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VIETNAM: A RADICAL VIEW

President Johnson has argued that division at home about the war in Vietnam encourages the enemy, and thus prolongs the conflict. I think this argument is sound. But it does not prove that those who consider the war unjust should remain silent. Rather, the ill effects of division show the need for a policy that almost everyone can support. Such a policy could neither continue present U.S. policy as it is nor completely reverse it. What is needed is a compromise.

The present official U.S. position on Vietnam is intelligible only in the light of the idealistic and internationalistic foreign policy the U.S. has pursued since 1947. The world is becoming one. Americans have wanted freedom and democracy to prevail over totalitarianism and communism in the coming age. For this reason, the U.S. has opposed Soviet communism many times, including the Cuba missile crisis only a few years ago. Similarly, the U.S. has opposed Chinese communism in Korea and elsewhere. Vietnam is merely the latest episode in the long drama of communism's challenge to freedom.

According to the official position, the sole objective of the U.S. in Vietnam is to aid the South Vietnamese to repel violence so that they can decide freely their own political future. The U.S. adheres to this objective for several, interrelated reasons. The cause is just in itself: the South Vietnamese have a right—as good a right as the West Berliners or the South Koreans—to freedom. The U.S. has committed herself to support this right. To go back on this commitment would notify every friend

and foe that America is weak willed. The communist countries have a common cause in Vietnam. If they gain their objective, communism around the world may become more venturesome. There is evidence that Ho Chi Minh himself has designs for the whole of Indochina and for Thailand. The U.S. has a choice: to stand and fight a small and dirty war in Vietnam now or to be forced to fight a larger and dirtier war somewhere else at a later date.

To those who accept this policy, the usual legal and political arguments against the war in Vietnam seem to miss the point.

Some say the U.S. is in an undeclared war, illegal because unconstitutional. But the Constitution does not require Congress to use the expression "declaration of war." Congress authorized the war by the "Tonkin Gulf Resolution," which contains an explicit provision for termination by Congress without the President's approval. Opponents of the war have not gained significant support for termination.

Another argument is that the U.S. action is based on a violation of the 1954 Geneva agreements. The only signed agreement at Geneva was a cease fire between the French and the Viet Minh. Neither South Vietnam nor the U.S. were party to the multilateral declarations that accompanied the cease fire. North Vietnam was a party to the declarations, but Ho Chi Minh's regime voided whatever force the declarations may have had by using brutal measures in violation of the Geneva declarations to consolidate its position in the North.

Another argument is that South Vietnam does not have the support of its own people. Yet the division between North and South Vietnam corresponded to political realities in 1954, or the line would not have been

drawn as it was. True, the division was nominally temporary, but anti-communist Vietnamese had no choice, in the face of Ho Chi Minh's activities, but to develop a free state in the South. Many fled the North and more would have fled had they not been prevented. More South Vietnamese would support their government if they were not threatened by Viet Cong terror.

Another argument is that the U.S. action is unilateral. In fact, many nations have given some degree of support to the U.S. effort in South Vietnam. Among them is Australia, whose backing is especially significant because the quantity of her support is substantial, because Australia certainly is no American puppet, and because she is in an excellent position to judge what are the long-range stakes of the Vietnam war.

These arguments against present U.S. policy remain unconvincing as long as the premises underlying this policy remain unquestioned. Without questioning basic premises, however, U.S. strategy and tactics can be subjected to ethical criticism which might appeal to the sensibilities of those who support current policy. Force is justifiable only when it is applied in a discriminating way against genuine military objectives. If there is not sufficient discrimination, U.S. military action is simply obliterating what our policy claims to be defending. Our bombing seems to approach the strategic method of obliteration bombing that proved unsuccessful in World War II. There can be no justification for the destruction of whole areas with their populations. Moreover, total war is incompatible with limited political objectives. The constant extension of the bombing carries with it the danger of escalation beyond the boundaries of Vietnam.

Most critics of current policy do not limit themselves to an ethical appraisal of military methods. In fact, many critics do not even bother with such subtleties. Instead, they indiscriminately oppose present U.S. policy and they want it completely reversed. Exactly what the alternative is remains somewhat vague. The popular expression of dissent is a mere slogan: "Stop the bombing and negotiate."

There is no necessary link between the ending of bombing and negotiation, but the two have been linked by North Vietnamese propaganda. The North might undertake meaningless talks in exchange for substantial U.S. military concessions, but that would be a poor deal. Thus the slogan, "Stop the bombing and negotiate," hardly points to a reasonable alternative policy. A true alternative must indicate what is to be negotiated. The unpleasant fact is that so far Ho Chi Minh has been willing to negotiate nothing but U.S. and South Vietnamese capitulation. Those who urge that we negotiate should make it clear whether they mean to do so on Ho's terms. If so, they should frankly say: "Withdraw." If not, they should advocate an alternative to the present U.S. political objective.

To this point we have been concerned with present U.S. policy and with the objections to it and criticisms of it that may be considered without questioning the fundamental premises of the policy. For many years a profound critique of the basic premises of U.S. foreign policy has been taking shape. We turn now to a consideration of this critique, the alternative basis it proposes for U.S. foreign policy, and the implications of this view for the Vietnam problem.

The alternative policy is grounded on nationalism and realism--

"realism" in the sense that it looks more to power politics than to considerations of ideology. From this point of view, the aim of U.S. policy should be the national interest, which is nothing more than the sum of the needs and interests of the American people. The most significant aspect of the post-World War II world is not the communist challenge to freedom, but the drive of undeveloped peoples to attain national status and economic development.

Communism is not monolithic, and many nations in the "free world" are far from free. In some places, a moderate form of communist government would be better for the people than existing anti-communist, but non-democratic, regimes. Social change is inevitable. U.S. policy should support it. America should limit its use of military power to situations in which it is necessary to protect concrete American interests.

The U.S. objective in Vietnam is unrealistic. Vietnam has been engaged in a nationalist struggle for independence for decades—against the French, the Japanese, the French again, and now the United States. Ho Chi Minh is a communist, but he also is a Vietnamese nationalist. Viet Cong insurgency would be impossible if Ho's nationalist leadership were not so widely recognized. The present war is simply a continuation of the long struggle for independence.

South Vietnam is not a separate nation. Its governments have been less representative of the whole people than has the Hanoi regime. The military clique in Saigon that cooperates with U.S. anti-communism—for reasons of its own—is in fact engaged in a civil war against the lawful government of Vietnam. The conditions for liberal democracy simply do

not exist in Vietnam. Hence, better to leave the Vietnamese to the not altogether unbenevolent despotism of Ho Chi Minh than to continue to subject them to destruction for the sake of imposing the not altogether benevolent despotism of the Saigon clique.

An implication of this position is that the U.S. should liquidate its Vietnamese commitment. This might be done with some face-saving device, such as formation of a coalition government based on the National Liberation Front, to which civil authority might be turned over pending reunification after U.S. withdrawal.

A realistic argument faces the fact that withdrawal from Vietnam may encourage insurgents elsewhere. The answer is that no true U.S. interest need be sacrificed if the logic of withdrawal from Vietnam is followed elsewhere. On the contrary, a clearly articulated national consensus on the problem of wars of liberation will discourage threats to peace by allowing the upsurge of nationalism to run its course.

This realistic view is widely accepted in the academic world, but it is not generally understood by the public at large, who have learned through two decades of struggle to regard communism as a serious adversary. At the same time, the frustration of the Vietnam war is beginning to generate a very unrealistic popular feeling that the U.S. can yield in Vietnam, and bring peace to the world, without changing anything anywhere else very much. This popular attitude might be called the "blue-birds-over-the-white-cliffs-of-Dover syndrome."

If this popular illusion leads to withdrawal from Vietnam without a national consensus on the underlying policy, consequent confusion about

U.S. policy could easily create a very dangerous situation. Other nations might challenge the U.S. so seriously that even the most hard headed realists would have to admit that the national interest was at stake. The public might react with an excess of war spirit. Thus, if a realistic reappraisal of foreign policy were to be accepted, it would be urgent that it be understood and accepted by the people at large.

Some—Senator Eugene McCarthy is a recent example—have sought an alternative to existing policy without fully embracing the realistic alternative. Without questioning the sincerity of those who have sought a moderate policy, we may wonder if they have reached any position that can be maintained with intellectual coherence. It seems that their efforts have so far won only limited following because they have not yet been able to articulate a coherent alternative to existing policy that does not go so far toward realism as to endanger public confidence.

Personally, I do not believe that either the idealistic and internationalistic policy the U.S. has pursued for the past two decades or the realistic and nationalistic alternative policy is ultimately sound. Both policies are dealing with abstracted aspects of the political realities. And each tends to consider as unreal any factors that do not fit into its view. Neither policy takes adequate account of the prospect that large-scale nuclear war will occur eventually if world political unity is not achieved first.

Opposition to communism and the alternative policy based on nationalism are equally certain to lead to disaster. If the communist challenge to freedom is something of a myth, the national interest is a myth at

least to the same extent. What the world needs is a political settlement far more radical than either side in the Vietnam debate has been considering.

In a few years China will have strategic nuclear capability. Other nations will find it necessary to follow. When this happens, international politics will become infinitely more complicated and more dangerous than it has been in the past. The period of danger will not be limited. The crisis of nuclear capability is with us from now until the end of time. Once many nations have substantial nuclear capabilities, the possibility of attaining world political unity will have passed until after the first nuclear war is fought. Then, if there are survivors, they may set aside the ideology of nationalism as well as other ideologies and opt for world polity.

I believe that the United States and the Soviet Union have a grave moral obligation to join now to end the arms race and the threat of nuclear war. To achieve this end, the two nations would have to attain a considerable degree of political unity. I do not think that the concessions that would be necessary to attain this unity would be too high a price to pay for it.

I believe the alternative is a disaster so great that most people refuse to think about it. But the main reason I think we should make fundamental concessions for the sake of peace is not that I accept the ethics of the slogan: "Better red than dead." The main reason I think we should make fundamental concessions is that I consider our present deterrent strategy ethically indefensible. The ethical trouble with the deterrent is that it embodies an intention to do what is certainly immoral: to

senselessly and uselessly destroy non-military targets—the enemy population—if nuclear war occurs.

The strategy of deterrence is built on an insane logic. It consists in a balance of terror, a precarious leaning against one another of opposed threats to carry out several stages of increasingly useless destruction. The last stage would be sheer retaliation—the destruction of enemy cities with no expectation of military advantage. The hope is that the irrationality of the last stage will prevent the process from starting.

But if nuclear war occurs, I believe U.S. forces will in the last stage carry out their orders and execute final retaliation. We do not wish this to happen, but we do intend it, for we are prepared and determined to do it under conditions that are not in our power. Both present U.S. foreign policy and the proposed "realistic" alternative are built on the foundation of this gross immorality: the will to destroy millions of innocent people. In my judgment, no policy to which the deterrent is essential can be just. A just policy would not merely include a pious wish to eliminate the deterrent—the road to hell is paved with good wishes—but an effective intent to eliminate it. Better red by communism imposed upon us than red by the blood of the innocent murdered by us for the sake of freedom.

Consequently, I believe that any war the U.S. fights while maintaining the deterrent is tainted with the guilt of this immoral policy. Even if the deterrent is not directly involved, it stands as an essential condition of the policy and strategy of every move America makes in the world. For this reason, fundamentally, I believe the war in Vietnam is unjusti-

fiable. All the killing is useless and meaningless because ultimately neither anti-communism nor nationalism is an ethically correct basis for foreign policy in the nuclear age.

I have nothing but respect and gratitude for those Americans who are risking their lives in fulfilling what they believe is their duty to their country and to freedom. But I think their sacrifice is in vain. I believe that objectively the right course for all Americans would be to refuse all military service and all direct cooperation in war-making activities. Neither the present war nor any other can be justified until the deterrent is eliminated—this applies both to the United States and to the Soviet Union.

Now these remarks about nuclear warfare and the immorality of deterrence may seem tangential to the Vietnam war. But they are not. If neither of the two intellectually coherent but opposed policies toward the war is sound—if the war must be rejected primarily because of the larger context—then the sole question about Vietnam is how American action there can be terminated. I do not expect that many Americans will share my own outlook. Therefore, I urge a compromise, not as the morally right course but as one less evil than continuation of the war and more likely to be accepted than the radical political settlement implied by the end of deterrence.

A good case can be made against continued pursuit of present U.S. objectives in Vietnam even if the present policy is not questioned. The war is disproportionately destructive of life and costly in terms of other goods. If we continue, it may yet escalate into World War III. Or Hanoi

may eventually agree to negotiate. If Ho Chi Minh negotiates, insurgency will halt, a paper settlement will be reached, and U.S. forces will withdraw. Apparently the present effort will have succeeded. But insurgency will begin again. U.S. forces will not return. The result will be the same as if the U.S. were to withdraw now.

To avoid this outcome, U.S. forces must stay in South Vietnam. But no peace settlement will allow that. Yet the present objective of a peaceful and free South Vietnam cannot be achieved without a settlement or a very large, permanent commitment of U.S. power. It seems that we must give up our objective or resign ourselves to an endless war in Vietnam.

That the American political objective in Vietnam must be reduced also is indicated by the division existing among the American people. A majority would accept almost any sort of compromise. A recent Gallup poll showed a large majority willing to submit the issues to binding arbitration by the United Nations. That would certainly mean American withdrawal. Yet most Americans still reject withdrawal when it is explicitly proposed.

One way to reduce our political objective in Vietnam would be to abandon most of South Vietnam, to cease offensive operations, to defend only certain areas—e.g., Saigon and some surrounding territory—and to deter local attacks by a threat of disproportionate, non-local counter-attack. This alternative to the present objective has been discussed increasingly of late. It might be called "Berlinization." It differs from the "enclave" proposal which was intended to be a step toward an ulterior political resolution. Berlinization would be a resolution in itself.

What would be the advantages of Berlinization? South Vietnamese who do not wish to be put at the mercy of the Viet Cong would be protected. The U.S. would not have completely broken faith with them. We could attempt this resolution immediately, by unilateral action without negotiations. The continuing presence of U.S. power might discourage the extension of Hanoi's and Peking's influence. Most important, death and destruction would be greatly reduced.

What would the disadvantages be? The enemy might not accept the resolution and boundary fighting could continue. The cost of the U.S. military presence and economic support would be substantial and permanent. Some local industry might be developed to partly offset this cost; Saigon could be another Hong Kong. Neither hawks nor doves would find this resolution completely satisfying. And I do not propose it as morally sound, only as the least evil that is likely to be accepted.

Perhaps the American people could agree to Berlinization. Probably U.S. power could make it work. Very likely most allies and many non-aligned nations would be in sympathy with this compromise if the U.S. committed herself to it. Most important, widespread support for a compromise such as Berlinization might offer Mr. Johnson and his advisors an alternative to continued pursuit of the present policy.

Dissent concerning the war, though increasing in intensity, has not had the desired effect on the President. Mr. Johnson surely does not like the domestic political consequences of the war. He would like to end it and turn to concerns nearer his heart. What critics seem to forget is that if U.S. policy is to change, if we are to extricate ourselves from

Vietnam, then Mr. Johnson must be persuaded of the reasonableness of an alternative. Critics may think that the elections this fall will obviate the need for such persuasion, but the elections are months away and they may not help at all to solve the Vietnam problem.

Certainly, members of Congress who say they disapprove of the war but who continue to support it will not convince the President he is mistaken. He naturally interprets their statements as political hedging. Crowds chanting slogans will not convince the President he is mistaken. He sees they are unhappy but he is convinced they are confused. Extremists who resort to violence or theatrical gestures, or who talk as if they were reading a script written in Moscow, Peking, or Hanoi will not convince the President he is mistaken. He considers such persons disloyal or deluded by enemy propaganda. The President and his advisors are intelligent, sane and sincere men. Strong public support for a definite, plausible alternative to the present policy is the only thing that will make them change course.

I think that Mr. Johnson, Mr. Rusk, and other members of the administration deserve some sympathy and considerable respect. They are dealing with a difficult situation. And, considering their interpretation of the problem, Mr. Johnson and his advisors have been acting with considerable restraint both in Vietnam and on the home front. It is quite unfair to give all the moral credit to the dissenters. Mr. Rusk, for example, has shown at least as much courage and good humor as his hecklers.

Once the division over Vietnam is seen to go back to different conceptions of the correct first principles of U.S. foreign policy, it becomes

clear that there is little to be gained from the continuation of the essentially ideological conflict that is now being conducted among us Americans ourselves. Anti-communists should stop saying that political realists are traitors and political realists should stop saying that anti-communists are deluded by myths. Each position is defensible and both positions are questionable, because both include the deterrent strategy as an essential though unwelcome element, as an evil assumed to be "necessary."

The important thing for Americans is to locate some practical basis for compromise among ourselves. No settlement seems to be possible unless present U.S. objectives are reduced without being completely abandoned. If Berlinization is not the answer, some other compromise solution must be found.

Any compromise among Americans must be based on mutual respect. That is why no one who wants peace should use violence in pursuit of it, and the doves must not think and talk about Lyndon Johnson as if he were another Adolf Hitler, while the hawks must not think and speak of critics of present policy as if they were quislings.