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Nothing is quite so difficult as extrication from a revolutionary war. Conventional wars too can be fought for "unlimited" objectives, such as the overthrow and replacement of a regime. All such unlimited wars tend to end, not in compromises, but in settlements that merely reflect the defeat of one side. In conventional wars, it is the battlefield which is the judge: the road to the goal passes through the defeat of the enemy's army. In revolutionary wars, the asymmetry of means introduces a complication: for the rebels to lose, it is necessary, not only that they be defeated on the ground, but also that they be deprived of external support, and thus asphyxiated, and that they be deprived of new internal opportunities: the judge is, doubly, political. When the rebels win on the battlefield, as at Dien-Bien-Phu, the settlement consecrates their victory. When the governmental forces win, as in Greece and in Malaya, there is no need for a formal settlement. The really complex cases are the traps - the instances when the rebels have failed to reach their objectives by force, and may even have been largely eliminated or contained as a military threat, yet can count on enough external supplies and domestic assets to prevent a return to law, order and peace. It is for these cases that Raymond Aron was right to say that the rebels who don't lose win, while the forces of order who don't win lose: for the latter's choices are either to keep fighting - which means, in effect, perpetuating the conditions that have fed the rebellion in the first place, and which only a return to peace could eliminate - or to give up.

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The post-war world has seen two spectacular traps: in Algeria and in South Vietnam. In both cases, a Western state tried to crush a rebellion primarily by military means; but the stake of the struggle was the political control of the native population, and the key weakness of the "outside" power was the absence of any effective and authentic native political force capable of rallying the population against the rebels. In both cases, this very absence, which might be called the original sin, and the military means used in lieu of political or social ones, led to a self-destructive reliance on dictatorial measures, and on a mix of physical destruction and social disruption well-calculated to increase sympathy for the rebels or at least dislike of the "outside" power. In both cases, thanks to such tactics, guerilla activities were ultimately reduced, and "security" largely restored, but the guerilla's infrastructure was not destroyed, the authority of the government continued to rest mostly on its might, and native political elites hostile to the rebellion failed to rally to the side of the Western state. In both cases, whatever the losses of the rebels within the contested territory, there remained large amounts of fighters and supplies in "sanctuaries" just outside. In other words, the central objectives of the Western state: pacification and the elimination of the risk of a take-over by the rebels proved elusive; reaching the latter goal presupposed the achievement of the former - for without pacification there could be no consolidation of the "forces of order" - yet entailed the opposite of pacification: continued fighting.

II The Algerian analogy has been useful mainly in order to help us understand why "victory" was not achievable and why, as I have written elsewhere, America's earlier objectives were totally inappropriate to the political realities of South Vietnam.¹ But Algeria is of limited use if we want to find out the details of the ^{best} solution for getting out of the trap. For there are too many differences. In the first place, the French

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choice was clear (which does not mean easy). They could stay, and fight, forever; or they could accept the emancipation of Algeria; there was no "third force," and no third solution. There were only two real protagonists: Paris and the FLN. In the case of Vietnam, there are at least three (assuming we assimilate the Vietcong to Hanoi): the "other side," the U.S., and the regime in Saigon. This both increases and complicates our options: One possible alternative to an agreed solution in South Vietnam is South Vietnamese - not American - management and military effort. Without the French army, Algiers was the prize of the FLN. Without the U.S. army, there would still be the regime and the army of Saigon. To get out of South Vietnam means leaving either Saigon or Hanoi in charge, i.e., it may mean still trying to achieve what was not achieved while we were in. To grant self-determination to Algeria meant leaving the FLN in charge: the only object of bargaining was over how much (i.e., full or limited independence, and "secession" vs. links with France^e); but self-determination is precisely what each side, in Vietnam, pretends it wants to insure, and accuses the other of trying to prevent. In exchange for granting the independence of Algeria, de Gaulle could insist on obtaining negotiated guarantees for French settlers; this - an important issue for the French - was a side issue for the FLN. But in exchange for getting out of South Vietnam, the U.S. cannot ask Hanoi and the Vietcong to guarantee a long and happy life to the Saigon regime, since the stake of the whole war is the control of Saigon. If, in order to reach a negotiated settlement, the U.S. - meeting the other side's demands - does the same ^{as} what de Gaulle has ^{ne} done, i.e., granted control of Saigon to the other side, this would entail not merely a commitment to withdraw our forces but also a removal by us of the regime of our ally: a major additional debacle.

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In the second place, as U.S. Administrations have never ceased emphasizing, the international repercussions of acknowledging defeat would be far greater in the case of the U.S. This is so partly because of the difference just mentioned, since for the U.S. to remove, not merely its presence but its own ally, might be interpreted by other allies as a betrayal, a warning to them not to rely on U.S. support, and an incentive to seek accommodation with the enemies of the U.S. Another reason is that the foe ~~of~~ the U.S. is fighting is not merely a nationalist rebel whose objectives are limited to the liberation of its soil, but a Communist movement and a Communist state. Their victory would be seen not merely as a local outcome but as a blow of world-wide significance - especially at a time when the major Communist powers have come out of their "time of troubles" that began with the Cuban missile crisis and continued with the Cultural Revolution, the Indonesian ~~putch~~, the six-day war. Today, the Chinese are breaking out of their isolation, the Soviets are catching up with America's missile strength, they have a strong foothold in the Middle East and they have consolidated their position in Europe. A further "Western" defeat could weaken America's alliances, not only in Southeast Asia, but also in the two areas that have been so decisive since 1945: Japan and Germany. Another reason still is the fact that, over the years if not initially, Hanoi's role in the South Vietnamese civil war has become predominant, so that its victory might appear, not as that of a successful insurrection, but as that of an outside aggressor operating across an internationally established boundary (despite the reticence of the Geneva agreements on this ~~point~~): a point which would not be lost on other countries to whom ^{SECUR} defense against armed attacks the U.S. is committed. Whatever one may think of the validity of the global domino theory, the fact is that the problem did not arise in the French case.

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In the third place, the domestic and the external circumstances of a negotiated settlement for extrication offer a very different balance sheet in the two instances. De Gaulle's main troubles were domestic. "L'abandon" threatened to split the French army and provoked a fierce terrorist rebellion by the O.A.S. both in Algeria and in France;;His own regime was new, and rested almost exclusively on the prestige and character of a leader who was a natural target for assassins. On the other hand, once he decided to negotiate France's extrication, he disposed of three advantages vis-à-vis the FLN. One, he could resort to a persuasive threat. Some threats have a deterrent value (it remains to be seen whether the threat of renewing the bombing of North Vietnam will deter Hanoi from major military operations while we withdraw); others do not (i.e., the earlier threats of escalation, and indeed their execution, did not deter Hanoi from pursuing the war); but most threats that can have deterrent value have no "compellent" one: neither the earlier bombing nor the U.S. military presence en masse nor the invasion of Cambodia forced Hanoi to negotiate on unfavorable terms. De Gaulle's threat of partitioning Algeria - in contrast to earlier hints of setting up a "third force" administration in ¹⁶⁷¹Algeris, for which there were no volunteers - had a measure of credibility. For Algeria had been French, and it was not implausible that short of receiving the guarantees and advantages he wanted from an "Algerian Algeria," he would regroup the French settlers in easily defensible enclaves. In other words, the threat of staying, in a limited yet essential area, was serious enough to discourage FLN intransigence - given de Gaulle's willingness to grant the FLN what was the core of its demands.nTwo, there was a range of common interests that were incentives to and objects of negotiations. There was an

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acknowledged common interest in getting the French army and administration out; a common interest in economic and cultural cooperation; a common interest in avoiding the total break-up of ties advantageous to both sides - the French settlers' presence in Algeria, the Algerian workers in France. Three, the two adversaries shared two precious goods: an absence of ideological dogmatism, and a common universe of discourse, the kind of familiarity that allows one side to understand the thought processes of the other even when the goals are conflicting and the values diverge.

The balance sheet is very different in the case of the U.S. in South Vietnam. Despite various apocalyptic pronouncements, there is little reason to believe that a negotiated settlement that would in substance meet the other side's demands without appearing like a pure and simple capitulation (i.e., a settlement ~~com-~~ comparable to de Gaulle's) would provoke a groundswell of indignation in the U.S. and a "backlash" similar to that which killed Weimar and defeated the Democrats after the "loss of China." The Weimar analogy is as mischievous as the Munich analogy. Weimar was killed by a combination of factors, in which the most important were a rotten party system and a gigantic depression: these provided the opportunity for the Nazis to rise and to arise a latent sense of national humiliation. In the U.S., should the recession worsen, the beneficiaries are likely to be the regular Democrats, not Right-wing demagogues. As for the McCarthy precedent, it came at a time when the nation gave an overwhelming, almost obsessive priority to the cold war, and after almost twenty years of rule by the Democrats. The truth of the matter is that Right-wing demagogues can split both parties - but not for their own benefit. McCarthy grew because Republicans - led by Taft - had used him as a springboard to long-lost power; but a Right-wing Republican "backlash" would insure a Democratic victory; i.e., short of wanting to cut off their own noses to

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spite Mr. Nixon's face, they have nowhere to go. None of this means that a humiliating outcome would be in the nation's interest, just because it might be accepted in sullen resignation. But it means that there is domestic leeway for maneuvering toward a negotiated settlement that does not appear humiliating. What is, and isn't, humiliating, will be discussed below.

The trouble, however, lies in the absence of incentives between the antagonists. One, they share no common language, even for opposite purposes. There is a wall of mutual suspicion, made of totally separate historical experiences, of ideological antagonisms, of deadlocked national pride, of opposite negotiating styles, of conflicting domestic processes. The rigidity and monotony of their propaganda discourages us, and does not make it easy for us to find any dent, ^{cr}vice or hole that would give us some hold for bargaining. The permanent din of diverging interpretations, half hints, vague offers and veiled threats coming out of Washington must confirm them in their suspiciousness of our motives and intentions. Two, the adversaries do not share negotiable common interests. In this respect, Vietnamization (by contrast with the threat of partitioning Algeria) makes negotiation both more difficult and less necessary. More difficult: for the threat it entails happens not to be an incentive to negotiations on the basis of our terms. Less necessary: for the promise it contains removes the other side's incentive ^{so} to negotiate.

Vietnamization's threat is double. On the one hand, unless Hanoi and the Vietcong negotiate a political solution, we will turn over the war to Saigon, which is more intransigent than we are. But this first threat is partly a deterrent to negotiations - insofar as it is serious; insofar as it is not, it is partly

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dubious, partly an actual promise. It is a deterrent² to serious talks, insofar as it leads us to build up, to support and to increase the weight of the very regime which the other side wants to tear down and which is most reluctant to accept anything short of its own victory. Presented as a goad to negotiations, Vietnamization acutally risks diverting from them; for its logic is to push to the conference table two forces each one of which has sworn to eliminate the other, each one of which would feel humiliated if it had to negotiate with the other anything other than a more or less cosmetized surrender. This threat is therefore no incentive, insofar as it has real teeth. But it is not clear that it has any. For it is dubious insofar as it remains hard to believe that the Thieu regime without massive U.S. support will be more effective and successful than the Thieu^{le} regime with such support. To be sure, some of its own weakness and impopularity result from the very scope of American military involvement, i.e., destructiveness, and from the visibility of its subordination to and dependence on the U.S. Yet given this weakness and impopularity, the regime, left to itself, might soon again repeat the tragic history of the years 1959 to 1965. And the threat of leaving Thieu in place is even a promise to Hanoi, insofar as there are signs of increasing opposition to the Saigon regime in the cities.² The other part of the threat is that of a residual U.S. presence, if negotiations do not allow for extrication by agreement. But whereas France's staying power in at least the urban centers of Algeria - a territory just across the Mediterranean, whose possession had been a vital ^{element} ~~part~~ of the national self-image, an area that had been deemed part of France ^{for} 130 years and where a million Europeans lived, ~~r~~ was credible as a "second best" solution in a contest with a foe whose military power, in the short run, was limited, whose external sanctuaries were in nations eager for a settlement, and who, if

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he had been, through partition, put in charge only of the poorer and less inhabited parts of Algeria, would have had not so much a base of operations as a zone of troubles, ^{where} the North Vietnamese cannot be much impressed by the threat of America's staying power. For South Vietnam is not South Korea, or Japan, or West Germany, i.e., a friendly country at peace. It is a shaky ally at war, in which Americans would have to keep fighting a foe with considerable military resources and a well-established, solid base: North Vietnam. Rather than settle for terms that would fall far short of its own, Hanoi's regime, which sees itself as acting on behalf of a nation that has always first eroded, then defeated, its conquerors, through endurance, would rather count on its two great assets: this is its country, not the Americans', and everything points to its greater patience and aptitude in waging protracted wars. Finally, Vietnamization mixes with the rather ineffective threat of a possible residual U.S. presence the promise - indeed the performance - of large-scale U.S. withdrawals. Insofar as a major incentive to negotiation is the need for the other side to remove the bulk of the U.S. armies, whose presence has for several years ruled out a defeat on the battlefield or a collapse of Saigon from the inside, unilateral withdrawals (which were not a part of Henry Kissinger's plan for Vietnamⁱⁿ negotiations just before he joined the Nixon Administration) considerably weaken this incentive. To be sure, de Gaulle too ⁱⁿ initiated partial troop withdrawals, but only after he had granted the principle of self-determination, and after negotiations on that basis had begun in earnest. (see below, fn. 17)

De Gaulle, when he offered the FLN independence in exchange for various procedural, face-saving concessions and substantive guarantees, was credible in threatening partition, and he could use France's persistent presence as a bargaining counter. Nixon, when he offers Hanoi the very kind of open-ended political process that had already gone wrong for Hi-chi-Minh after 1954,

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seems merely to give North Vietnam the choice between two forms of resignation to the non-control of the South: a negotiated one - entailing a disarmament, physical or psychological, of the Vietcong - and a military one. Between the dubious prospect of being able ~~of~~ successfully to exploit the opportunities of a "fair political solution . . . reflect(ing) the existing relationship of political forces" ³ as assessed and controlled by the present Saigon regime, and the chance to exploit the military and political opportunities provided by a Saigon regime increasingly left to itself in a continuing war, there is no real incentive for Hanoi to settle for the former.

Does this mean that Algeria has absolutely no relevance to the politics of American extrication? Not at all. For a reading of de Gaulle's last volume of Memoirs ⁴ provides us at least with a method. The present Administration, in its own search for a way out, seems to have lifted two valid precepts from de Gaulle's operational code: the need for ambiguity in order to circumvent obstacles inside and outside, the need for local military control in order to rule out an exit under forcible pressure. But these were tactical precepts, at the service of a strategy: de Gaulle's method consisted first in deciding "the main lines" ⁵ of the kind of solution he wanted, i.e., in setting a long-range goal based on his ²reasoning of France's national interest, given France's possibilities and prospects; second, in seeing to it that this goal, which could only be reached in agreement with the rebels, could not at any point appear as if it had been imposed on him by them (military control was one of the tactical implications of this strategic precept: to make the final outcome appear as the will of France, "the France of always . . . in her strength, on behalf of her principles and according to her interests" ⁶). In other words, the lessons which are crucial, despite the differences described above are (1) that the details, the ups and downs,

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the tactics of extrication ought to be subordinated and harnessed to a design that does much beyond extrication, and entails a long-term political vision: otherwise, the danger of being led astray by a péripétie - an accident, a sudden detour, an unexpected road block - is too great; (2) that the use of one's armed forces ought also to be tailored to the design, rather than having the outcome shaped by what one has done with one's armed forces; (3) that even a basically unpleasant and emotionally upsetting political outcome can be made, not merely acceptable but desirable, if, on the one hand, the government shows that it is in control of events and has deliberately and firmly chosen the course, and if, on the other hand, it has become clear that any other solution would be more disastrous and more humiliating in its internal and external effects. For there is a final lesson common to all politics of extrication: unless the "forces of order" have won a decisive victory, there is no "good" solution that feeds national pride, there is only a choice between "bad" solutions. The choice must therefore be determined, first, by the ruthless elimination of wishful thinking - i.e., by an initial reduction of the options to the possible ones, by the exclusion of those that, while highly preferable, are also highly improbable; second, by the rigorous assignment of a price tag to each of the remaining ones; third, assuming (as is likely) that the price of each is high, by a long-term view of a desirable future, rather than by a short-term view limited to the process of extrication alone.

III

The Johnson Administration, in its last months, had already given up one illusory solution - military victory through the tactic which Herman Kahn had christened "attrition - pressure - ouch," leading either to a disappearance of the enemy or to a settlement

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sanctioning his defeat. The Nixon Administration appears to have adopted as its goal a political settlement reached between the present parties, and leaving the ultimate fate of South Vietnam open, i.e., giving each South Vietnamese faction a chance for the future. Both as an inducement toward such a settlement and in order to respond to domestic pressures, the Administration began the process of troop withdrawals. For scaling down a war which could never reach the goal of victory, (both because its scale prevented any real "pacification" and because its necessities^{ar} ~~many~~ limits preserved external support for the rebellion), a war whose violence no longer corresponded to the much more modest new objectives; for trying to go part of the way toward meeting the other side's demands about U.S. departure and a new political process in the South, the Administration deserves more praise than ~~these~~^{the} critics who, in 1968, had asked for little more have been willing to give. Nor do the length of extrication, or the Administration's unwillingness to meet the letter of the other side's demands, deserve major criticism, unless one thinks that considerations of face, domestic self-respect and external impact are irrelevant. The real focus of criticism ought to be elsewhere: not the past, or even the present course, but the future.

After almost two years, it has become clear that the policy ought to be reexamined. For reasons already discussed, the inducements have not worked, and the design as originally shaped has proven unworkable. If what we want is "a political agreement" by the South Vietnamese factions on "a suitable political process," it will not be reached between the FNL and the Thieu regime, nor will Hanoi accept to withdraw its troops in order to respect such an agreement. If what we want is a chance for South Vietnam to avoid "a change in . . . political structure . . . brought about by external military force,"⁷ as long as the present South

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Vietnamese regime is in power such a change will be avoidable only by continuing ~~war~~^{war}. Vietnamization, which began as an element toward a settlement by negotiation, has tended to become a substitute; but it is merely a process. The original designs - the discarded Johnson scheme and the stalemated Nixon one - had the virtue of containing a vision of the post-bellum future. This is precisely what is missing in current Vietnamization, and what is needed now. Let us therefore apply the Gaullist method to the admittedly very different situation in Indochina.

We must assume that the present course will not be reversed - i.e., there will be no massive reintroduction of U.S. forces (even though there may be renewed bombings to protect continuing withdrawals). To what long-range futures does the present course lead?

There is one "optimal future" which seems to play a role comparable to the dream of "French Algeria" : "Integration, says de Gaulle, was, to me, nothing but a tricky and empty formula" ⁸. The same could be said of the "Korean model." The "Report to Congress" on U.S. foreign policy for the 1970^s of last February mentioned the hope of forcing the enemy to fight as a conventional army, which could then be stalemated and repulsed as in Korea. ⁹ A Korean solution would allow either South Vietnam without residual forces, or South Vietnam with a residual U.S. military presence serving as a deterrent as in Korea, to turn at last to the huge tasks of "nation-building" - including social integration of the refugees in the cities, land reform in the countryside, and "normalization" of political life - behind a cease-fire or armistice line. But South Vietnam is not South Korea. The main difference here is the perfectly obvious unwillingness of North Vietnam to follow the precedent of North Korea, to accept a cease-fire that would leave the Thieu-Ky regime in control, i.e., to give to a

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war-racked enemy the chance to consolidate its hold. Part of this unwillingness can be explained by the imperviousness of Hanoi to the kinds of pressures from its big Communist brothers which dragged Marshal Kim-il-sun to the Pan-Mun-jom agreements. Another part is due to the fundamental differences between the two "Souths." North Korea launched an invasion instead of starting a revolutionary war in Rhee's South and thus threw away all chances of exploiting the flaws in South Korea's political and social system. This helped Rhee to achieve - in his own dictatorial way - a staunchly anti-Communist nationalism, which made the North appear to most South Koreans as a Soviet satellite. In Vietnam, it is still Hanoi that appears as the champion of nationalism, and the massive U.S. presence in the South has helped rather than harmed Hanoi's image. It is not that an initially shaky military dictatorship can never establish itself as a legitimate and effective regime, which can rely on the support of its population; but it cannot do this while fighting a war that diverts it from the tasks of peace, obliges it to rely heavily on the kind of outside assistance that tarnishes its nationalist appeal, and forces it to treat as enemies all those citizens who do not share its determination to keep fighting. To be sure, Saigon would have a chance to establish a national image of its own if the U.S. became much less visible and the tasks of reconstruction were tackled at last - but the prerequisite for this is peace; i.e., the key to a "Korean solution" is, again, in Hanoi. Not only is a regime that initiated a national and social revolution under and against French rule, and that never stopped fighting for more than 25 years, less likely to give up than a regime that had been set up by Soviet occupants, but Hanoi, unlike Pyong-Yang, still disposes of considerable forces and infiltration routes in a war that recent U.S.-South Vietnamese successes in the countryside have not turned into a conventional conflict.

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The extension of the war to all of Indochina makes the neatness of a "Korean solution" even less likely. The elimination of the guerillas, the establishment in the villages and towns of the kind of decentralized pacification that would deprive Hanoi and the Vietcong of internal sympathies and opportunities would require both a much more permanent ~~muting~~^{muting} of the war by the other side and a very different kind of regime in Saigon - one which, in all likelihood, would anyhow prefer a negotiated settlement to a protracted war. Once more, we find that in order to reach a "good" outcome, we would require conditions which, if they had existed earlier, would have made this kind of war impossible, and which can not be brought into existence as long as it lasts. Once and for all, we must give up hoping for favorable outcomes that cannot come into being unless Hanoi plays the role we have assigned to it. We can imagine circumstances in which Hanoi might find ~~that~~ a continuation of an intense war in the South ~~is~~ too costly, and prefer to keep its scale down; but there would still remain a huge difference between an endemic war and an armistice that restores peace to a war-torn country.

There is another "good" outcome that is unrealistic, however attractive it may appear as a long-term solution. It is that which the more recent Administration proposals have suggested, and which might be termed the "Finnish solution": a negotiated settlement which establishes, in effect, a regime in which the Communists accept at the outset a minority position, and which then conducts free and open elections under international supervision, according to procedures agreed upon by all the main factions. Insofar as this would leave the future open, and, if it should bring about a Communist victory, would at least do so

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in a way that nobody could brand a betrayal of U.S. commitments, one can see why it exerts such a hold on the official imagination. What it ^{turns} ~~turns~~ against is, once more, the unwillingness of Hanoi and the Vietcong to trust a process that would begin with their endorsing the legitimacy of the existing regime, and with their acceptance of a risky minority role in it - not the best posture for winning elections in a country where countless votes have never done much more than ratify the visible balance (or preponderance) of forces. If a coalition government makes as much sense "as to attempt to overcome the problems of Mississippi through a coalition between the SDS and the Ku-Klux-Klan" ¹⁰, is it much more reasonable to expect the SDS to take a minority position in a regime led by the Klan? It would become plausible only if the alternative, for the other side, were the likelihood of defeat in a protracted war, the conviction that "Vietnamization" works. But, as indicated earlier, this is not the case, and the present indices of its success owe more to a deliberate tactic by the other side, eager to save its resources while the U.S. withdraws, than to a sudden political and military miracle on our side. That the North has its problems of poverty, bureaucratization and lassitude - is certain; that the recruitment of guerilla manpower, either in an increasingly urban South or among the distrustful Khmers, meets with difficulties is clear; that either these factors or external ones are strong enough to force Hanoi to abandon its essentially political analysis of the irreversible - if slow - stirrings of the urban masses against the "puppet regime," i.e., its assurance that deep cracks will open in that regime as soon as the American props are removed, and that therefore to throw in the towel now would be suicidal: this is totally unlikely.

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We are thus left only with two equally grim visions of and alternatives for the future. One is protracted and uncertain war to preserve Indochina from Communism; the other is Indochina potentially under Communist influence, or control, or even with a recruited Vietnam under Hanoi's rule. These are the terms in which the options ought to be seen, for all the rest is tactics; it is between those alternatives that a choice has to be made on the basis of an assessment of long-term interests. Both prospects imply a very limited American capacity to control the outcome; and yet one of the criteria of choice has to be the degree to which it is possible for the U.S. to master the consequences of its actions and to shape the outcome so as to make it less harmful. Vietnamization fuzzes over the choice, and, while aiming at keeping options open, actually risks foreclosing some. It only postpones the tough decisions, and thus may oblige us to make them under worse conditions and with our back closer to the wall. The great alleged advantage of not revealing publicly whether the withdrawals will continue until there are no expeditionary forces and no more U.S. military operations in Vietnam, or whether we will stop our exit at a certain point, is that this vagueness allows us either to accelerate our departure, or to suspend it, should we find that further withdrawals undermine Saigon. Yet a willingness to preserve the option of staying implies either that no choice between alternatives has yet been made, or ^a prior choice of a policy of protracted war to keep South Vietnam from falling. The disadvantages of the latter will be explored below. A preference for postponing choice would ~~be~~ ^{make} sense only if one could expect a significant change in the nature of the alternatives (for instance a sudden shift in Hanoi's position) as a result of partial withdrawals and continuing Vietnamization. But there is no reason to expect any such lifting of the ~~clouds~~ ^{clouds}: the two

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alternatives remain, only our capacity to shape each one of them decreases as time passes - and as our withdrawal increases the interlocking hold of Hanoi and Saigon on events.

If one assumes that a decision has actually been reached not to leave a residual force in South Vietnam, the refusal to publish a deadline could be explained by a variety of factors: the fear of weakening Saigon by a solemn announcement, which could be interpreted as ^{an} invitation to various fence-sitters to open a drive against the Saigon regime; the conviction that Hanoi would have absolutely no incentive left to negotiate with us. Yet the threat of a residual U.S. presence has proved to be no incentive at all, and the fear of weakening Saigon raises once more the key issue: what future do we want there? A decision (even if unrevealed to the public) to withdraw totally has the "advantage" of passing the final choice between the two alternatives on to Saigon - at least in the first instance. But things are not so simple. For the present Saigon regime is most unlikely to opt for accommodation. Should either a public announcement or the mere evidence of our total withdrawal lead to its collapse and replacement by a new government geared to peace, this would look like an embarrassing rebuff to us; ^{it would} ~~and~~ show to the whole world that the previous regimes had no legitimacy and that we lost all control along with our ^{re}presence. This risk - a high one - could be handled (in different ways, of course), only if we had made a clear choice either for accommodation or for protracted war. Should the present regime survive and decide to keep fighting (and to help the Cambodian regime to survive), it would undoubtedly turn to us for assistance - military and economic. If we deny ^{help} _{it} arguing that we have done enough, this will - however hard we try - look like a belated betrayal. If we answer the request by obtaining support for Saigon from other Asian states, we will in fact be mortgaging our whole Asian policy in order to produce a rather faint-hearted front of

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Asians fighting other Asians. If we provide, directly or indirectly, such assistance, and the regime collapses anyhow, † from the inside or from the other side's pressure, such a fall after such repeated involvements would look like a disaster - for it would combine a persistent attempt at stemming the tide and an ultimate failure to do so. There could still be domestic backlash (aimed at those who had been "foolish" enough to start withdrawals and thus weaken our staunch ally), and the domino effects, although postponed, might still be felt. Most seriously, we would have lost our ability to shape the outcome - unless we were prepared to play Sisyphus and reescalate the conflict. Moreover, all of this presupposes that we had first been able to conduct our military extrication under ideal conditions, i.e., without accidents such as either renewed bombings aimed at preventing a major offensive and thereby actually provoking one, or without any need to come and help South Vietnamese, or Cambodian, or Laotian units in difficulty should Hanoi decide to increase pressure on them while we get out, or without a sudden and hostile change in Saigon in the last phase of our withdrawal.

In other words, both throughout and after the process, the outcome is in the hands of an obstinate enemy and a shaky ally; the goal of leaving the ultimate outcome to that ally's own capabilities and choices - passing the buck, so to speak, while appealing in the abstract, would still entail our being blamed should things go wrong: for that ally would still look like our proxy, yet his dissociation from us would still be seen as our own decision. If the real goal is to give him a fighting chance of surviving for at least several years after our departure, we ought to guard against wanting incompatible goals once more: for to survive several years, he may need our presence; our complete departure might insure his collapse, without saving us from blame should the collapse come later, especially as in this instance a

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"fall" of Indochina would occur outside the framework of international supervision and guarantees which a negotiated agreement could provide. In whatever direction we turn the compass, the needle always points the same way: to tie ourselves to the present Saigon regime makes us largely responsible for keeping it afloat, would make us partly responsible for its fall, does not save us from having to settle either for perpetual war or for a "loss," yet pushes us - despite our attempt at appearing in charge of the calendar - into an essentially reactive position.

IV

Let us therefore examine the two alternatives, apart from so dubious a process. Protracted fighting (with or without a residual U.S. military presence at the end of the withdrawal phase) has one main appeal: that of preventing Saigon [and perhaps also Phnom^PPenh) from falling into Communist hands, and of showing thereby the reliability of the U.S. to America's allies all over the world. But a perpetual war is not a policy. We would have to guard, and be ready to move, against two recurring risks of debacle: successful military pressures from the other side, political disintegration in the South. The uncertainties and costs of such a course would make sense only if we could afford (1) a very optimistic evaluation of South Vietnam's capacity gradually to move toward what might be called a "Greek solution", i.e., victory on the battlefield; (2) a very pessimistic evaluation of North Vietnam's capacity to disrupt, militarily and politically, the South and Cambodia after the bulk of U.S. forces have been removed; (3) a very optimistic reading of America's willingness to provide in the meantime whatever may be needed toward a victorious outcome. The least one can say is that these three assumptions are debatable; South Vietnam remains a grim wonderland for data-collecting American Alices, Hanoi's capacity to adapt its strategy

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to new twists is unimpaired, American lassitude makes predictions of post-withdrawal involvement risky. On so weak a ^{an} foundation, can one advocate in the national interest a course that entails the following liabilities? (1) Militarily, a low level of U.S. support (whether in the form of a residual presence or in that of aid after exit) would leave the initiative of operations and re-escalation to the other side, but a high level - with the prospect of intensified operations and rising casualties - would bring us back to the agonizing options of 1963 - 65. (2) Politically, a permanent fixation on South Vietnam would complicate accommodation with China. It would oblige us to continue to give our relations with "friendly" states such as Malaya, Singapore, Thailand and South Korea a predominantly military orientation - one which reduces the "Nixon" or "Guam doctrine" to a mere shift of burden - bearing in a network of military commitments for containment. It would deter us from giving the necessary priority to the one task that is essential for "containment" of the real danger, which is not military aggression in Southeast Asia but internal chaos: "Provide those states with the means of getting out of misery and humiliation, which are, there as elsewhere, the causes of totalitarian regimes" ¹¹, It would keep us identified with regimes whose corruption, inefficiency or tyranny may drag them into internal trouble, and us into new quagmires as the scapegoats of local resentments. (3) Last but not least, a policy of protracted war would in fact oblige us to keep in power - despite our much reduced or almost disappearing physical presence - a war-oriented regime in Saigon, despite the pressures toward peace and political change that can be expected to grow in the South.

Would a protracted war lead with any high degree of probability to a "Greek solution," maybe the attempt would be worth the costs, just in order to avoid a sense of defeat at home and to vindicate our past investments in the eyes of our allies. But this degree does not exist. It could be reached only if Hanoi and the Vietcong

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let themselves be decisively defeated on the ground - i.e., if they lost their own tactical skill, and if South Vietnam could launch the kind of operations that failed even in the years of our massive presence. If anything, the fall of Sihanouk - far from helping, through the destruction of the sanctuaries - has made such a prospect more remote, for now Saigon has to bolster Phnom Penh in order to prevent all of Cambodia from becoming a Communist base of operations.

Thus, for the U.S. it is more than bizarre to argue that our credibility with our allies depends on our willingness to prolong for several years the agony of being in a trap and the spectacle of a major power incapable of providing a client with the promised degree of security. For the message to others is unmistakable: first, what no foreign power can ever deliver - victory against a rebellion which is fed both by domestic conditions and by unremovable external aid - cannot be supplied by the U.S. either. Secondly, what the U.S. can supply in such circumstances is the means of keeping a most disruptive war going on the client's territory. This is a high cost to pay, in order also to convey the message of one's credibility. If the preservation of Indochina from Communist control had a vital importance from the ^{view} new point of the "relations of major tension" in the world - i.e., if Communist control meant a significant extension of Soviet influence, as has happened in the Middle East - not through any domestic take-over but through the exploitation of diplomatic and strategic opportunities - or a dangerous expansion of Chinese influence, as would have happened if the Indonesian Communist Party had taken over (in a coup that we would not have fought), there might be a different balance sheet. But since the avoidance of a minor (if undeniable) setback in Southeast Asia can only be obtained at the costs described above, obstinacy is foolish. Nor is there any reason to believe that any of the non-Communist regimes of Southeast Asia would either surrender to local Communist movements or give up the independence of their countries to China or to a Red Indochina. The attitude of other states, in Asia and elsewhere, toward us, will be determined

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less by our willingness or unwillingness to preserve Indochina from Communism²⁴, than by a combination of two factors: our behavior toward them in issues of direct concern to them, and our capacity to bring the Vietnam tragedy to an end, which, however unwelcome to them and to us, would at least appear orderly and willed by us rather than imposed upon us. What destroyed the credibility of the French and British as great powers in the thirties was their refusal to take minor risks against a potentially major threat, at a time when the latter could still be nipped in the bud; i.e., it was the self-destructive irrationality of the course followed by Paris and London. Protracted war in Indochina presents no terribly rational image of the U.S. Indeed, our prolonged and unsuccessful involvement in Indochina, and domestic reactions to it, tell America's allies that the likelihood of our ever fighting for them, either a guerrilla war even under better circumstances, or a conventional war at a time of sharp troop reductions, is decreased, not increased by our "~~steadfastness~~^{Vietnam}".

We are left therefore only with the other real outcome: Indochina under a more or less decisive degree of Communist influence. There is no doubt that this could appear as a humiliating outcome, under two sets of circumstances: (1) if it happened through the collapse of our ally (either while we are still around, or after our exit and, in this case, as I argued above, whether we had supported him until the end or refused to do so); for almost twenty years of efforts at building a non-Communist nation would be not merely wasted but blown up in our face; and yet this is exactly what Vietnamization may lead to, and what even a choice for protracted war would have to insure itself against; (2) if it appeared that, in a negotiated settlement we had both accepted all of the other side's terms and deprived the people of South Vietnam of any chance to express their will; i.e.,

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that we had purely and simply delivered Southth Vietnam, and also Cambodia and Laos, to our adversaries. It would have been equally humiliating for the French to accept a settlement that merely consecrated the end of French Algeria. What is in America's interest is a settlement which (1) while acceptable to the other side is not imposed by the U.S. or by an unholy coalition of Hanoi and Washington on a reluctant Saigon, but is negotiated by the U.S. and by a South Vietnamese government determined to seek a peace of reconciliation and to move toward free elections under conditions accepted by the other side; (2) establishes an international framework, for the supervision of a cease-fire, for that of those elections, and for the definition and guarantee of an international status of neutrality; thus the problems of Indochina could be dealt with in a broader Asian context and as part of the global policy of the U.S. If such a settlement ^{could} be reached, and even if it should lead, through elections, to a Communist victory, on the South and to the unification of Vietnam under Communist rule, it would have the following advantages: Negatively, it would put an end to a long and hideous war, as well as to an association between Washington and Saigon regimes devoid of any prospect other than endless war and any appeal other than the profits and patronage of brutal power. Positively, it would substitute an orderly transition for a bloody one. It would ~~both~~ provide ^a ~~an~~ important element in a long-term accommodation with China, and yet contribute much more effectively to the "containment" of Chinese influence - by the consolidation of independent states in Indochina - than could ever be done by America's physical presence in, or support to, shaky client states. It would be a decisive step toward "a truly neutral Southeast Asia" which, even if it includes a "predominant

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North Vietnamese influence in all of Indochina", would prevent "ultimate Chinese dominance"¹² in the area while insuring China against U.S. military presence on the mainland of Southeast Asia.

What makes it possible to believe that the U.S. could avoid the "humiliating" versions of this and achieve the "acceptable" form? One or the other of the humiliating versions would result from the following events: (1) If, in order to meet the other side's terms, the U.S. granted them "the right to exclude whom-ever they wish from government"¹³ and to select their own partners in a coalition. Indeed, the initiative toward the establishment of a government of reconciliation has to come from within South Vietnam. Not only can we not allow the Communists to force, but we ourselves cannot force a provisional coalition on Saigon. However, a new Saigon government whose program would be the ending of the war could negotiate with the Vietcong either the establishment of such a coalition, or-following another precedent set by the agreement between de Gaulle and the FLN - the creation of a temporary government acceptable to both sides and entrusted with the organization of elections. Those men, in Saigon, who are determined to wage war until some form of victory would have to step aside from the new government (although they should of course not be excluded from political life). But it is not the U.S. that ought to remove those who have been its staunchest supporters in our earlier, yet hopeless course. The question therefore is: can South Vietnam, without odious, overt U.S. manipulation - the very thing we ought to end - provide a new government that would be both geared to peace negotiations, and determined while they last to resist enemy attempts at a forcible take-over? A positive answer requires, obviously, a change in America's overall policy. It is not a matter of removing the Thieu Administration: it is a

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matter of defining a policy which entails that we no longer cling to it. For our support of Thieu has amounted to our sitting on the lid of South Vietnam politics. To be sure, we do not want to repeat the sinister experience of Diem's end and succession. But our dissociation from Diem was itself conducted in a policy vacuum, and was followed by U.S. support only for South Vietnamese leaders - mainly military - who were geared to war. A clear indication of America's determination to cease looking for Korean, Finnish or Greek solutions and to orient Vietnamization decisively toward peace would remove us from the lid. In order to result in the necessary changes in Saigon, such an indication ought to consist of a series of measures. Publicly, we ought to declare ourselves resolved to break the Paris deadlock and to give priority to negotiation over Vietnamization. In the expectation of making such negotiations possible, we ought to set a public deadline for total withdrawal: early enough to provide the impetus toward change both in Saigon and in Paris, not so early as to provoke a sense of panic in Saigon and to reduce the negotiations in Paris to an empty formality. We ought to state our condition that political accommodation in the South is the only desirable outcome and our ~~readiness to~~ ^{recourse to} accept all efforts by South Vietnamese at setting up a political process leading to such an outcome. A change of Ambassador in Saigon ought to consecrate and enable the shift in policy. We should also give to South Vietnam the firm assurance that, pending a negotiated agreement, and while withdrawing our forces, we would continue to provide Saigon with the means to prevent any military victory by the other side (following, again, the Algerian precedent: for de Gaulle saw to it that political accommodation would not be turned into and aggravated by military debacle: this is the one essential aspect of Vietnamization that must be pursued). Privately, we should communicate to the present Saigon Administration our

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expectation of stopping military assistance after our withdrawal, and our determination to see the next Presidential election in the South take place without any of the restrictions that had been imposed by Thieu and Ky in 1967, that are being fabricated again, and that have been tolerated by us - so that a new and enlarged cabinet could prepare, and a new regime could emerge from, those elections. We have often stated that we have no obligation to maintain a government in Saigon by force against the will of its people. Of course, while the war goes on, there can be no perfect expression of will. But if our claims about increased security are correct, we have no excuse for allowing further fabrication - unless we have indeed decided to keep South Vietnam "safe", i.e., fighting a protracted war ¹⁴.

(2) Humiliation would obtain if, after having thus made possible a change of government in Saigon, and revised our own policy, we found that the other side remained totally uncompromising and took advantage of our shift in order to obtain the surrender of the South. Then there would be a serious danger of domestic backlash, and domino effects abroad. The very abyss that separates Washington from Hanoi must force one to envisage this possibility. Like all previous plans - from the Johnson dream of victory to Mr. Nixon's recent offer - the policy advocated here does assign to the other side a role it could decline to play. We must also remember that (contrary to de Gaulle) we have not had at our disposal credible threats to oblige Hanoi to negotiate outcomes it did not want. So, what if Hanoi keeps denouncing the new Saigon regime as another set of puppets, waits until all Americans are out, and then runs over a government that would have been emasculated by our shift, never expected or intended to keep fighting, and was further demoralized by the other side's intractability? It is not a very plausible nightmare, for a variety of reasons. First, the shift would correspond to the unilateral creation ^{on} by the U.S. of the conditions which the other

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side itself has presented as the basis for serious negotiations (comparable to de Gaulle's unilateral grant to the FLN of conditions he knew they wanted to obtain at the bargaining table). Secondly, this shift would change the nature of Hanoi's own alternatives. Their choice would no longer be between an unattractive "Finnish solution," and a protracted but not unpromising war, but between a promising settlement and a protracted war. Militarily, the situation in the South, for whatever set of reasons, has sufficiently improved not to entertain Hanoi and Vietcong illusions about an easy conquest. Even under a government of reconciliation, the army of Saigon would not be like the shattered French army in mid-June 1940, which practically demobilized itself in places when Pétain asked for peace. Indeed, should Hanoi prove intractable, the ⁵psychological impact of such intransigence on Saigon could backfire for the other side: Saigon might once more be taken over by die-hards, or else its regime might turn out to be, not a disheartened crew ready to surrender, but men who, disappointed in their hopes and refusing to capitulate, would decide that they have no choice but to wage a war that could be much less unpopular than that waged by a military dictatorship - and could even, under such circumstances, receive U.S. assistance. (Indeed, we could make clear to Hanoi that the deadline for total withdrawal was set in the expectation of negotiations in good faith, and could be revised in case of total intransigence following the formation of a government of reconciliation in Saigon.) The threat of a prolongation of the war, unimpressive as long as the alternative was the "Finnish solution," would be weighed differently in the new perspective. Moreover, the Vietcong knows that it cannot reach its ultimate objectives in the South without the cooperation - at least for a long time - of "persons of various political and religious forces and tend-

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ences" ¹⁵ whose past incapacity to organize effectively does not eliminate their numerical and social importance. Finally, one could expect that Hanoi would find itself this time under strong pressure both from Moscow, eager to play some role in an overall settlement, and from Peking, eager to reappear on the world diplomatic scene, and probably interested in accommodation with the U.S. as long as it is not at the expense of Hanoi and Saigon.

(3) Less unlikely than total intransigence would be the other side's preference for not agreeing with a new Saigon regime on a provisional joint government until after the U.S. exit, so as to exert greater psychological pressure and obtain better terms. The only guarantee against this risk of humiliation rests in the continuing strength of the South Vietnamese army, i.e., in the need for Hanoi to weigh the additional costs of protracted war, as against those of reaching an accommodation with Saigon: merely extorting surrender should be ruled out. If, after our withdrawal, Saigon decides that it has no choice but to keep fighting, we could then consider ~~afresh~~ ^{to} refresh the supply of military assistance, aimed - this time - not at supporting a regime that offered its enemy no more than a minority chance, but at helping a regime willing to restore a dialogue along the lines the other side itself had described as fair, so that it could avoid surrender and obtain the very kind of peaceful outcome demanded for so long by our adversaries.

(4) Would it be humiliating for the U.S. if the elections agreed upon by the Vietcong and a new Saigon regime, and conducted under a government sympathetic to, influenced by, or partly composed of members of the Vietcong, should lead to a Communist take-over very shortly after the U.S. exit, allowing for no face-saving time lag between our departure and their triumph? Again, the risk exists. But the alternative policy, as

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we have seen, leads nowhere, or may also lead, despite our preference, to a government of accommodation in Saigon once we are out - one that would be more hostile to us than if it coincided with a new policy in Washington, and could force us to face the same outcome in far more humiliating circumstances. Also, we have always said that a Communist victory at free elections would be acceptable. The other side has recently indicated that it would accept international supervision of elections held under a temporary government acceptable to both sides.

(5) Actually, there are good reasons to believe that these risks should not be exaggerated, and that Hanoi - like the Algerian FLN, although for different reasons - has no desire to inflict a humiliating loss of face on the U.S., once Washington accepts the bases of accommodation. But even if one assures that Hanoi would negotiate seriously on these bases and put the discussions in a broader framework, despite its bad memories of Geneva, there could still be one path to humiliation: the kind of ^{pulling} ~~dragging~~ in South Vietnam that could lead to the political and military decomposition of Saigon - a risk implied in our analysis of "scenarios" (1) to (4). There may be a sad and somber truth in this paradox: that South Vietnam is so fragile that it would disintegrate unless it is kept in the steel jacket of militarization (i.e., war, the simplified priorities that result from it, and the twisted political process that is tailored to its pursuit). Undoubtedly, the new policy would require far greater skill in South Vietnam than has been shown in the past - both on our part and on the part of the South. One of the attractions of Vietnamization is that it requires no great feats of diplomacy, statecraft and imagination: "we" leave, gradually, and "they" take over; the execution of the policy can be left to our officials in South Vietnam and to Saigon's present regime - apparently, there is little they can do to spoil it. The

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new policy suggested would, however, require on the part of our political representatives in Saigon ^aan extraordinary amount of finesse, tact and determination - the determination to get the various South Vietnamese political forces, ¹fragmented, ³often suppressed and bickering, to reopen a political process both within their country and with the other side, the finesse and tact of allowing wide-ranging changes in Saigon without overbearing and muddled manipulation, since nothing would be more absurd than branding the successors of a regime denounced as a puppet by many Vietnamese (not only in Hanoi), with the label "made in America": this one ought to be genuinely South Vietnamese, and based largely on forces that have been waiting in the wings - or in the ¹sails. Also, the new policy supposes on the part of the South Vietnamese a capacity to meet the challenge of a most difficult political process - the very capacity that has been conspicuously absent in the past. ^yOf one remembers how often policies conceived in Washington went wrong because of faulty execution in South Vietnam, one has no reason to expect belated miracles. But once more, the real question is: think of the alternative. If the only talent demonstrated by our men in Saigon and by the South Vietnamese is that of waging an inconclusive war, regardless of the fact that the political and social dimensions of the conflict are, in the final analysis, decisive, then we must realize that as long as they have a controlling influence in the field, they can still derail us from our present course. They retain the capacity to pressure Washington in order to slow down our extrication, ^{the capacity} ~~use~~ to demonstrate the perils of speedy Vietnamization, the dangers and likelihood of enemy offensives, the need to deter them by bombings, the importance of preserving exposed positions in Cambodia and Laos,

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etc. . . - The only way of preventing the logic of protracted war to take over - as it did in Cambodia, on the ground of military evidence that was, in itself, not unsound - is to break decisively with the perspective of protracted war, and with an open-ended process that allows both our clients and our foes to believe that this is still our only perspective. If its open-endedness allows us to play the game by ear, we must remember that we have a tin ear. As for the South Vietnamese, ~~we~~ when faced with the need to prove that they can compete on the political battlefield with the Vietcong - i.e., that there is enough autochthonous material for a political process that would be neither a military dictatorship nor a pure and simple Communist take-over - they ^{bring us} show themselves unable to demonstrate even elementary national coherence and to guard against a kind of spontaneous demobilization and disintegration, in a period that is militarily more favorable to them than any in the recent past, ^{but} then they would have provided us with the most graphic illustration of the absurdity of a permanent U.S. effort at shoring up a non-nation, and of the reason why protracted war in support of the present regime would be an endless Sisyphean hardship. For it would be clear that Saigon has no lasting power other than that provided by an arbitrary rule built on American stilts. That a risk of disintegration exists in the perspective of accommodation in no way means that protracted war would save us or the South Vietnamese from having to face it some time later.

The policy suggested here would require the most difficult and controlled use of rhetoric by the Administration. Here again, we may turn to the Algerian precedent. It is true that de Gaulle practiced ambiguity so as to minimize opposition and to maximize his freedom of maneuver. But especially after his speech of Nov. 4, 1960, his fuzziness about details of the coming negotiations,

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For rather his prudence in clarifying^{fyiny} them step by step only) never conflicted with the very clear thrust of a policy aimed at reaching self-determination through "general negotiations." There could be doubt about the precise substance of the final settlement; There was none at all about the choice made for accommodation as against protracted war. Tactical ambiguity never obfuscated strategic clarity. One of the main drawbacks of Vietnamization as a process which floats in a policy vacuum, is ~~that~~^{the process} it obliges the Administration to use ~~a~~^{the} rhetoric ~~that~~ is essentially military, puts most of its emphasis on the build-up of South Vietnam's capacity to take care of itself on the ground, and covers our own retreat under assurances, if not of victory, at least of non-defeat, non-surrender, non-humiliation. This (rather than a mere, and necessary, assertion of strength, i.e., of determination not to let oneself be run over) is essentially dangerous; for the logic of the words implies protracted war (yet without an explicit choice - i.e., without preparing the public for it, thus with the seeds of future misunderstandings and divisions), Also, a shift to a different policy is thereby made more difficult, for the Administration's own words could then be used as a boomerang against it. This is something which de Gaulle, who knew the importance of language for leadership, was always careful to avoid. This is also something which an Administration afraid of a radical nationalist backlash should be most eager to prevent, even if it still prefers protracted war to the alternative, as long as it is not convinced - and how could it be - that protracted war is not only politically "sellable" in the U.S. but likely to lead to a "winning" outcome. Moreover, the rhetoric of toughness feeds the illusion that there is a winning outcome, a good way out. Finally, as long as a final choice between the two perspectives within which "Vietnamization" can fit has

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not been made, this rhetoric serves as a major disincentive for the other side (as does the contradiction between our own pleas for a negotiated settlement consisting of a "fair political solution," and the Thieu regime's frequent statements of intransigence).

The rhetoric of toughness comes naturally to U.S. leaders. The policy advocated here would require a much more difficult exercise. On the one hand, it presupposes a clear explanation of why protracted war is an unappealing policy, why the alternative to a policy of accommodation is not some form of victory but endless war mortgaging U.S. policy and allowing for no political, even if there is some military, extrication. On the other hand, this new course should not appear as a brutal reversal, as a repudiation of 45,000 dead, as a stab in the back of the South Vietnamese. What is needed - for important reasons of domestic harmony, external reassurance, and national self-respect - is the impression of continuity, as well as - for reasons of external efficiency - a psychological shock indicating a decisive choice for a new course. Fortunately, the President's speech of October 7, 1970, was sufficiently devoid of bellicose rhetoric and vague on key points to allow him to present the shift as a further development of his last "major new initiative," as a bold filling in of details (in the true Gaullist fashion!) rather than a turn-around. Fortunately, also, the end, next April, of the present slice of announced withdrawals, as well as the elections in South Vietnam next Fall, provide salient points around which a new policy can develop.

V

This policy puts the search for a peaceful solution within the framework of a policy for Asia; in this respect a total withdrawal of our troops from South Vietnam can be presented as fitting

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a general policy of withdrawing military forces from the mainland of Southeast Asia - just as Algerian independence fitted a general policy of decolonization. It also preserves as a goal what has been the core of stated U.S. policy throughout - a final popular vote by which "the South Vietnamese people (would) determine for themselves the kind of government they want,"¹⁶ something unachievable in any other way. Thus, the course suggested here applies the "Algerian method," insofar as it is appropriate and possible. To be sure, the French did not withdraw all their troops before the Evian agreements, but the withdrawal of U.S. troops does not leave South Vietnam defenseless, and the solemn French referendum of January 1961 granting self-determination to Algeria was a kind of functional equivalent of the withdrawal of U.S. troops.¹⁷ Moreover, what I suggest here is that the U.S. should try to shape the outcome in the least hazardous way while it is still deeply engaged in South Vietnam: Later, it will be too late.

What made the Algerian extrication possible, once accommodation had become France's goal, was the strategic vision and the tactical skill of de Gaulle. A comparable policy may demand too much both of the South Vietnamese political process and of the American governmental one. And yet, should their weaknesses - which ought to have deterred us from entrapment in the first place - also deter us from getting out of the trap? Vietnamization, even though it may look like a way out of it for us, and one that does not tax either of these processes, suffers from two major flaws. Like so many of our previous moves in Indochina, it consists of reculer pour mieux sauter: the hard choices it avoids are merely postponed, the iron facts and dilemmas that should have been faced before going in (and so as not to go in) must still be faced, and nothing we do can save us from having to face them sooner or later. Had they been confronted earlier - in 1961,

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in 1963, in 1965, in 1969 - we would not have had to choose each time between investing more in the trap, in order to justify the earlier inputs, or, in order to make getting out easier, tearing down what we ourselves had poured in. Also, even if we assume that Vietnamization takes "us" out and leaves "them" with the choice between perpetual war and accommodation, should this have much appeal to those who, in the Administration, are deeply, genuinely and rightly concerned with honor and compassion? For we have been "in it" with the poor South Vietnamese ever since the beginning - 1954; it is too late for us to shirk our responsibility. Should they opt for accommodation, after our exit, they would be in far worse posture to reach a decent one, if the political arena were limited to Saigon vs. Hanoi and the Vietcong, than if it were one in which we participated as well. Should they opt for continued fighting, how honorable would it be for us to tell them that they surely ought to keep battling - despite the obvious rifts in and reluctance of their society - but that they should no longer expect us to contribute, after so many years in which we threw our support only to those Saigon leaders who staked all on the war? To be sure, past commitments - rather than the intrinsic importance of the area - explain why no President may have wanted to let Saigon fall before the next elections, and one of the attractions of Vietnamization is that, if Saigon falls, it pins on South Vietnam, not on us, the loss of another country to Communism. But the lesson that other nations are not "ours" to lose has, by now, been learned - surely Vietnam has taught us at least that they are not ours to win; and Vietnam has been a burning tunic against the U.S. skin too long for us to deny some part in the outcome, however hard we try. In order to reach our original objective, we would have to continue to pretend that the realities of South Vietnam are other than what they are, and to stoke the fire of war in order to suppress them. The last service we can perform for Indochina - and, concerning Indochina, for the conscience of our own nation - is putting our energies behind an effort to bring back a peace that will be based on those realities.

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Notes

¹ In: Richard M. Pfeffer (ed), No more Vietnam? (New York, Harper & Row, 1968), p. 116. It is hazardous to try to classify writers; Richard A. Falk, in his "What we should learn from Vietnam" (Foreign Policy, No. 1, pp. 98-114), pigeonholes me among those liberals who take what he calls position 2 - the Vietnam war is "a failure of proportion." I consider myself much closer to Falk's own "position 4" than to position 2. Having written that our objectives in Vietnam were politically unreachable, that the means we have used made the goals even more illusory and were morally evil, that "no policy is ethical, ^{no} however generous its ends, if success is ruled out" or if the means "entail costs of value greater than the costs of not resorting to them" (in No more Vietnam, p. 202), it seems to me that I came rather close to "repudiat(ing) our present objectives in Vietnam on political and moral grounds". To be sure, I did not pronounce our stated goals as politically and morally bad in the abstract or on their face. What has been wrong is, however, far more serious than "a failure of proportion": it is a refusal to recognize basic realities, the irrelevance ^{(of} these realities of ends that are not ignoble ^{as stated} (and as believed in, by the policy-makers), the ignominy that inevitably follows from the attempt to twist concrete cases into disembodied ideals. Another difference with Falk is that I would not pass sweeping condemnation of all commitments to "repressive" regimes: he himself acknowledges "our obligation under the UN Charter to resist overt military aggression of the Korea-type," and I see no reason to give up treaty obligations that merely confirm and lend precision (hence add deterrent value) to the very vague, and frequently ignored, UN principle; each case, here, ought to be examined on its merits.

² See for instance North Vietnam's Premier Pham-van-Dong's interview in Le Monde, Dec. 2, 1970.

³ Speech by Mr. Nixon, Oct. 7, 1970.

⁴ Le Renouveau (Paris, Plon, 1970), especially Ch. 2-3.

⁵ Ib., p. 49.

⁶ Ib., p. 50.

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- 7 These quotes are from Henry A. Kissinger's "The Vietnam negotiations," in his American Foreign Policy (New York, Norton, 1969), pp. 130 - 131.
- 8 Le Renouveau, p. 49.
- 9 See text in Department of State Bulletin, vol. LXII, No. 102, March 9, 1970, p. 300.
- 10 Kissinger, op. cit. p. 126.
- 11 Le Renouveau, p. 269.
- 12 William P. Bundy, "New tides in Southeast Asia," Foreign Affairs, Jan. 1971, pp. 194 - 195.
- 13 Nixon speech, Oct. 7, 1970.
- 14 See a similar argument in Robert J. Johnson, "Vietnamization: can ~~it~~ ^{it} work?", Foreign Affairs, July 1970, pp. 629 - 647.
- 15 Vietcong proposals of Sept. 17, 1970.
- 16 Nixon speech, Oct. 7, 1970.
- 17 I can't help feeling, however, that we would have been in a position to obtain better terms if, two years ago, the new Administration in Washington had decisively opted for accommodation, made it possible for Saigon to shift to the same perspective, started withdrawals only after serious negotiations had begun, and made the date of final departure one of the issues for negotiation, then following de Gaulle's tactic. Having compromised withdrawals by associating them with support for the present Saigon regime, we now need to set a public date for total withdrawal both in order to help provoke a shift in Saigon and in order to signal our own shift to the other side: i.e.} nothing anymore can be gained by ambiguity on this point. The decision to start withdrawals, made either independently of any choice between the alternative visions discussed here, or in the perspective of protracted war, was a mistake which shows Washington's continuing difficulty in grasping the proper relations of military means to

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political goals, and the familiar contradiction between domestic necessities and external efficiency. At present, it might also well be a mistake to set a public date for total withdrawal, either in a policy vacuum, or in a perspective of protracted war by Saigon. For the other side might then grant us a de facto unilateral cease-fire, while intensifying its attacks on the South Vietnamese army, thus driving a wedge between us and Saigon, and forcing us to make difficult choices - political and military - so to speak under their gun and their will.

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