaders expressed disapproval.

Four months later, after an exhaustive review of the Dominican crisis by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, it was clear beyond reasonable doubt that, while saving American lives may have been a factor in the decision to intervene on April 28, the major reason had been a determination on the part of the United States Government to defeat the rebel, or constitutionalist, forces whose victory at that time was imminent. Had I known in April what I knew in August, I most certainly would have objected to the American intervention in the Dominican Republic.

Almost nine months before the Dominican intervention, on Aug. 5, 1964, the Congress received an urgent request from President Johnson for the immediate adoption of a joint resolution regarding Southeast Asia. On Aug. 7, after perfunctory committee hearings and a brief debate, the Congress, with only two Senators dissenting, adopted the resolution, authorizing the President "to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force," against aggression in Southeast Asia.

The joint resolution was a blank check signed by the Congress in an atmosphere of urgency that seemed at the time to preclude debate. Since its adoption, the Administration has converted the Vietnamese conflict from a civil war in which some American advisers were involved to a major international war in which the principal fighting unit is an American army of 250,000 men. Each time that Senators have raised questions about successive escalations of the war, we have had the blank check of Aug. 7, 1964, waved in our faces as supposed evidence of the overwhelming support of the Congress for a policy in Southeast Asia which, in fact, has been radically changed since the summer of 1964.

All this is very frustrating to some of us in the Senate, but we have only ourselves to blame. Had we met our responsibility of careful examination of a Presidential request, had the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held hearings on the resolution before recommending its adoption, had the Senate debated the resolution and considered its implications before giving its overwhelming approval, we might have put limits and qualifications on our endorsement of future uses of force in Southeast Asia—if not in the resolution itself, then in the legislative history preceding its adoption. As it was, only Senators Morse and Gruening debated the resolution.

I myself, as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, served as floor manager of the Southeast Asia resolution and did all I could to bring about its prompt and overwhelming adoption. I did so because I was confident that President Johnson would use our endorsement with wisdom and restraint. I was also influenced by partisanship: an election campaign was in progress and I had no wish to make any difficulties for the President in his race against a Republican candidate whose election I thought would be a disaster for the country. My role in the adoption of the resolution of Aug. 7, 1964, is a source of neither pleasure nor pride to me today—although I do not regret the outcome of the election.

The problem, then, is to find ways by which the Senate and individual Senators can discharge their constitutional *duties* of advice and consent in an age in which the direction and philosophy of foreign policy are largely shaped by urgent decisions made at moments of crisis.

The Senate as a whole, I think, should undertake to revive and strengthen its deliberative function. Acting on the premise that dissent is not disloyalty, that a true consensus is shaped by airing our differences rather than suppressing them, the Senate should again become, as it used to be, an institution in which the great issues of American politics are contested with thoroughness, energy and candor.

In recent months, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations has engaged in an experiment in public education. The committee has made itself available as a forum for the meeting of politicians and professors and, more broadly, as a forum through which recognized experts and scholars could help increase Congressional and public understanding of the problems associated with our involvement in Vietnam and our relations with Communist China. It is my hope that this experiment will not only contribute to public education but will help to restore the Senate to its proper role as adviser to the President on the great issues of foreign policy.

I believe that the public hearings on Vietnam, by bringing before the American people a variety of opinions and disagreements pertaining to the war, and perhaps by helping to restore a degree of balance between the executive and the Congress, have done far more to strengthen the country than to weaken it. The hearings have been criticized on the ground that they conveyed an "image" of the United States as divided over the war. Since the country obviously *is* divided, what was conveyed was a fact rather than an image. As I have already indicated, I see no merit in the view that we should maintain an image of unity even though it is a false image, maintained at the cost of suppressing the normal procedures of democracy.

In coming months, and perhaps years, the Foreign Relations Committee contemplates additional proceedings pertaining to major questions of American foreign policy. It is our expectation that these proceedings may generate controversy. If they do, it will not be because we value controversy for its own sake, but rather because we accept it as a condition of intelligent decision-making, as, indeed, the crucible in which a national consensus as to objectives may be translated into a consensus of policy as well.

An individual Senator, attempting to make a useful contribution to the country's foreign relations, faces some special problems. A Senator who wishes to influence foreign policy must consider the probable results of communicating privately with the Executive or, alternatively, of speaking out publicly. I do not see any

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great principle involved here; it is a matter of how one can better achieve what one hopes to achieve. For my own part, I have used both methods, with results varying according to circumstance. Other things being equal—which they seldom are—I find it more agreeable to communicate privately with Democratic Presidents and publicly with Republican Presidents.

Since 1961, when the Democrats came back to power, I have made recommendations to the President on a number of occasions through confidential memorandums. In April, 1965, I sent President Johnson a note containing certain recommendations on the war in Vietnam, recommendations which I reiterated thereafter in private conversations with high Administration officials. When it became very clear that the Administration did not find my ideas persuasive, I began to make my views known publicly in the hope, if not of bringing about a change in Administration policy, then at least of opening up a debate on that policy.

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It is difficult to measure the effectiveness of a public statement by a Senator—a speech, say—because its effect may be something *not* done rather than some specific action or change of policy by the executive. Generally speaking, it seems to me that a Senator's criticism is less likely to affect the case in point than it is to affect some similar case in the future. I am inclined to believe, for example, that my Senate speech of Sept. 15, 1965, may have been a factor in the Administration's subsequent support of the Garcia-Godoy Government in its resistance to pressures by the Dominican military. Its more significant results will be shown in the reaction of the United States Government if it is again confronted with a violent revolution in Latin America. As to my criticisms—and those of my colleagues—regarding the Vietnamese war, their effect remains to be seen.

Before considering how he will try to influence events, a politician must decide which events he proposes to influence and which he will leave largely to the determination of others. The Senate consists of 100 individuals with 50 separate constituencies and widely varying fields of individual knowledge and interest. There is little that a Senator can accomplish by his own efforts; if he is to have an effect on public policy, he must influence his colleagues.

SOMETIMES, but not often, a colleague's support can be won by charm; it can certainly be lost by rudeness. Occasionally it can be won by persuasive rhetoric; more often it is got by trading your support on one issue for his on another, or simply by a general practice of limiting your own initiative to matters of unusual interest or importance while otherwise accepting the recommendations of the committees. And, in some instances, a Senator may influence his colleagues by influencing their constituencies.

Some may regard this process of mutual accommodation as unethical. I do not regard it so, because I do not place my own wishes and judgments on a plane above those of my colleagues. There are no areas of public policy in which I am absolutely sure of the correctness of my opinions, but there are some in which I am reasonably confident of my judgment. It is in these areas that I try to make a contribution. There are other areas in which my knowledge is limited, and in these I prefer to let others take the lead. There are still other areas in which I am proscribed from leadership or initiative by the strong preferences of my constituency.

A politician has no right to ask that he be absolved from public judgment; he may hope, however, that he will be judged principally on the basis of his performance in the areas of his principal effort. He may hope that he will be judged not as a saint or a paragon, but as a human being entrusted by his constituents with extraordinary responsibilities, while endowed by the Lord with the same problems of judgment and temptation that afflict the rest of the human race.

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