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## REFLECTIONS ON VIETNAM

Mr. KENNEDY of Massachusetts, Mr. President, in a recent edition of the New Yorker magazine, an article appeared by Mr. Richard Goodwin on the war in Vietnam. I commend this article to my colleagues, for I found it to be a clear and precise description of the situation, its history, and the policy demands that we now face.

Mr. Goodwin speaks from a broad background of experience as Special Assistant on Foreign Affairs during both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. He collaborated with both Presidents on speeches which pointed to new directions in foreign policy and was one of the original innovators of such outstanding programs as the Alliance for Progress. Mr. Goodwin is now serving as a research fellow at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn. He has had an outstanding career as a lawyer and served as law clerk for Justice Frankfurter.

I ask unanimous consent that this article be included in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the article was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

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It must have seemed to the commander who made the choice that Operation White Wing had a faintly lyrical sound, suited to the An Lao Valley, where battle was to be found and fought. Dark-green jungle flows over gentle hills toward flat, still swamps, bursting with rice and separated by the trailing wisps of jungle growth that spring up wherever the hand of man pauses to rest. The River slices south through the center of the valley until, north of Bong Son, it turns east toward the South China Sea. The river was muddy—as it always is at the end of January, when the rains are heavy—perhaps reminding Pfc. James Ricks and Harry Morse of the upper waters of the Potomac, which divides their native States of Maryland and Virginia. It was about as wide, and there were rapids. But there was nothing at home like the soaking heat that crowded their lungs, or the violent nighttime fury that tore about the bunker where they waited for dawn. The two friends had come with the 18th Infantry to help clear An Lao of thousands of Vietcong guerrillas who made their home in the bountiful valley.

Eleven thousand miles away, where the Potomac broadens, Senators and spectators walked into room 4221 of the New Senate Office Building. J. WILLIAM FULBRIGHT, Senator from Arkansas, foe of civil rights, almost Secretary of State, Rhodes scholar, and backwoods politician, hero to some and dem-

agog to others, sat in the center chair behind the raised, arched desk that stretched across the entire front of the rectangular hearing room. The marble margins of the floor touched light wood-paneled walls in an unsuccessful blending of political-traditional and Washington modern. In front of Senator FULBRIGHT were officials and clerks bent over tables piled with papers and documents—the vital substance of government—while about 60 spectators filled rows of harsh straight chairs behind them. On either side of FULBRIGHT were the other members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. Among them was Senator BOURKE HICKENLOOPER, of Iowa, tough, narrow, conservative, and, on this day, guardian of the political interests of the Republican Party. Senators FRANK CHURCH, of Idaho, and CLAIBORNE FELL, of Rhode Island, were clearly marked by youth and intelligence, as members of the Kennedy generation of Democrats. There was STUART SYMINGTON, of Missouri, appointed presidential hopeful, blending absolute integrity with lifelong sympathy for the aims and outlook of the military. Finally, most vocal in opposition was WAYNE MORSE, cattle breeder, Oregon Republican-turned-Democrat, who had broken all the rules of the "club" and transgressed the tenets of polite political discourse, thus earning the disdain of official Washington, yet still commanding deference as chairman of a powerful Senate subcommittee, and whose stern, shrill, sometimes exasperatingly self-righteous independence had carried further across the country than Washington believed. Most of the 19 members were there. The subject was that confused and violent conflict which in the last year had become the center of American concern, expectation, and fear—the war in Vietnam.

Over the chairman's head was the great seal of the United States, the engine grouping the olive branch of peace and the arrows of war—a sculptured omen of the day. Facing him, in a large red-padded chair, sat the first witness—Dean Rusk, for 5 years Secretary of State of the United States, selected after President-elect Kennedy had reluctantly turned away from FULBRIGHT himself, and the principal advocate of a militant pursuit of the war.

At 9:05 a.m. of Friday, January 28, the Vietnam debate began. Its subject: the history, the wisdom, and the future of American action and policy. Whatever the result, however, discussion might alter the course of events, it would not make any difference to James Ricks, of Cortland, Va., or Harry Morse, of Pasadena, Md. Twenty minutes before, while the first curious arrivals were claiming the scarce seats, a grenade flung anonymously through the jungle-fed night had exploded in their bunker. They were dead—2 more of the almost 400,000 people—yellow, white, and black, who had been killed in the strangest and most complicated war in American history.

Before the month of debate was over, it had moved from the small hearing room into the television-dominated homes of millions of Americans, had caused one of the most respected executives in television, Fred Friendly, to quit in fury because his superiors at CBS refused to show the most important national discussion of all, and had made national celebrities out of a soft-spoken general-turned-businessman named James Gavin and a career-diplomat-turned-scholar named George Kennan. With the echoes of the final Friday hearing still fading, the debate touched the upper reaches of American politics. On the morning of Saturday, February 19, Senator ROBERT KENNEDY discussed the possible outlines of a settlement. He was supported by Gen. Maxwell Taylor, Presidential consultant on the war and intellectual leader of the generals, while he was attacked by other officials, some of whom had privately urged the same position they now

publicly assaulted. For a moment, a major political skirmish seemed possible, but the President himself refused to attack the Kennedy proposal. He was clearly determined to close no door that might lead to peace and to open no wounds that might further increase domestic division. Then, the debate having run its course in Washington, it moved into the outer arena of national discussion and the inner secret councils of the administration, where it will continue as long as the war itself.

There is something oddly insubstantial about the thousands of pages of hearings, speeches, press conferences, and television interviews—the immense stream of argument, discussion, and declamation. The pages are filled with rhetoric designed to arouse old emotions rather than stir new thoughts; with grand simplicities and sweeping clichés that ignore and blanket the cruel particulars of conflict; and with history that is neither relevant nor, in many cases, true. Men become advocates rather than analysts, seeking to prove every point and answer every argument, even though they must distort or accuse in order to do so. Some must rewrite the events of the past in order to offer a better defense of their own past acts and judgments. Meanwhile, sensed by all but the scholars is the silent and unseen weight of the American electorate, whose ultimate judgment has never been so unclear in any other time of war, and whose decision will shape the personal futures of those who contest before the gaze of the Nation. Each one who speaks is also aware that he speaks across the city to the single man who has the power to gather up all the threads of possibility and belief and weave them into the fabric of decision. Senator ALBERT GORE said of the President, "We are seeking to reach him by way of the people." Yet each also hoped to reach him by way of the television screen or the morning newspaper.

Much of Vietnam is covered with what experts call "three-canopied jungle." Three layers of somber, unrelieved green, block the sun from the earth, which even at noon is often night-dark. The debate that swirls about this jungle country is also triple-layered, and the tangled lines of argument often obscure the light.

Rising above the other debates is the debate over grand strategy, conducted in the fascinating, elusive abstractions of geopolitics: Does America have a vital stake in Asia, and, more specifically, in Vietnam itself?

Next is the debate over the past: What kind of war is it, and how did we become so deeply involved in it?

Closest to the ground of action and decision is the third Vietnam debate: What is our present policy, and what should it be?

In its crudest and simplest form, the first of the three clashes of conviction questions whether the United States would be seriously injured if much of Asia were to be dominated by a hostile power—at this moment in history, by China. For at least a quarter of a century, every American government has believed the answer to be "Yes." On November 26, 1941, Secretary of State Cordell Hull handed a series of proposed agreements to the Japanese Ambassador in Washington. Japan and the United States would agree that neither would violate "the territorial integrity and sovereignty" of any country in Asia. Both nations would pledge to seek a broad agreement by many powers, including Great Britain, China, and the Netherlands, "to respect the territorial integrity of French Indochina [including Vietnam]," and, if that integrity was menaced, to consult "with a view to taking such measures as may be deemed necessary and advisable to meet such threat." (A similar agreement, by many of the same powers, was to become the central guarantee of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, 14 years later.) Japan, how-

ever, had already determined upon the conquest of Indochina, and 11 days later, attacked the only remaining power both committed and able to bar the way. Since the end of the war that followed, every American President has sent armed forces to Asia: Truman in Korea, Eisenhower at Quemoy and Matsu, Kennedy briefly at the Thai-Laotian border and in Vietnam, Johnson in Vietnam. Deeply rooted in modern experience, asserted in two major wars, the American interest in Asia, and now in Indochina, nevertheless requires evaluation by the light of shifting realities. Although the American stake in Asia is not a new one, is it real?

During several years I spent in Washington—at the State Department and as an assistant to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson—few intellectual tasks were more frustrating than the occasional effort to answer the great, the ultimate questions of foreign policy: Why should we try to contain China? Why should we help the underdeveloped nations? What is the urgency of preventing nuclear spread? Such questions, in fact, are ordinarily raised in argument with critics but rarely in the councils of decision. It is precisely because there is no sure and irresistible logic by which such questions can be answered that discussion often dissolves into empty generalities and false scholarship. "Nations must learn to leave their neighbors alone." (Cf. the intervention in the Dominican Republic.) We cannot remain "an oasis of wealth in a worldwide sea of misery." (We have always been one and will be one for a very long time.) "The appetite of aggression is never satisfied." (Cf. the independence of the Philippines, Mexico, and Canada.) Such failures of analysis reflect not our own inadequacies so much as what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., calls "the inscrutability of history." To justify a course of policy in its largest dimension is to predict what will happen if that course is not taken, to prophesy the unknowable turns of history. All that any leader can do is call upon wisdom, judgment, and national principle, a sense of history and a knowledge of present reality, and act on the speculative and intuitive guess that results. This enormous limitation is reflected in Albert Einstein's famous reply when he was asked why the politicians could not catch up with the creations of science—he said that "politics is much harder than physics"—and George Kennan's testimony that "the most important thing a government such as ours can have, as it faces the long-term future of international relations, is right principles rather than the gift of prophecy." The huge and inescapable uncertainties of this process impose on any sensible statesman an essential skepticism, from which flow at least two guiding rules for the conduct of international affairs: to decide as little, in places of danger, as present urgencies require, leaving room for change if events contradict judgment, and to take as few risks as action requires, refusing to hazard enormous consequences on speculation. The most frequent flaw in the Vietnam debate, running through the arguments on all sides, is the recurrent claim that the unknowable can be stated with certainty.

Even with this caution, judgment leans heavily toward protecting Asia from domination or conquest by a hostile power. There is the almost idealistic, compelling conviction that the one nation with the power to prevent it should not stand aside while nations unwillingly submit to foreign domination. To do so would undermine the central world purpose of the United States—the creation of an international order of independent states. Moreover, the impact of a large-scale Chinese expansion would probably radiate across the world, reshaping the politics of the weak and uncertain societies of Africa and Latin America, perhaps further eroding the ties among our Western allies, forcing the

Soviet Union toward increased militance in the competition for leadership of the Communist world. More ominous still would be the likely effect on our own society. As the fall of China itself contributed to McCarthyism, a large expansion of China, soon to hold major North American cities hostage to its nuclear power, thus increasing its willingness to risk conflict on the ground, would inevitably feed the dark undercurrent of repression and militarism never wholly absent from American life.

Our vital concern in Asia cannot be denied by allocating that continent to the abstraction of a Chinese "sphere of influence," if by influence we mean domination or the right to direct policies by coercion. Geography is still important, as the Soviet Union learned in Cuba, and as we rediscovered in Hungary. Yet we are as close to Asia, in terms of swift and effective action, as we were to Europe in the Second World War. We are a Pacific nation, and since the end of the Second World War we have been the only Pacific power of real consequence. Moreover, nations have no natural or God-given right to dominate those close to them.

If they had, the border states of Afghanistan and Iran would be under Soviet rule; Cuba would be in the hands of a friendly president or, more likely, an American trained general; Argentina would never have dared admire and assist the Nazis. The sphere of influence of a great nation extends just as far as its power and ambition go unchecked by its own limitations and by the strength and the interests of others. Its "sphere of influence," as domination, rests on the weakness of those in its path, not on the laws of geography or history. China must always weigh heavily in the calculations of Asian states, but as long as our power stands in the way, there need be no vast and inevitable sphere of influence, although it is hoped that there will one day be fruitful relations of commerce and friendship. Nor can we stand aside in the certainty that, as in Eastern Europe, the spread of Communist influence will be blunted by "polycentrism"—a host of Titos, or even Gomulkas. The underdeveloped societies of Asia lack the structures—the middle class, an educated population, even national traditions—that lend strength to the self-assertions of the countries of Europe. The Asian societies are thin at the top, unstable, and far more vulnerable to control by small well-organized groups assisted from other countries. Nationalist communism may come to Asia, but the experience of Eastern Europe is no guarantee. We do not know whether China will try to expand, or whether it can. It is hard enough to judge the intentions, ambitions, and capacities of our own leaders. How can we hope to penetrate the thoughts of aging leaders whose experience, culture, and convictions are so remote? This does not mean, however, that we should not be prepared to resist expansion if it comes. Yet, even if we accept this basic judgment, we are not compelled to fight for every inch of Asian soil or hazard war each time Chinese influence begins to grow. We stood by while China crushed Tibet, for we lacked both the resources and any compelling reasons to oppose Chinese armies in such a remote and difficult place. Our Government was fully resigned to the potential domination of Indonesia by a Communist Party close to Peking, since armed invasion seemed the only way to prevent it. Nor are American armies likely to rush to the defense of Siberia if Chinese forces move into that vast and tempting area. It is, on the other hand, inconceivable that aggression against India would not be met with—if necessary—the full force of American power. The question always is where, and under what circumstances, we should commit military force to the protection of Asian nations. Is Vietnam such a place?

Not very many years ago, the answer seemed clear. South Vietnam, a tiny patch of poverty-stricken jungle, populated mostly by simple farmers concerned only with the daily struggle for survival, was not important to our security. President Eisenhower, despite urgent French pleas, refused to intervene in 1954 even if all of Vietnam should fall, declaring himself to be "convinced that the French could not win the war." Had the Communists succeeded in taking over the entire country, as they almost did, no sensible American would now be demanding that we go to war to recapture South Vietnam. It would be another name on the list of half-forgotten lost lands. Today, however, events have overtaken that possibility. American power and wealth are committed to Vietnam on an immense scale. We will soon, in all probability, have half a million men in South Vietnam. Helicopters, air support, and modern firearms give our troops there four or five times the striking power of their Second World War counterparts. We have already dropped the rough equivalent of a ton of bombs for every Vietcong soldier. Our financial assistance since 1954 amounts to over three billion dollars, or more than two hundred dollars for every person in South Vietnam. The records are filled with dozens of statements asserting our determination to use force to halt armed aggression. For the United States, after so overwhelming a commitment, to permit a rapid Communist takeover by withdrawal, or, in the President's words, "under the cloak of a meaningless agreement," would damage the confidence of all Asian nations, and of many other nations, in the willingness and the ability of the United States to protect them against attack. Unpleasant and undesirable as it may be for Americans and Asians both, we are the only power strong enough to offer such protection. On the very day that India and China clashed on their border, representatives of India were in Washington to seek assurances of help. They had nowhere else to go. Had we chosen not to intervene in Vietnam, the credibility of our military power would perhaps not be at stake. But those decisions were made. Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia foresaw the way in which increasing American intervention would raise the stakes, telling an interviewer in July, 1965, "It is certain that if the United States provokes a major confrontation in this region—which will inevitably end in [its] humiliating retreat—all the other Asian nations, one after another (beginning with the Allies of the United States), will come to know, if not domination, at least a very strong Communist influence." The battle, therefore, has come to transcend the issue of Vietnam itself, making withdrawal intolerable until we achieve a resolution that does not involve American defeat.

Since there exists such a compelling case, resting, as Dean Rusk testified, "upon policy and strategic and geopolitical considerations that are of the utmost importance," it is baffling to find many supporters of the war offering justifications for our presence which have little foundation in history, reason, law, or the course of events. Perhaps it is simply proof of the saying that in war truth is the first casualty. Most startling of all is the recent claim that the United States has a formal and binding commitment to use its armies to defend Vietnam—a commitment resting on the southeast Asia Treaty, or, alternatively, on presidential statements over more than a decade. Secretary Rusk himself testified, "It is this fundamental SEATO obligation that has from the outset guided our actions in Vietnam." The language of the treaty itself is imprecise. In case of "armed attack" we agreed only "to meet the common danger in accordance with [our] constitutional processes." No nation is specifically required to go to war, although it is true that a skilled lawyer could inter-

pret the language as a commitment or as an excuse for inaction, depending upon his instructions. The conclusive fact, however, is that neither our fellow-signers, including France and Britain, nor John Foster Dulles, who drew up the treaty, nor any American President has believed or been advised that those words required us to send fighting men to Vietnam. Under close questioning by Senator HICKENLOOPER, who was eager to refute the slightest insinuation that this was "Ike's war," General Taylor admitted, "No, sir. Very clearly we made no such commitment. We didn't want such a commitment. This was the last thing we had in mind. \* \* \* Insofar as the use of our combat ground forces are concerned, that [commitment] took place, of course, only in the spring of 1965." One can search the many statements of Presidents and diplomats in vain for any mention of the SEATO Treaty. Time after time, President Johnson set forth the reasons for our presence in Vietnam, but he never spoke of the requirements of the treaty, nor did anyone at the State Department suggest that he should, even though they surely reviewed every draft statement. The treaty argument is, in truth, something a clever advocate conceived a few months ago.

The claim of a SEATO commitment is often buttressed by quotations from the American Presidents concerned—Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson—used to attribute to them the pledge that, in President Kennedy's words, the Communists shall not win "for lack of any support which the United States might render." But for every statement of this kind there is another, such as the one in the Kennedy interview of September 1963, cautiously warning that "we can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it—the people of Vietnam." President Johnson repeated many times the same careful limitation on American involvement. It is unfortunate that the demands of the modern Presidency require such an enormous, unending flood of words and speeches, inevitably resulting in imprecise and ambiguous language. The meaning rests not on a word-by-word analysis of an old text but on the common assumptions and realities of their setting. No President committed American combat troops to Vietnam before they actually went. No President believed he had made such a commitment. No one ever thought he had. No adviser in the highest councils ever urged action on the basis of the SEATO Treaty or of any other pledge; none, as far as I know, ever mentioned the existence of such a pledge. And, in fact, there was no such commitment. Combat troops were sent because our national interest, in the judgment of our leaders, required their presence, and for no other reason.

Efforts to justify our presence in Vietnam by elevating it to the grand scale of a decisive "testing ground for the war of liberation," of "another Munich," or of the beginning of a fall of "dominoes" are equally unnecessary and also defective. In large part, the struggle in Vietnam is indeed a war of internal aggression—what Soviet and Chinese leaders call a "war of liberation." It certainly is not the decisive one. Win or lose, we will face similar challenges, just as our success in Greece and Turkey was followed, much later, by Soviet intervention in Cuba. Invasion in Korea was halted, and Quemoy and Matsu were bombarded. Firmness in the Formosa Strait did not halt efforts at subversion in places as remote as the Congo and the Central African Republic. Fighting in Malaya and the Philippines and on the Indian border came to an end, but fighting continues in Vietnam. This war is another episode—a particularly dangerous and bloody one—in a long, continuing conflict. Gen-

eral Taylor has already informed us that "they are beginning in Thailand." Nor is this the Asian equivalent of the decision at Munich. There the Allies yielded to a nation with a timetable for the armed conquest of Europe. Moreover, it is unlikely in the extreme that a firm stand at Munich would have long halted a madman armed with the best military machine in Europe. It might have changed the terms and timing of war but not war itself. Had the time the Allies bought been used to prepare, Munich might be now considered an act of statesmanship. Our refusal to yield in Vietnam stands on its own merits, not on those of a distant and indistinct analogy. Nor would the simple fact of Communist rule set a row of dominoes falling. In 1949, the biggest domino of all, China, fell, and others did not follow. It is the fact of American defeat, the demonstration of American futility, rather than the presence of a Communist government in Vietnam, that would shake uncertain governments in Asia.

The American war in Vietnam flows not from formal commitment or historical theory but from the history of this cruel and confused conflict. The effort to rewrite that history only bewilders the supporters and strengthens the opponents of government policy in Vietnam, carrying the debate into irrelevant dead ends of discussion and contradiction.

The Vietnamese war is 20 years old. It began while Chiang Kai-shek still ruled China and the French owned Indochina. On September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh issued the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence: "All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." On the evening of December 19, the next year, city streets all over Vietnam were instantly cloaked in night by a coordinated attack on power stations across the country. The war had begun. It was first ignored, then shared, by the United States, which gave more than a billion dollars of aid to the beleaguered French. Early in 1954, John Foster Dulles announced that the new French military policy was designed to "break the organized body of Communist aggression by the end of the 1955 fighting season." But in May 1954, before that fighting season came, the great powers assembled at Geneva to work out the terms of a French defeat. The Geneva Conference granted Vietnam independence, prohibited it from forming military alliances or accommodating foreign bases, guaranteed it democratic freedoms, and divided the country into North and South until national elections could be held in 1956, making it clear that the partition was "provisional" and "should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary."

At this point, accounts and histories, claims and charges trail off into uncertainty and illusion. The course and nature of the "second" Vietnamese war are cloaked in ignorance, obscured by the diverging views of historians, buried in the archives of Hanoi, Peking, the State Department, and the Quai d'Orsay, interred with the bodies of Diem and his brother.

We do know, however, that the new, semi-official narrative of straightforward Communist duplicity and aggression does not tell the whole story. According to Secretary Rusk, the Communists violated the Geneva agreement at the very beginning by leaving a hard core of agents in the south. Yet, the International Control Commission, including friendly and responsive Canada, found in 1955 that "the provisions of \* \* \* a military or semimilitary nature have on the whole been carried out." It is true that some agents were left. Most of the 5,000 guerrillas still to be found in South Vietnam were

South Vietnamese who had gone home, as they were entitled to do. Then, we are told, during the next 5 years, Hanoi "developed a secret political-military organization in the south," conducted a campaign of terror and assassination, and, like a "typical police state," refused to let the national elections scheduled for 1956 be held. This refusal is surely the greatest political self-denial in history, since President Eisenhower has estimated that "possibly 80 percent of the population [of all Vietnam] would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh." In the late 50's, the new narrative goes on, North Vietnam began to infiltrate the south with "disciplined adherents whom the party had ordered north at the time of the settlement," and directed them to "form cadres around which guerrilla units could be built." Finally, in 1960, Hanoi created the National Liberation Front, to serve as a "political facade" for the conquest of a people enjoying "substantial progress" under Diem. Infiltration increased. The Army of North Vietnam joined the battle. And, here we are.

The whole of this careful structure, faintly reminiscent of an entry in the Soviet Encyclopedia concerning the American contribution to the Second World War, is designed to prove that the struggle in Vietnam is solely "a systematic aggression by Hanoi against the people of South Vietnam." Some of this account is accurate and some of it is distorted. More often events are described with a certainty and simplicity that do not exist. On February 3, Vice President HUBERT HUMPHREY was more candid about the complexities, telling a New York audience, "Some of these revolutionaries are from the south. Some are from the north. Some are irregulars. Some are regular North Vietnamese soldiers. Some of their supply and direction comes from the south. Some of it comes from Hanoi. Some of it comes from Peking." The President said, more compactly, "Some of the people of South Vietnam are participating in attack on their own government." The reality is that there is aggression and there is also civil war. Some of the revolutionaries are Communists and some are not. Some wish to associate with China and others are passionate nationalists.

From 1954 until 1956, North Vietnam for the most part bided its time, expecting that South Vietnam would soon be under its control. When the time came for the elections required by the treaty, President Diem, with encouragement from the United States, refused to hold them—because he rightly feared defeat—and began a rigorously severe repression against his political enemies, including the small number of Communists who, along with other dissidents, were seeking a foothold in the countryside. Spurred by this repression, by the desire to overthrow Diem, by the failure to hold elections, and by a small but growing amount of help from the north, the revolutionaries organized. They began to terrorize the peasants, propagandize the villages, and even carry out a few small measures of reform. Nor did Diem improve relations by creating, in 1958, a Committee for the Liberation of North Vietnam, which parachuted agents into northern areas of discontent, or by refusing to trade badly needed rice. Finally, in 1960, Hanoi called for a National Liberation Front to lead the growing struggle in the south—an organization whose "nominal leader," according to Vice President HUMPHREY, "is not known as a Communist"—which is clearly responsive to Hanoi but whose exact relationship, puppet or partly independent, is certainly unknown and probably mixed.

By 1960, 15 village chiefs a week were being killed by revolutionaries. Infiltration from the north was on the rise. Today, as the President has said, the support and direction from the north are "the heartbeat of the war." But the war never was, and is not now, only a war of north against south.

Secretary McNamara carefully explained in 1964 that even though northern support and direction are "a critical factor \* \* \* the large indigenous support that the Vietcong receives means that solutions must be as political and economic as military," and he added, "Indeed, there can be no such thing as a purely 'military' solution." This appraisal is strengthened by the Defense Department estimate that of a total of about 330,000 Vietcong, dead and alive, only 63,000 have been infiltrators. More than a quarter million have been recruited from among the people who live in the south. Our enemies are not only ruthless aggressors and assassins but also men like Do Luc, whose diary, found on his body, contains the lines "Leaving temporarily the beloved north to return to my native south to liberate my compatriots from the yoke of misery imposed by My-Diem [U.S. Diem]. \* \* \* Now my life is full of hardship, not enough rice to eat, not enough salt to give a taste to my tongue, not enough clothing to keep myself warm. But in my heart I keep loyal to the party and to the people. I am proud and happy."

Neither the country nor the President is served by a reduction of the confused and blending tones of history to sharp blacks and whites. President Johnson, with clearer insight, has spoken of "the confused nature of this conflict." It is enough to know, without seeking a consistent and deliberate plot stretching over a dozen years, that there is aggression—in Johnson's words, "an attack by one country on another." Yet at the same time there is also civil war, discontent, unfulfilled aspirations, and violent passions among the people of the south. Any effort at a political solution must take shape from that reality as well, if it is to be accepted or if, once accepted, it is to endure.

Just as our immense and dangerous involvement in this confused conflict does not rest on formal commitment or on resistance to "simple aggression," it did not emerge from a clear and consistent policy, based on a clear consciousness, at every step, of the implications, dangers, and possibilities of the future. As in many great national enterprises, each individual decision seemed reasonable, carefully limited, even necessary. We looked cautiously ahead while the door closed slowly, ponderously behind us.

More important than any other single factor was the hopeful expectation, the wish, deeply grounded in the American character, that victory might come easily and with little pain. In 1954, Eisenhower wrote a letter offering to "examine" a program of aid if needed reforms were carried out in South Vietnam. The object was to build a stable country that could stand on its own feet—nothing more than we were doing, and still are doing, in dozens of countries. In 1955, a few soldiers crossed the Pacific to help train the South Vietnamese Army to do a better job of protecting its own country; this training mission was similar to the missions we have in other parts of Asia and in many countries of South America. Nevertheless, the United States slowly began to replace the French as the dominant foreign power in a weak, unstable, menaced land. Next, as terror and attack mounted—though still on a small scale—under President Kennedy, the American military presence began to increase. It consisted of advisers, instructed to train, help, counsel, but not to fight. Late in 1961, we suffered our first military casualty. By the end of that year, there were 3,000 American troops in South Vietnam; by the end of the next year, 11,000; by the end of 1963, 16,000.

At every step, it seemed to many that the struggle was almost won. Who, in good conscience, and in the interests of the United States, could refuse the small additional help that did not seem to risk major conflict yet might prevent a Communist takeover? In March 1963, our commander in

Vietnam, Gen. Paul Harkins, assured the Nation, and the President, that the South Vietnamese armed forces "had all that was required for victory." That October, Secretary of Defense McNamara and General Taylor announced that "the major part of the U.S. military task can be completed by the end of 1965." A month later, General Harkins prophesied, even more glowingly, that "victory is \* \* \* just months away." And in the secret meetings of the National Security Council the reports, estimates, and counsel were still more optimistic and assured, although a few advisers were more skeptical. These were the judgments of men of intelligence and force. Robert McNamara is a most brilliant Secretary of Defense and a principal voice of restraint in the administration; Maxwell Taylor is among the most thoughtful and enlightened of generals. The shifting group around the conference table was one of the most luminous ever assembled in government. Why were the estimates so faulty? In part, of course, they were not. The enemy forces were relatively small. The South Vietnamese Army was growing in power and effectiveness. But the reasonable, even brilliant military calculations masked a whole series of erroneous political assumptions. The crucial variables in the equation of victory were not firepower or troops but the will of the Vietcong to fight, the strength and stability of the South Vietnamese Government, the intentions and capacities of North Vietnam. As it turned out, the Vietcong were more determined, and had greater local support, than we thought; the South Vietnamese military was less effective and its Government (soon to be tumbled in a flood of popular discontent) weaker than we thought; North Vietnam was more willing to take risks and better equipped to make war. The estimates were reasoned, but they were based on the wrong evidence or on evidence that was far more uncertain than anyone believed. Added to these critical misjudgments were a certain amount of wishful thinking and, more important, the fact that other problems—Cuba and Berlin and the test-ban treaty—were clamoring for attention. Had we more precisely judged what the future might bring, the same decisions might still have been made, but they would have been made with a clearer awareness of onrushing danger.

In 1964, the process continued assisted and complicated by President Johnson's need to assert his new leadership, map out a program, and prepare for election. We continued to "advise and help," although more of those concerned began to see the dimensions of the approaching crisis. Finally, early in 1965, the President was advised that morale in South Vietnam could be revived only if we bombed military targets in North Vietnam. This would assure Saigon of our determination to stay the course, and perhaps, if we were lucky, would so weaken Hanoi's will to fight that we could avoid the unpleasant, looming need to send in large numbers of combat troops. Thus the most fateful decision of all was made. The war went north. What had been an important but subdued conflict became a major international crisis. In the election of 1964, although Vietnam was occasionally mentioned, not a single complete speech of President Johnson's was devoted to that conflict. (We did not then refer to it as a war.) Opinion polls commissioned by local candidates and the national Democratic Party showed that as few as 4 or 5 percent of the people in many States considered it an issue of major concern; it was ranked distantly behind unemployment, disarmament, and even Cuba. From the day of the bombing, however, Vietnam, rapidly swallowing up all other concerns and dangers, was never to leave the front pages of the world.

By the spring of 1965, it was clear that if American combat troops, in large numbers,

did not enter the war, defeat was not only likely but imminent. "Early in 1965 \* \* \* it was widely felt on both sides \* \* \* that it was only a matter of time before the Communists would win, unless something was done about it," McGeorge Bundy said in February. After the most painful discussion, a commitment of combat troops was made, limited only by developing military needs, and Vietnam became an irrevocably American war.

Flowing from the cruel necessities of the present, informed by awareness of the past, is the third Vietnam debate: the passionate unresolved clash about the future. Thousands of lives are at hazard, and there are rising risks of war with the entire 300,000-man Army of North Vietnam, of a titanic conflict with the legions of China, and even, in ultimate—decisive—holocaust, of armed conflict with the Soviet Union.

President Johnson, guided by the information he receives, confined and influenced by advisers, swayed by opinion, coerced by events, directed by national tradition and principle, nevertheless holds the vital decisions in his hands alone. Alarmed at this enormous power, some people have denied its existence. "This President of ours cannot justify under the Constitution sending a single American boy to \* \* \* South Vietnam without a declaration of war," Senator Morse said at the hearings. "We are involved illegally in this war." A President's power to involve the country in armed conflict—argued and indecisively compromised at the Constitutional Convention—has been resolved by history. President Polk knowingly brought on the Mexican War by ordering American troops into an area disputed with Mexico (although war was later declared). In 1861, Lincoln established an armed blockade of Southern ports when Congress was not yet in session. Theodore Roosevelt openly boasted, "I took Panama." Truman sent troops to Korea, and Eisenhower to Lebanon, without asking Congress. Kennedy approved the Bay of Pigs invasion and commanded the armed blockade of Cuba on his own. Today, the congressional power to declare war is little more than a ratification of events and acts already past. Congress can censure Presidential action, or even cripple it by refusing to vote money or troops. But this is not being done, partly because many Congressmen support the war, partly because others follow the reasoning attributed by Benjamin Thomas to Representative Abraham Lincoln during the Mexican War—that even though he opposed the war, "whenever supply bills were presented, he, like most other Whigs, voted for them rather than risk popular disfavor." Lincoln himself, his political career seemingly devastated by open opposition to the Mexican War, explained to William Herndon, in terms that might appeal to many men now in Congress, "The Locos are untiring in their efforts to make the impression that all who vote supplies \* \* \* do of necessity approve the President's conduct in the beginning of it; but the Whigs from the beginning made and kept the distinction between the two."

It is not possible to convey the full flavor of a meeting of final resolution conducted by Lyndon Johnson. In the early summer of 1966, following several days of discussion, the President and his advisers—Rusk, McNamara, Bundy, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency William Raborn, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Earle Wheeler, Under Secretary of State George Ball, and several Presidential assistants—met to discuss the decision that he intended to announce the next morning. It was already clear that combat troops would be sent to Vietnam. The question was whether the reserves should be summoned, a national emergency declared, and the Nation given a serious war warning. Throughout the debate, the President sat slouched and almost unnoticed in his chair, listening, and ask-

ing questions. As debate trailed off, he sat upright, the massive physical presence suddenly dominating the table. "Gentlemen," he said, "here are the alternatives." He carefully listed five choices, the last being to commit only the troops then needed, without calling the reserves. His tone left little doubt of his own choice. He then went back over the alternatives, pausing after each one to ask, unsmiling, "Does anyone favor that?" As No. 4, the most drastic, met the same silence as the others, he turned and, staring at the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, rose without putting the fifth, and favored, choice, said "Thank you, gentlemen," and left.

During the night, the President personally inserted in his announcement the most advanced peace proposals we had made—free elections, reunification if this should be voted, a cease-fire, and a clear willingness to hear the Vietcong at the conference table—at one stroke overriding long-held objections. Few incidents better dramatized the painful, consistent Presidential desire to prevent defeat while resisting proposals to enlarge the conflict beyond what the present seemed to demand. The wisdom of such a course can be debated, but I do not doubt Lyndon Johnson's desire to end the war. It is killing Americans and threatening the death of many more. It has already reduced resources for education and housing, for conservation and the war against poverty. It is endangering our prosperity. It is, far more than is yet clear, seriously weakening national support for the Democratic Party and the President himself. The depth of this possible disaffection is hinted at by the recent Gallup poll showing that 67 percent of the people would favor a congressional candidate who advocated that we "try harder to reach a compromise peace settlement." (Fifteen percent would oppose such a candidate, 18 percent had no opinion.)

But how can the war be ended? On that issue, the public record reveals, there is a real and danger-filled clash—unresolved, barely articulated, and now in process of decision. Few wish either withdrawal or what the President called mindless escalation, involving an immediate devastation of North Vietnam or an attack on China. These views have no serious prospects, at least for the moment. There are, rather, two middle grounds, presenting different risks, and leading in different directions. On one side are those who believe we should fight a carefully limited war, restricted to combat in South Vietnam and pacification of the countryside; that we should refuse to expand, and perhaps even reduce or halt, the bombing of the north; and that we should aggressively seek a compromise political settlement, with the inevitably uncertain risk that the Communists might ultimately win control of the country. On the other side are those who wish to use all the military power needed, in the north as well as in the south, to bring the Vietcong to their knees and break the will of Hanoi to continue the war—who wish to compel the Communists into an unfavorable political settlement or no settlement at all. "I don't think anybody suggests literally exterminating them," General Taylor testified, "but we would like to have them so beaten that they would be glad to come in and accept an amnesty." Our policy today rests precariously on the first alternative—carefully limited conflict, leading to a fair, if risky, compromise. However, the pressures of circumstances and events are urging us imperceptibly toward the second course, exposing us to the steadily enlarging danger of a course that has no logical and certain end except in measureless rivers of blood.

Our future policy in Vietnam must follow two parallel roads—the road of negotiation and the road of combat. Past miscalculation should have humbled us to the awareness that each specific step may have larger consequences than we can foresee. Each should

be tested against a single standard: Does it serve or injure the bedrock vital interest of the United States? That interest is to establish that American military power, once committed to defend another nation, cannot be driven from the field. It is not to guarantee South Vietnam forever against the possibility of a Communist takeover.

Hanoi's unwillingness to negotiate is one of the great mysteries of the war. At best, negotiation would give them a favorable result; at worst, negotiation would make it almost impossible for the United States—compelled to show good faith at the conference table—to step up the war. In fact, some of the more militant members of the Washington community have expressed fearful apprehension lest our offer be accepted. The answer to the mystery is buried in the unknown calculations of enemy leaders, the internal politics of North Vietnam, the obscure relations among the Vietcong, Hanoi, Peking, and Moscow. Certainly North Vietnam can no longer hope for victory, either by force of arms or by the failure of will. Yet perhaps it does, knowing so little about the strange stubbornness streaked with violence, of the American mind. Recent proofs of instability and division in South Vietnam may add fuel to that hope. Probably the North Vietnamese also suspect that we are asking them to the negotiating table simply to compel their surrender, that nothing we have yet said assures an acceptable compromise, and that if they talk without such assurance it will destroy the morale of the thousands of guerrillas who have undergone years of cruel hardship and danger. Beyond this is Peking, urging, demanding, warning against discussions, establishing its own direct relations with the Vietcong over the head of Hanoi, seemingly delighted to see Americans involved—without cost to China, though not without risk—in a war that helps feed its hope of wresting world Communist leadership from the Soviet Union.

We have had, as we are often reminded, many communications with Hanoi. The critical question, however, is not how many times we have talked but what we have said, not how many notes we have sent but what they have contained. We cannot know this with certainty, but the vagueness of public discussion strengthens a general conviction that the terms of a realistic political settlement have not yet been communicated—a conviction that is further supported by the suggestion of U Thant, expressed in a January interview with a reliable correspondent for the Washington Post, that "as a next step \* \* \* concrete proposals be made on what type of government in South Vietnam, representative, as far as possible, of all the sections of the South Vietnamese people \* \* \* could take over the responsibility of organizing the exercise by the people of the right to decide their own affairs." Clearly, such proposals must answer at least three basic questions. First, who will shape the terms of settlement? Certainly Hanoi cannot come to the table if the Vietcong, who bear the burden of combat, are excluded. Even if it could, to do so would require its admission that the war of liberation in South Vietnam was "simple aggression," that it had consistently lied to the world. Its own very recent claim that the Vietcong are "the sole legitimate representative" of South Vietnam is surely a response to our own assertions that the Vietcong are, in the Vice President's words, but a "stooge," an "agent," of Hanoi. Stripped of pejoratives, however, our current utterances seem to express willingness to talk to the Vietcong. There is, the President said, "no insuperable problem" to having the Vietcong's views represented at a conference. Ambassador Averell Harriman elaborated this when he said that the Vietcong can come either "as part of the North Vietnamese delegation or as an independent group \* \* \* but not as a government." The paper-thin

problem of formal labels is no formidable barrier to those who really want to talk. The second, and most important, of the three questions concerns the makeup of the ultimate Government of Vietnam. We are willing to see "free elections" in which the Communists can organize, can campaign, and perhaps can win a voice in government. If this happens—and the popular support of the Vietcong makes it likely that it will—we will "honor their result." Once there is peace, we will support a neutral South Vietnam, without military alliances or foreign bases, and free to choose whether or not to reunite with the Communist north. So, according to their published program, will the Vietcong. The third question has to do with the governing of Vietnam between a final settlement and elections. In a country as weak, unstable, and disorganized as Vietnam, elections will be confused, difficult, and disputed. Clearly, we cannot trust the Communists to run free elections. Nor can they be reasonably expected to rely on the honesty and dispassion of General Ky (or his successor). If elections are to mean anything, the country must be directed in this interim period by a compromise government, trusted by both sides, their trust being supported by an effective network of international guarantees, by international supervision, or even by an international armed force sufficient to prevent a repetition of the 1956 refusal to hold elections (made possible, at least in part, by the withdrawal of French forces at the request of Diem). This may mean that some Communists will be allowed to share in the interim government. It may mean a government of Buddhists and neutrals, or even an international trusteeship. There are many in South Vietnam well suited to such a role; the vital matter is the international guarantees and international forces that will insure both free elections and peaceful accession by the victors.

This sine qua non of a negotiated settlement was at the center of the confused debate that raged over the February 19 statement of Senator KENNEDY—a debate that dramatized the impossibility of publicly discussing complex issues, especially amid the intricacies of high politics. KENNEDY stated that an acceptable compromise would involve "a share of power and responsibility" for the Vietcong, shaped to avoid the possibility of "domination or internal conquest," with "international guarantees to back up agreement," while the political process would be placed "under the rigorous supervision of a trusted international body." Our willingness to accept the "uncertainties of election" would be matched by a clear demonstration that we would not permit conquest by force. The record of debate does not sustain the impression that KENNEDY withdrew from this position in the fire that followed. There were, however, misreadings, followed by attacks on the proposals as thus interpreted. In fact, he did little more than elaborate what Senator FULBRIGHT had said unnoticed to Secretary Rusk the day before: "I do not recall \* \* \* we have ever made it crystal clear that we will support an election supervised by an appropriate international body, and that we will accept the results. \* \* \* It is also not clear that we are willing to allow any participation of the National Liberation Front either in a provisional government or at any time and, therefore, there is no alternative for them but surrender or annihilation." When the cannonade of comment is sifted, and then stripped of imprecations, accusations, zeal to be in the front ranks of anticommunism, and the fervent but always risky effort to read the unspoken thoughts of the President, the discussion does not seem to leave the administration position far from this. But the debate did, for just a moment, throw a ray of light on inner differences of temperament and attitude. It seemed that Sec-

retary Rusk closed the door when, the day before the Kennedy statement, in answer to FULBRIGHT's dogged pursuit of the alternative to the "possibility of participation" by the Vietcong, he said, "They do have an alternative. They are the front of Hanoi. They do have an alternative of quitting, of stopping being an agent of Hanoi and receiving men and arms from the north." McGeorge Bundy added to the confusion 2 days later by asserting, "The administration does not take the view that admitting the Communists to a share of power and responsibility would be a useful or helpful step," and then, lapsing into the most painful possible rejoinder, quoted President Kennedy against his brother on the wholly irrelevant problem of popular fronts in Europe. (Closer to the problem—if past heroes are to be invoked—is President Kennedy's response to a question about the dangers of coalition government in Laos: "We are taking a chance in all of southeast Asia. \* \* \* I can assure you that I recognize the risks that are involved. But I also think that we should consider the risks if we fail, and particularly of the possibility of escalation of a military struggle in a place of danger.") Once the verbal torrent diminished, it was clear that the President had not embraced the Bundy view. In public speeches and press conferences, he carefully avoided saying anything against the approach of FULBRIGHT and KENNEDY. We would "honor the result" of an election, the President said—presumably even if the Communists should win. And the makeup of an interim government, according to Ambassador Arthur Goldberg and the White House, would "be left to the negotiating parties"—which keeps the door open for compromise. The structure of such a compromise (or the many possible variants of compromise) and our willingness to communicate specific proposals to Hanoi are left to future actions and decisions.

Is there a possibility of such a settlement? Hanoi has proposed four points for negotiation. Secretary Rusk, in setting forth 14 points of his own, said that "the effect of those four points \* \* \* would be to give away the very purposes for which we are fighting and to deliver the people of South Vietnam against their will to the domination of a Communist regime." Yet the substance, if not the intention, of the four points is not impossibly distant from the Secretary's own program. It is generally agreed that only the third point, calling for a settlement of the affairs of South Vietnam "in accordance with the program of the National Liberation Front," is totally unacceptable. Although that program has shifted over the years, its essentials have remained constant. Once past the unflattering references to "gangster-style U.S. culture," it calls, in its fullest 1961 version, for "a new constitution," "a new National Assembly through universal suffrage," "all democratic liberties" (including freedom of speech and worship), land reform through "purchase from landowners," "a foreign policy of peace and neutrality," the elimination of all foreign military bases, close unity with "peace-loving and neutral countries" (first of all, with "neighboring Cambodia and Laos"), the overthrow of the Diem regime (since accomplished), and the establishment of "a national democratic" coalition administration, and so on. Of course, there are hidden traps and dangerous ambiguities, such as a granting of freedom only to "patriotic" political parties, a call for reunification by negotiations rather than through elections (although the negotiating government would be elected, and although this year Hanoi proposed reunification through elections), and an absence of international guarantees for elections. It would be naive to think that the program was not intended to move toward a Communist take-

over. Yet in the main, when the ritual curses have been excised, Hanoi's four points, including the front program, sound much like ours; the expressed differences are no greater than those in many productive cold war negotiations. Perhaps this is all propaganda; perhaps victory, not settlement, is the real goal. Yet, whatever Hanoi's reaction, the time has come for the United States to formulate a fair and detailed outline of settlement. Of course, we cannot, as George Ball has said, "first announce it to a television audience and then \* \* \* sit down at a bargaining table." Fruitful discussion will begin in secrecy, where it can be free from political pressures, from critics, and from the corrosive compulsion toward simplicity which marks public debate. The essentials are there: a cease-fire, a laying down of arms so that the entire country can be governed, and an end to bombing; a structure to guarantee elections and also peaceful accession by the victors; a withdrawal of foreign forces, and neutralization; free elections, with Communist participation. Such proposals, couched in the most specific possible terms, should be communicated to Hanoi, accompanied or quickly followed by a meeting between a high U.S. official and a top North Vietnamese. Negotiations, even in the lofty chambers of international politics, cannot be conducted successfully by notes and messengers. Only men confident of their authority and their ability, and fully aware of the implications of their own proposals and the proposals of others—in other words, no more than half a dozen men in America—can hope to bring such negotiations to a successful conclusion, or even bring an accurate account of them to the President.

It does not illuminate reality to say, as some have said, that we cannot "dictate to South Vietnam" what form a settlement should take. It is not conceivable that the United States should continue a major war simply because the temporary chieftain in Saigon did not agree with our position. Nor can any South Vietnamese leader hope to withstand determined American pressure toward a settlement.

In the inevitable political instability of a peaceful South Vietnam, there is always a risk that the Communists may ultimately win political power—that the fox may insinuate its way, or be voted, into the chicken coop. It is this danger that sifens some people's resistance to negotiations. It would indeed be an unfortunate outcome, but, measured by our vital interest—avoiding military defeat—it would not be fatal. It is no more than the chance we are constantly taking all across the world in cold war competition. The only way to compel the Vietcong to a settlement that does not involve such a risk is to crush them in battle.

That battle now goes on in two wars, separated by the 17th parallel—the war in the north and the war in the south. The northern war carries a far more grave danger of a larger, bloodier, and increasingly devastating struggle. On the objectives of the war there has been a subtle change of direction among many of those responsible for its conduct. Less than a year ago, our objective was "a stalemate." Once the guerrillas were convinced that victory was impossible, they would come to the conference table. Now important voices, publicly and privately, are lifted in favor not of a stand-off but of victory. On March 3, Secretary McNamara told a Senate committee, "We win if North Vietnam leaves South Vietnam alone. [translated: if the Vietcong stop fighting] \* \* \*. We believe we can win in the sense I indicated." Two weeks earlier, on February 17, General Taylor testified that the time to negotiate is not "until it is quite clear their course of action is a losing one"—a flat contradiction, as Senator ARKEN reminded the General, of the President's ex-

pressed desire to negotiate now. Other officials are proclaiming it our intention to "destroy" major enemy units, or to break Hanoi's "will to fight." It is a mistake to read too much into individual statements and speeches, plucked out of the careless and ceaseless verbal flow of official Washington, but the absence of contradiction, the growing lack of caution, the obviously planted news stories, and the other evidence charged with significance for the insider (an official in the highest ranks of foreign policy said that the Life article called "Vietnam: The War Is Worth Winning" was one of the most helpful he had seen) all strongly indicate that a substantial section of the community of power believes that military victory is our principal, perhaps our only, objective. I myself am convinced that this belief is growing, but it is significant, and heartening, that the President has not called for armed triumph.

Victory in the south may be possible, with the major Communist units destroyed or broken up, morale shattered, and the guerrillas laying down their arms, asking for amnesty, or peacefully returning to their homes. We are, after all, killing greater and greater numbers of Vietcong. One high official estimates that the "kill rate" may average a thousand a week throughout the year. (Like nearly all the statistics of this war, such an estimate is necessarily flawed by doubts and inadequate information.) The defection rate is increasing, too (now at a weekly average of three to four hundred), although it does not yet match desertions from the South Vietnamese Army. Areas that once provided the guerrillas with secure sanctuary are now constantly menaced by descending helicopters and mobile troops. Yet many heavy clouds obscure the view toward "victory." Past misjudgments impose a fierce skepticism about promises—however faint and tentative—of military triumph. Since the early 1950's, they have always been wrong. Recently, we were told that the "tide" was turning—a phrase that accidentally echoed the Pentagon pronouncement of May 1963, that "the corner definitely has been turned" toward victory. In 1962, McNamara said that the "ratio of killed and captured" was much more favorable; while a year later General Harkins proclaimed encouragingly from Saigon, "The Vietcong are losing because we are steadily decreasing their areas of maneuver and the terrain over which they can move at will." With a change in dates, these statements would fit unnoticed into many of today's briefings and releases. It is natural for men whose business is to fight wars to believe they can win, just as any good politician secretly believes he can win an election no matter how unfavorable the odds. Past mistakes are no guarantee of future error. There is a possibility that they may be right this time, but history teaches a reluctance to hazard great things on such predictions.

Moreover, it is unclear what victory means. The Secretary of State has said that our only commitment is to stop armed attack from the north—that if the North Vietnamese "were to show the slightest interest in withdrawing their regular armed forces and infiltrators, we could move to peace very quickly and the United States could withdraw its forces." How easy it is to become captive of the incomplete view that the Vietcong are "simply . . . the military arm of North Vietnam." A withdrawal of all infiltrators would leave more than a hundred thousand trained guerrillas in South Vietnam, and there would be no certainty that Hanoi could completely stop the fighting or that such an order, if it should be obeyed at first, would not soon be ignored. Unless a negotiated settlement gives the dissidents a role in the political life of the country, a peaceful outlet for their ambitions, hopes, and protests, we must remain—as well we may—occupiers for

many years. That possibility, resting on uncertainty about the nature of a victorious or independent South Vietnam, is further strengthened by today's still unsettled turbulence. The demonstrations, many of them conducted by young men who have never lived in a country free of terror, civil strife, and the cruelties of war, remind us that the last few months of political quiet in South Vietnam were a rare interlude. To the extent that Communists have inspired division, the antigovernment protests show alarming influence in cities we have long claimed to control. To the extent that they flow from local discontent, they reflect division about the future of South Vietnam and weariness with war, and indicate the mounting price in anti-American feeling we must inevitably pay for the growing weight of the American presence in that tiny land. Whatever the outcome, however, unless events sweep away our influence altogether, it is unlikely we will permit any government to come to power which would inflict on us what some would see as the "humiliation" of requesting our withdrawal.

Some people justify their optimism about victory in terms of "breaking the will" of the Communists to continue the fight. It is true that there are more and more defectors, and that prisoners arrive more and more tired, dejected, and hungry. But the battle goes on; despite our growing force, Hanoi seems more militant, and infiltration seems to be increasing as our own numbers increase. We cannot know the will of men we do not understand. From Thermopylae to the Japanese-infested islands of the Pacific and Hitler's Berlin bunker, history is full of individuals and fighting forces who chose to fight against impossible odds and accept certain death. Nor can we measure the determination of an aging Communist leader who has been waging war for almost a quarter of a century. It is a guess built on an assumption resting on a hope. Aggressors though they are, many of the Vietcong believe they are enlisted in the ranks of justice. Mal Xuan Phong wrote in his diary, "The most precious thing for a man is his life. . . . My whole life, my whole strength have been devoted to the most elevated and the most beautiful cause—the struggle for the liberation of mankind." The demonstrations in South Vietnam show either an increasing weariness with the war on our side or a far greater Communist penetration of the cities than we have cared to admit. The Communists' will to fight may dissolve tomorrow, but one should not wager many American lives on it.

Even if we win countless battles, our victory will not be assured. Success in a guerrilla war, as our experts have repeatedly told us, is not measured simply in deaths and prisoners but, for the most part, in areas of the country pacified and population controlled. There is no clear proof that our control over the population is increasing. General Taylor, at one point in his testimony, indicated that 60 percent of the people were under friendly control instead of the 53 percent of 6 months before. Other testimony shows this figure to be uncertain, probably unknown, or perhaps completely unjustified. Although the Vietcong controls fewer areas than before, there is no firm evidence that a single square mile has been pacified—that is, cleared of guerrillas, protected against future attack, and set on the road to economic improvement. Nor has the United States reached the end of its commitment. General Taylor admitted 235,000 men are not sufficient. The probable conclusion—the simple arithmetic—of Secretary McNamara's March 3 testimony before the Senate is that the United States plans to have at least 400,000 troops in South Vietnam by the end of the year. They will be needed if we intend to keep up the offensive against enemy forces that can increase

by 8,000 a month while we kill 4,000 or less—and even this estimate of enemy increase rests on the highly speculative belief that more supplies can be smuggled into the south than these troops require, or about a hundred and fifty tons a day. If we are wrong about this—and we may well be wrong—the number that can infiltrate could grow enormously, along with the number of our own troops. (We need four or five men for every enemy soldier, and South Vietnam is nearing the limit of its manpower.)

The hope of victory, however, is not just a harmless fable of some generals and their few State Department allies. It carries the enormous danger that in pursuit of that shining, elusive prize we will enlarge the war in the north. As the southern conflict continues unabated, pressure for more aggressive attacks on North Vietnam, will steadily mount—pressure from public opinion frustrated by an endless battle, pressure from politicians seeking to discredit the administration's will and courage, pressure from those still searching for that one untaken step which will bring success. I hope, and I believe, that the President will resist such pressure, for no one is more painfully aware than he of the immense hazards of enlarging the war in the north.

Since February 7, 1965, we have been bombing selected military targets in North Vietnam—roads and bridges, ammunition and supply dumps, and gathering points for guerrillas. The bombing began with the aim of restoring crumbling morale in South Vietnam and in the forlorn hope that North Vietnam, quaking under the punishing assault, would come to the conference table. Its present purpose, according to Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance, is "to interdict the infiltration of men and material," or, as it is more expansively viewed by General Taylor, "in a very real sense, the objective of our air campaign is to change the will of the enemy leadership." There is little evidence that the bombing has either had serious effect on the flow of supplies or eroded the will of the north. Infiltration did increase during the pause in the bombing. It also increased before the pause and it has increased since, and we have no figures to prove that bombing has made any important difference. Bombing, it is claimed, imposes "a higher price" for infiltration. It is unclear what this means. The border between the two Vietnams is mostly jungle crossed by trails and waterways. The price of carrying supplies and of repairing roads and bridges is high in terms of human labor, but there are huge numbers of willing unemployed. The travel of men and supplies since the bombing is longer and more difficult, but the North Vietnamese have time and they are used to discomfort. Of course, the bombing has some effect, but there is no compelling public justification of these costly assaults on military grounds. General Matthew B. Ridgway, our commander in Korea—the last ground war in Asia—has concluded, "It is impossible to interdict the supply routes of an Asian army by air power alone. [In Korea] we had complete air mastery—we clobbered Chinese supply columns unmercifully—but we did not halt their offensive nor materially diminish their strength."

The war in the north has neither halted aggression nor shattered the "will" of the enemy nor "punished Hanoi" beyond the limits of endurance, yet the Alice in Wonderland response of some is to call for a stepping up of the war. "We should go after more meaningful targets on a slow progressive scale," said General Taylor, a highly intelligent military moderate. This will, it is hoped, "provide a sobering reminder to the leaders in Hanoi that progressively they must pay a mounting price for the continuation of their support of the Vietcong insurgency."

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The President has given a more restricted basis for the bombing—"to slow down aggression" "increase the confidence of \* \* \* South Vietnam," and help "convince the leaders of North Vietnam—and all who seek to share their conquest—[that] we will not be defeated \* \* \* grow tired \* \* \* [or] withdraw." The bombing has helped strengthen Southern resolution, and it has also helped convince any reasonable adversary that armed conquest is inconceivable, though the combat troops we have sent to the South since the bombing began are a more compelling proof.

The objectives set forth by the President are limited ones, and they have largely been accomplished. However, the grander and more spacious desire to end the enemy's capacity for making war, destroy his will to fight, and punish him for wrongdoing opens limitless horizons of expansion. Moreover, this desire invokes judgments that are not military judgments. The will of a nation, the punishment it can take, the strength of national pride and feeling and resistance are not matters that military specialists or computers or the Rand Corp. can assess. They require an intimate knowledge of the culture and thought of alien lands and of obscurely known leaders. It may even be that, as a careful American study of the war against Germany indicated, bombing strengthens the fighting spirit of a people. A leading political figure recently said to me, "After all, if we were being bombed, we'd never give in." Even the purely military justification, unsupported by any civilian \* \* \* if necessary, should assure continued security while we begin the work of social organization and economic investment, along with measures for education and the improvement of health, the harnessing of water power, and an increase in the yield of the land. ~~If we now lack the manpower for this most important task—and we do—then both Americans and Vietnamese might well be recruited, or even conscripted, for it.~~ Such a course might limit our battles and our deaths. It would prove our determination far more effectively than leaping across the country looking for guerrillas to kill, and would clearly demonstrate our willingness to help build a sure base for a society in which, to reverse Mao Tse-tung's famous image, "the fish" of guerrilla armies cannot "swim." Here, too, the President might well tell the American people that the outcome is uncertain—that we may turn a sudden corner and find victory but that it is far more likely that we will see only a long, bloody, inconclusive war of attrition, until returning sanity brings a political settlement. For if the talk of victory is allowed to swell, the political consequences of failure and the pressure to expand the war will also mount.

Secretary Rusk, when he was asked by Senator PELL if he saw any end to the "corridor we are following," replied, "No; I would be misleading you if I told you that I thought that I know where, when, and how this matter will be resolved." A few minutes later, he added, "The nature of a struggle of this sort \* \* \* is, of course, substantially determined by the other side." Such a terrifying admission of futility—an advance absolution—only conceals the truth that this enormous Nation is not helplessly in the grip of events, that the future, like the past, will be shaped largely by our own judgments. It is easy, and it would be wrong, to be apocalyptic about a conflict that is still so strictly limited and so full of hopeful possibilities for settlement. We have emerged safe and strong from many equally dangerous enterprises. Yet not long ago an important politician, intimate with the processes of power, told me he thought that if large-scale war ever comes, it will come not in a burst of Strangelove madness

or a fall-safe accident, but through a long series of acts and decisions, each seemingly reasonable, that will slowly place the great powers in a situation in which they will find it impossible to back down. It will be no one's fault.