

U.S. Foreign Policy

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Critical Decisions: "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy"

Of the many divisive issues in the "turbulent sixties," none was more disruptive than the escalating American commitment in Vietnam. To understand the disillusionment that followed, it is important to be aware of the early decisions of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations that led to that escalation. The following documents review the origins of American involvement in Southeast Asia and explore the process by which significant state policies are arrived at, in this instance the fateful choices made to expand the war in 1965.

Setting the stage for escalation, the Kennedy administration increased the American presence in Vietnam, deploying American advisers in a counterinsurgency program consistent with the flexible response strategy described in your textbook. By September 1963, however, administration leaders had concluded that the American surrogate, Ngo Dinh Diem, was a liability. Newsman Walter Cronkite's interview with Kennedy revealed the president's concern about the ominous developments in Saigon. Following Diem's assassination in October, some weaknesses in his regime became evident, as noted in assistant secretary of state Roger Hillsman's memoir of the Kennedy years.

One year later, the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam forced president Lyndon B. Johnson to give serious attention to a change in American policy. Armed with the sweeping authority granted by the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, Johnson prepared for escalation in early 1965. Examine national security adviser McGeorge Bundy's policy paper against the back-

ground provided by the Defense Department's John T. McNaughton in his memo of November 1964. Identify the reasons why Bundy recommended the substantial escalation, implemented by Johnson in February 1965.

The president's approval of a substantial bombing program aimed at North Vietnam reflected rising anxiety within the administration over the failure of ARVN forces to mount an effective resistance to the Viet Cong guerilla activities in the south. As you examine the February decision, be especially aware of the administration's interpretation of the war's origins.

In July the American military requested a substantial increase in American troop commitment, resulting in a thorough policy review in Washington. The dynamics of the White House decision-making process are revealed in Jack Valenti's account of the internal debate over a decision that would result in the Americanization of the war. Consider the reasoning of all parties in the discussion.

Johnson's acceptance of the majority recommendation was to have tragic consequences. As you examine the president's personal justification for a firm American commitment, be alert to the factors uppermost in his mind. Evaluate Johnson's argument in the light of Townsend Hoopes's frank recollection of the president's procedures and objectives. Think about the policy process as well as personal experience as factors in a decision with grave implications for Asians and Americans alike.

Questions for Analysis

- Using the textbook material on Kennedy's foreign-policy ideas, develop an explanation for the deepening American involvement in Vietnam during his administration. What do the documents reveal about his intentions at the time of his death? Do you find him optimistic or pessimistic? What was the basis for his views? Was his assessment justified?
- What do the documents reveal about the progress of American/ARVN counterinsurgency efforts by late 1964? Why did the problems of South Vietnam remain unresolved? What were the available policy alternatives?
- What was the American interpretation of the origins of the Vietnam War? Why was this problem such an important issue for American policy makers? What is your assessment of the American analysis?
- One interpretation of the Vietnam War is the "quagmire thesis," which suggests that the United States slipped accidentally or unknowingly into a commitment from which it could not extricate itself. In view of the evidence from the documents, does this explanation of American involvement seem accurate? Why or why not?
- In February 1965, President Johnson authorized a significant escalation in the war by approving air strikes in North Vietnam. How was the new policy defended? Was it a responsive action or a preplanned measure? Do the documents reveal the intent of the new bombing policy? Explain.
- Perhaps the crucial decision of the early war years came in July 1965, when the Johnson administration decided on a major increase in American troop commitment in South Vietnam. The documents contain a record of policy discussions held on July 21-22, 1965, during which the proposed escalation was debated, as well as the dissenting recommendation of under secretary of state George W. Ball. What were the issues at stake? How did the administration regard Ball's critique? Why did President Johnson ultimately approve the new troop limits? Did the policy review and advisory process serve the president well? Why or why not?
- When President Johnson attempted to explain his policy on Vietnam to the public, what was his rationale for the American presence? What experiences, motives, and assumptions influenced the thinking of the president and his advisers? How was history used to justify the administration's policy decisions? Evaluate the official argument for American involvement.
- As you review the chain of events from September 1963 to July 1965, do you draw from the documents any conclusions with regard to the reasons for the ultimate failure of American policy in Vietnam? What were the prospects for victory by 1965? How was the term victory defined? What handicapped the American effort? Was there any fatal flaw in American policy? Explain.

1. President John F. Kennedy's Analysis of Prospects for the Diem Regime, 1963

MR. CRONKITE. Mr. President, the only hot war we've got running at the moment is of course the one in Viet-Nam, and we have our difficulties here, quite obviously.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY. I don't think that unless a greater effort is made by the Government to win popular support that the war can be won out there. In the final analysis, it is their war. They are the ones who have to win it or lose it. We can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it—the people of Viet-Nam—against the Communists. We are prepared to continue to assist them, but I don't think that the war can be won unless the people support the effort, and, in my opinion, in the last 2 months the Government has gotten out of touch with the people.

The repressions against the Buddhists, we felt, were very unwise. Now all we can do is to make it very clear that we don't think this is the way to win.

It is my hope that this will become increasingly obvious to the Government, that they will take steps to try to bring back popular support for this very essential struggle.

... [I]n the final analysis it is the people and the Government itself who have to win or lose this struggle. All we can do is help, and we are making it very clear. But I don't agree with those who say we should withdraw. That would be a great mistake. That would be a great mistake. I know people don't like Americans to be engaged in this kind of an effort. Forty-seven Americans have been killed in combat with the enemy, but this is a very important struggle even though it is far away.

We took all this—made this effort to defend Europe. Now Europe is quite secure. We also have to participate—we may not like it—in the defense of Asia.

2. Roger Hilsman Recalls a Realistic Evaluation of the Situation in South Vietnam, 1963

... The Viet Cong took advantage of the preoccupation of the new regime with matters in Saigon to consolidate their holdings in the countryside and

district and province levels and to reward its own men—and the Viet Cong also made the most of the resulting confusion. . . .

[T]he greatest shocks were not how effectively the Viet Cong moved to take advantage of the Diem-Nhu regime's past mistakes but the discovery of just how wild the statistics really were on which the United States had based so much optimism. On October 22, 1963, before the coup, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research had analyzed the statistics and concluded, not only that the trend was downhill, but that the statistics had started downhill in July, before the attack on the pagodas. . . .

But when the coup drew back the curtain, both sides of the argument were amazed at what the true picture really was. First, the Viet Cong had not really been "compressed" into the delta, but were merely lying low in the other regions while they concentrated on infiltrating strategic hamlets and gaining control from within. . . .

move into new ones. The new regime also set about to replace the incompetent and politically dangerous among the Diem-Nhu political appointees at the dis-

Second, a high percentage of attacks initiated by the government—the statistic on which so much American optimism had been based—had been mounted against "targets" where the Viet Cong were known *not* to be, as a means of inflating the statistics without risk of the casualties that would rouse Diem's ire. . . .

Third, the statistics on the number of strategic hamlets and on the number of villages under effective government control were completely false. Vice-President Nguyen Ngoc Tho, for example, informed us that of the 8600 strategic hamlets claimed under the Diem regime, only about 20 per cent actually met the standards. . . .

"*Ab, les statistiques!*" one of the Vietnamese generals exclaimed to an American friend. "Your Secretary of Defense loves statistics. We Vietnamese can give him all he wants. If you want them to go up, they will go up. If you want them to go down, they will go down."

3. Richard McNaughton's Assessment of Conditions in Vietnam, 1964

1. U.S. aims:

(a) To protect U.S. reputation as a counter-subversion guarantor.

(b) To avoid domino effect especially in Southeast Asia.

(c) To keep South Vietnamese territory from Red hands.

(d) To emerge from crisis without unacceptable taint from methods.

2. Present situation:

The situation in South Vietnam is deteriorating. Unless new actions are taken, the new government will probably be unstable and ineffectual, and the VC will

probably continue to extend their hold over the population and territory. It can be expected that, soon (6 months? two years?), (a) government officials at all levels will adjust their behavior to an eventual VC take-over, (b) defections of significant military forces will take place, (c) whole integrated regions of the country will be totally denied to the GVN, (d) neutral and/or left-wing elements will enter the government, (e) a popular front regime will emerge which will invite the U.S. out, and (f) fundamental concessions to the VC and accommodations to the DRV will put South Vietnam behind the Curtain. . . .

4. McGeorge Bundy Recommends "Sustained Reprisal," 1965

I. Introductory

We believe that the best available way of increasing our chance of success in Vietnam is the development and execution of a policy of *sustained reprisal* against North Vietnam—a policy in which air and naval ac-

ceptable, we emphasize that its costs are real. It implies significant U.S. air losses even if no full air war is joined, and it seems likely that it would eventually require an extensive and costly effort against the whole air defense system of North Vietnam. U.S. casualties would be higher—and more visible to American feelings—than those sustained in the struggle in South Vietnam.

Yet measured against the costs of defeat in Vietnam, this program seems cheap. And even if it fails to turn the tide—as it may—the value of the effort seems to us to exceed its cost. . . .

III. Expected Effect of Sustained Reprisal Policy

1. We emphasize that our primary target in advocating a reprisal policy is the improvement of the situation in *South* Vietnam. Action against the North is usually urged as a means of affecting the will of Hanoi to direct and support the VC. We consider this an important but longer-range purpose. The immediate and critical targets are in the South—in the minds of the South Vietnamese and in the minds of the Viet Cong cadres.

2. Predictions of the effect of any given course of action upon the states of mind of people are difficult. It seems very clear that if the United States and the Government of Vietnam join in a policy of reprisal,

tion against the North is justified by and related to the whole Viet Cong campaign of violence and terror in the South.

While we believe the risks of such a policy are

there will be a sharp immediate increase in optimism in the South, among nearly all articulate groups. The Mission believes—and our own conversations confirm—that in all sectors of Vietnamese opinion there is a strong belief that the United States could do much more if it would, and that they are suspicious of our failure to use more of our obviously enormous power. At least in the short run, the reaction to reprisal policy would be very favorable. . . .

8. We cannot assert that a policy of sustained reprisal will succeed in changing the course of the contest in Vietnam. It may fail, and we cannot estimate the odds of success with any accuracy—they may be somewhere between 25% and 75%. What we can say is that even if it fails, the policy will be worth it. At a minimum it will damp down the charge that we did not do all that we could have done, and this charge will be important in many countries, including our own. Beyond that, a reprisal policy—to the extent that it demonstrates U.S. willingness to employ this new norm in counter-insurgency—will set a higher price for the future upon all adventures of guerrilla warfare, and it should therefore somewhat increase our ability to deter such adventures. We must recognize, however, that that ability will be gravely weakened if there is failure for any reason in Vietnam. . . .

(July)

5. A Major Policy Review, 1965

... JOHNSON: Would you please begin, Bob.

[McNamara summarized the Pentagon recommendation to plan to support 200,000 troops in Vietnam by the first of 1966 by calling up the same number of reserves. By mid-1966 approximately 600,000 additional men would be available.]

BALL: Isn't it possible that the VC will do what they did against the French—stay away from confrontation and not accommodate us?

WHEELER: Yes, that is possible, but by constantly harassing them, they will have to fight somewhere. . . .

BALL: Mr. President, I can foresee a perilous voyage, very dangerous. I have great and grave apprehensions that we can win under these conditions. But let me be clear. If the decision is to go ahead, I am committed.

JOHNSON: But, George, is there another course in the national interest, some course that is better than the one McNamara proposes? We know it is

increase, the pressure to strike at the very jugular of North Vietnam will become very great. I am concerned about world opinion. . . . If the war is long and protracted, as I believe it will be, then we will suffer because the world's greatest power cannot defeat guerrillas. Then there is the problem of national politics. Every great captain in history was not afraid to make a tactical withdrawal if conditions were unfavorable to him. The enemy cannot even be seen in Vietnam. He is indigenous to the country. I truly have serious doubt that an army of westerners can successfully fight orientals in an Asian jungle. . . . The least harmful way to cut losses in SVN is to let the government decide it doesn't want us to stay there. Therefore, we should put such proposals to the SVN that they can't accept. Then, it would move to a neutralist position. I have no illusions that after we were asked to leave South Vietnam, that country would soon come under Hanoi control. . . .

RUSK: If the Communist world finds out we will not pursue our commitment to the end, I don't know where they will stay their hand. I have to say I am more optimistic than some of my colleagues. I don't believe the VC have made large advances among the Vietnamese people. It is difficult to worry about massive casualties when we say we can't find the enemy. I feel strongly that one man dead is a massive casualty, but in the sense that we are talking, I don't see large casualties unless the Chinese come in.

LODGE: I feel there is a greater threat to start World War III if we don't go. Can't we see the similarity to our own indolence at Munich [the Munich conference of 1938 when Hitler, with the acquies-

dangerous and perilous, but the big question is, can it be avoided? . . .

BALL: Take what precautions we can, Mr. President. Take our losses, let their government fall apart, negotiate, discuss, knowing full well there will be a probable take-over by the Communists. This is disagreeable, I know. . . .

LODGE: There is not a tradition of a national government in Saigon. There are no roots in the country. Not until there is tranquility can you have any stability. I don't think we ought to take this government seriously. There is simply no one who can do anything. We have to do what we think we ought to do regardless of what the Saigon government does. . . .

BALL: We cannot win, Mr. President. This war will be long and protracted. The most we can hope for is a messy conclusion. There remains a great danger of intrusion by the Chinese. But the biggest problem is the problem of the long war. . . . As casualties

of the West, seized part of Czechoslovakia]. I simply can't be as pessimistic as Ball. We have great seaports in Vietnam. We don't need to fight on roads. We have the sea. Let us visualize meeting the VC on our own terms. We don't have to spend all our time in the jungles. If we can secure our bases, the Vietnamese can secure, in time, a political movement to, one, apprehend the terrorist, and two, give intelligence to the government. . . . The Vietnamese have been dealt more casualties than, per capita, we suffered in the Civil War. The Vietnamese soldier is an uncomplaining soldier. He has ideas he will die for. . . .

JOHNSON: Doesn't it really mean that if we follow Westmoreland's requests we are in a new war? Isn't this going off the diving board?

MCNAMARA: If we carry forward all these recommendations, it would be a change in our policy. We have relied on the South to carry the brunt. Now we would be responsible for satisfactory military outcome. . . .

JOHNSON: But I don't know how we are going to get the job done. There are millions of Chinese. I think they are going to put their stack in. Is this the best place to do it? We don't have the allies we had in Korea. Can we get our allies to cut off supplying the North?

MCNAMARA: No, sir, we can't prevent Japan, Britain, and the others from chartering ships to Haiphong [the North Vietnamese port].

JOHNSON: Are we starting something that in two or three years we simply can't finish?

BROWN: It is costly to us to strangle slowly. But the chances of losing are less if we move in. . . .

B.

(July)

6. George Ball's Dissenting Opinion, 1965

(1) A Losing War: The South Vietnamese are losing the war to the Viet Cong. No one can assure you that we can beat the Viet Cong or even force them to the conference table on our terms, no matter how many hundred thousand *white, foreign* (U.S.) troops we deploy.

No one has demonstrated that a white ground force of whatever size can win a guerrilla war—which is at the same time a civil war between Asians—in jungle terrain in the midst of a population that refuses cooperation to the white forces (and the South Vietnamese) and thus provides a great intelligence advantage to the other side. . . .

(2) The Question to Decide: Should we limit our

liabilities in South Vietnam and try to find a way out with minimal long-term costs?

The alternative—no matter what we may wish it to be—is almost certainly a protracted war involving an open-ended commitment of U.S. forces, mounting U.S. casualties, no assurance of a satisfactory solution, and a serious danger of escalation at the end of the road.

(3) Need for a Decision Now: So long as our forces are restricted to advising and assisting the South Vietnamese, the struggle will remain a civil war between Asian peoples. Once we deploy substantial numbers of troops in combat it will become a war between the U.S. and a large part of the population of

South Vietnam, organized and directed from North Vietnam and backed by the resources of both Moscow and Peiping.

The decision you face now, therefore, is crucial. Once large numbers of U.S. troops are committed to direct combat, they will begin to take heavy casualties in a war they are ill-equipped to fight in a non-cooperative if not downright hostile countryside.

Once we suffer large casualties, we will have started a well-nigh irreversible process. Our involvement will be so great that we cannot—without national humiliation—stop short of achieving our complete objectives. *Of the two possibilities I think humiliation would be more likely than the achievement of our objectives—even after we have paid terrible costs. . . .*

B. 7. President Lyndon Johnson's Defense of the American Presence in Vietnam, 1965 (July)

. . . Three times in my lifetime, in two world wars and in Korea, Americans have gone to far lands to fight for freedom. We have learned at a terrible and brutal cost that retreat does not bring safety and weakness does not bring peace.

It is this lesson that has brought us to Viet-Nam. This is a different kind of war. There are no marching armies or solemn declarations. Some citizens of South Viet-Nam, at times with understandable grievances, have joined in the attack on their own government.

But we must not let this mask the central fact that this is really war. It is guided by North Viet-Nam, and it is spurred by Communist China. Its goal is to conquer the South, to defeat American power, and to extend the Asiatic dominion of communism.

There are great stakes in the balance.

Most of the non-Communist nations of Asia cannot, by themselves and alone, resist the growing might and the grasping ambition of Asian Communism.

Our power, therefore, is a very vital shield. If we are driven from the field in Viet-Nam, then no nation can ever again have the same confidence in American promise or in American protection.

In each land the forces of independence would be considerably weakened and an Asia so threatened by Communist domination would certainly imperil the security of the United States itself.

We did not choose to be the guardians at the gate, but there is no one else.

Nor would surrender in Viet-Nam bring peace, because we learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another country, bringing with it perhaps even larger and crueler conflict, as we have learned from the lessons of history.

Moreover, we are in Viet-Nam to fulfill one of the most solemn pledges of the American nation. Three Presidents—President Eisenhower, President Kennedy, and your present President—over 11 years have committed themselves and have promised to help defend this small and valiant nation.

Strengthened by that promise, the people of South Viet-Nam have fought for many long years. Thousand of them have died. Thousands more have been crippled and scarred by war. We just cannot now dishonor our word, or abandon our commitment, or leave those who believed us and who trusted us to the terror and repression and murder that would follow.

This, then, my fellow Americans, is why we are in Viet-Nam.

B. 8. Townsend Hoopes Analyzes Johnson's Policy Gamble, 1965

... [T]he President's close advisers (excepting Ball) unanimously urged direct U.S. military intervention

dent reluctantly accepted the recommendation, because it was nearly unanimous, because it reinforced his own instincts about Communism and the needs of U.S. prestige, because he lacked the experience and self-confidence in foreign affairs to devise a valid alternative through (or by overriding) his constitutional advisers, and because he was quickly resolved not to become "the first American President to lose a war." But operating always on the instinctive premise that foreign policy is merely a subordinate element of domestic politics, he perceived political safety in continuity. He thus imposed the condition that intervention had to be made to look as though nothing was changing, as though it all flowed inexorably from commitments made by Eisenhower in 1954 and Kennedy in 1961, as though Lyndon Johnson were essentially a victim of history. . . .

To a President convinced he must take new actions, yet obsessed by a need to preserve the posture of continuity, no major and overt actions were possible. He could not ask Congress for a declaration of war without shattering the posture (and without providing a rather specific explanation as to why "vital" U.S. interests were, after ten years of involvement, suddenly at stake). Inhibited by a formula of his own devising, he could only exploit the actions of the other side, seize available pretexts and provocations, and thus start a process that would lead in a series of acceptable steps to the required enlargement of the U.S. military effort.

The Administration positioned itself for such a development. On February 7, 1965, when the Viet Cong attacked American installations at Pleiku, destroying additional U.S. aircraft, killing seven and wounding 109, a retaliatory air strike was immediately ordered. Three days later, an American billet in the coastal city of Qui Nhon was similarly assaulted.

in Vietnam, in order to avoid further deterioration of "our credibility vis-à-vis the Communists." The Presi-

Another air strike was carried out. McGeorge Bundy, who was in Vietnam at the time, later told a newsman, "Pleikus are streetcars," i.e., if one waits watchfully, they come along. Thereafter, the air strikes were almost imperceptibly transformed into a systematic program of bombing the North, but without formal acknowledgment of the shift until long after it was established fact. On March 6, two reinforced U.S. Marine battalions were sent ashore at Da Nang on what was described as "limited duty" related to the perimeter defense of airfields. . . .

By moving with secret purpose behind a screen of bland assurances designed to minimize or mislead, by admitting nothing until pressed by the facts and then no more than was absolutely necessary, by stretching to the limit (and perhaps beyond) the intent of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, the President carried a bemused and half-aware nation far beyond the Eisenhower and Kennedy positions to a radically different involvement in the intractable Vietnam conflict. It would have to be conceded that the performance was a piece of artful, even masterful, political craftsmanship. Unfortunately for Lyndon Johnson and the American people, it could be vindicated only by a quick and decisive military victory. But when the mists of summer confusion lifted, there were 170,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam, U.S. air forces were bombing the North with mounting intensity, and the enemy showed no sign of surrender or defeat. There was the President and there was the country—waist-deep in the Big Muddy. And the integrity, the trust, the credibility without which the leadership of great democratic nations cannot govern were all gravely strained by a pattern of actions that seemed an inextricable blend of high-mindedness, inadvertence, and either massive self-delusion or calculated deceit.

Vietnam and the Crisis of American Empire



The Vietnam War was the most traumatic event in postwar American history. It cost the lives of more than 50,000 Americans and of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese and other Southeast Asians. It shattered the presidency of Lyndon Johnson, dealt the Democratic party a defeat from which it still has not recovered, and divided the American people more deeply than at any other time since the Civil War.

On one level, the war in Vietnam was the product of the Cold War and the projection of the ideas, interests, and strategies associated with that struggle onto a postcolonial world of nationalism and social revolution. It was also the logical outgrowth of America's postwar effort to maintain what Truman adviser Clark M. Clifford had once described as "our conception of a decent world order" or what Henry Luce had earlier called "an American century." The U.S. defeat in Vietnam, combined with the growing economic ascendancy of Japan and Western Europe, would mark the beginning of the end of the postwar "American era."

Among the many questions that continue to preoccupy historians and other students of the Vietnamese War, three in particular stand out: How (and why) did the United States come to tie its own fate to the creation and maintenance of an American-dominated, anticommunist regime in Southeast Asia? Given that commitment, how (and with what consequences) did the United States conduct the war? And finally, what are the lessons of Vietnam, especially in a world no longer dominated by the Cold War but in which the forces of nationalism and social revolution remain very powerful?

DOCUMENTS

As World War II drew to a close and Japanese control over Vietnam waned, the Vietminh, whose forces represented a powerful fusion of communism and nationalism, seized power throughout much of the country. With an eye toward winning U.S. support, they issued a Declaration of Independence (the first document).

which began with a familiar passage. The French effort to regain control of Vietnam and the resulting First Indochina War (1946–1954) posed a dilemma for U.S. policymakers: should the United States accept the victory of a movement that, like that in China, was both communist and nationalist, or should it support the French colonial regime led by Bao Dai? In the second document, State Department officials Raymond B. Fosdick and W. Walton Butterworth argue the two sides of the dilemma. The U.S. government, of course, followed the advice of the latter.

The French defeat was sealed on July 21, 1954, by the Geneva Agreements (the third document), which temporarily divided Vietnam along the 17th parallel, established procedures for the nation's reunification, and sought to insulate it from further outside intervention. Despite the Geneva Accords, the United States soon replaced France as the dominant Western power in Vietnam. Its efforts to create and sustain a new, anticommunist government, however, drew the United States deeper and deeper into conflict with the National Liberation Front (NLF, or Vietcong) in the South and with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam). In 1964, when American warships were fired upon in the Gulf of Tonkin off the North Vietnam coast (where they had been conducting electronic surveillance and providing cover for South Vietnamese attacks), President Lyndon Johnson seized the opportunity to push through Congress the so-called Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (document four), which he would later use to justify the continuing U.S. war in Vietnam.

Although U.S. military advisers had been present in Vietnam since the 1950s, American combat troops did not arrive until early 1965. Not until July 28, 1965, moreover, did the Johnson administration decide to greatly expand the U.S. effort. The fifth document is composed of two memoranda, one by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara urging escalation and one by Under Secretary of State George Ball arguing that the United States should seek a compromise solution. Despite superior weapons and resources, U.S. military forces could never fully subdue their Vietnamese enemies. American soldiers, unprepared to wage a guerrilla war in a foreign land amidst an unfamiliar people, and lacking the broad popular support that had sustained troops in earlier wars, became increasingly frustrated, angry, and disillusioned, as is revealed in interviews collected by Mark Baker in *NAM: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There*, excerpted as the sixth document. A decade after the fall of Vietnam, Americans continued to debate the war's legacy. The Reagan administration in particular sought to overcome what it called the Vietnam syndrome and to prove that "America was back." Thomas J. Vallely, a Marine Corps veteran who later campaigned against the war, strongly criticizes this approach in the final documentary selection.

The Vietnamese Declare Their Independence, 1945

"We hold truths that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

This immortal statement is extracted from the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. Understood in the broader sense, this means: "All peoples on the earth are born equal; every person has the right to live to be happy and free."

The Declaration of Human and Civic Rights proclaimed by the French Revolution in 1791 likewise propounds: "Every man is born equal and enjoys free and equal rights."

These are undeniable truths.

Yet, during and throughout the last eighty years, the French imperialists, abusing the principles of "Freedom, equality and fraternity," have violated the integrity of our ancestral land and oppressed our countrymen. Their deeds run counter to the ideals of humanity and justice.

In the political field, they have denied us every freedom. They have enforced upon us inhuman laws. They have set up three different political regimes in Northern, Central and Southern Viet Nam (Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina) in an attempt to disrupt our national, historical and ethical unity.

They have built more prisons than schools. They have callously ill-treated our fellow-compatriots. They have drowned our revolutions in blood.

They have sought to stifle public opinion and pursued a policy of obscurantism on the largest scale; they have forced upon us alcohol and opium in order to weaken our race.

In the economic field, they have shamelessly exploited our people, driven them into the worst misery and mercilessly plundered our country.

They have ruthlessly appropriated our rice fields, mines, forests and raw materials. They have arrogated to themselves the privilege of issuing banknotes, and monopolised all our external commerce. They have imposed hundreds of unjustifiable taxes, and reduced our countrymen, especially the peasants and petty tradesmen, to extreme poverty.

They have prevented the development of native capital enterprises; they have exploited our workers in the most barbarous manner.

In the autumn of 1940, when the Japanese fascists, in order to fight the Allies, invaded Indochina and set up new bases of war, the French imperialists surrendered on bended knees and handed over our country to the invaders.

Subsequently, under the joint French and Japanese yoke, our people were literally bled white. The consequences were dire in the extreme. From Quang Tri up to the North, two millions of our countrymen died from starvation during the first months of this year.

On March 9th, 1945, the Japanese disarmed the French troops. Again the French either fled or surrendered unconditionally. Thus, in no way have they proved capable of "protecting" us; on the contrary, within five years they have twice sold our country to the Japanese.

Before March 9th, many a time did the Viet Minh League invite the French to join in the fight against the Japanese. Instead of accepting this offer, the French, on the contrary, let loose a wild reign of terror with rigour worse than ever before against Viet Minh's partisans. They even slaughtered a great number of our "*condamnés politiques*" imprisoned at Yen Bay and Cao Bang.

Despite all that, our countrymen went on maintaining, vis-a-vis the French, a humane and even indulgent attitude. After the events of March

9th, the Viet Minh League helped many French to cross the borders, rescued others from Japanese prisons and, in general, protected the lives and properties of all the French in their territory.

In fact, since the autumn of 1940, our country ceased to be a French colony and became a Japanese possession.

After the Japanese surrender, our people, as a whole, rose up and proclaimed their sovereignty and founded the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

The truth is that we have wrung back our independence from Japanese hands and not from the French.

The French fled, the Japanese surrendered. Emperor Bao Dai abdicated, our people smashed the yoke which pressed hard upon us for nearly one hundred years, and finally made our Viet Nam an independent country. Our people at the same time overthrew the monarchical regime established tens of centuries ago, and founded the Republic.

For these reasons, we the members of the Provisional Government representing the entire people of Viet Nam, declare that we shall from now on have no more connections with imperialist France; we consider null and void all the treaties France has signed concerning Viet Nam, and we hereby cancel all the privileges that the French arrogated to themselves on our territory.

The Vietnamese people, animated by the same common resolve, are determined to fight to the death against all attempts at aggression by the French imperialists.

We are convinced that the Allies who have recognized the principles of equality of peoples at the Conferences of Teheran and San Francisco cannot but recognize the independence of Viet Nam.

A people which has so stubbornly opposed the French domination for more than 80 years, a people who, during these last years, so doggedly ranged itself and fought on the Allied side against Fascism, such a people has the right to be free, such a people must be independent.

For these reasons, we, the members of the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, solemnly declare to the world:

"Viet Nam has the right to be free and independent and, in fact, has become free and independent. The people of Viet Nam decide to mobilise all their spiritual and material forces and to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their right of Liberty and Independence."

State Department Advisers
Debate U.S. Support for the
French in Vietnam, 1949

[November 4, 1949]

SECRET

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. [Philip C.] Jessup [Ambassador-at-Large]

In his memorandum of November 1 on Indochina, Mr. [Charles] Yost argues that "a further major advance of Communism will be considered as,

and will in fact be, a defeat for the United States, whether or not we are directly involved." He therefore recommends, among other steps, support of the Bao Dai government (after the March 8 agreements are ratified) economic assistance to Bao Dai, etc.

It seems to me this point of view fails to take into consideration the possible, and I think the probable, consequences of such a decision. In grasping one horn of the dilemma, it ignores the other. My belief is that the Bao Dai regime is doomed. The compromises which the French are so reluctantly making cannot possibly save it. The Indochinese are pressing toward complete nationalism and nothing is going to stop them. They see all too clearly that France is offering them a kind of semi-colonialism; and to think that they will be content to settle for less than Indonesia has gained from the Dutch or India from the British is to underestimate the power of the forces that are sweeping Asia today.

What kind of independence is France offering the Indochinese today in the March 8th agreements?

(1) The foreign policy of Indochina is to be under the final control of France.

(2) French military bases are to be established and the Indochinese Army in time of war is to be under French direction.

(3) France is to be in charge of the so-called General Services:

(a) Control of immigration

(b) Communications

(c) Industrial development of Indochina

(4) Customs receipts are to be divided between France and Indochina in accordance with a formula to be agreed upon.

(5) Extraterritorial courts for French citizens are to be continued.

This shabby business is a mockery of all the professions we have made in the Indonesian case. It probably represents an improvement over the brutal colonialism of earlier years, but it is now too late in the history of the world to try to settle for the price of this cheap substitute. For the United States to support France in this attempt will cost us our standing and prestige in all of Southeast Asia. A lot of that prestige went down the drain with Chiang Kai-shek [President of the then-recently exiled Republic of China]; the rest of it will go down with the Bao Dai regime if we support it. Ambassador [to China, John] Stuart calls our relationship to this regime "shameful" and I am inclined to agree with him.

Ev[erett] Case argued yesterday that it is too late to do anything else except support Bao Dai. I disagree. It is never too late to change a mistaken policy, particularly when the policy involves the kind of damage that our adherence to the Generalissimo [Chiang Kai-shek] brought us. Why get our fingers burned twice?

Ho Chi Minh as an alternative is decidedly unpleasant, but as was pointed out at our meeting with FE yesterday, there may be unpredictable and unseen factors in this situation which in the end will be more favorable to us than now seems probable. The fundamental antipathy of the Indochinese to China is one of the factors. Faced with a dilemma like this the best possible course is to wait for the breaks. Certainly we should not play our cards in such a

way that once again, as in China, we seem to be allied with reaction. Whether the French like it or not, independence is coming to Indochina. Why, therefore, do we tie ourselves to the tail of their battered kite?

RAYMOND B. FOSDICK

[Consultant to the State Department on *Far Eastern Affairs*]

[To:] Mr. [Raymond B.] Fosdick

November 17, 1949

[From:] Mr. [W. Walton] Butterworth [Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs]

Your November 4 Memorandum to Ambassador Jessup Regarding Indochina.

Mr. Jessup has referred to me your memorandum to him of November 4, 1949 regarding Indochina which I have read with much interest.

In general, the considerations which you raise have been very much in the foreground of our thinking. I do not believe, however, that we can necessarily conclude, as you apparently have, that the Bao Dai regime is doomed. There is no doubt in my mind that Bao Dai's chances of establishing a viable non-Communist state are not brilliant, but I feel that under certain circumstances, which admittedly may never arise, he might be successful.

I think I can make our position clear by the following analogy: Because the odds are heavily against a horse entered in a given race, is no reason to withdraw that horse from the race although I agree that there is likewise no reason in these circumstances to back that horse heavily.

I agree that we should not support France in Indochina because such action will damage our standing and prestige in all of Southeast Asia, but I feel that without committing ourselves to another operation similar in some respects to that which took place in China, we must allow Bao Dai his opportunity to succeed and we must do nothing deliberately to eliminate his opportunity.

The Geneva Agreements, 1954

Final declaration, dated the 21st July, 1954, of the Geneva Conference on the problem of restoring peace in Indo-China, in which the representatives of Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Viet-nam, France, Laos, the People's Republic of China, the State of Viet-nam, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America took part.

1. The Conference takes note of the Agreements ending hostilities in Cambodia, Laos and Viet-nam and organizing international control and the supervision of the execution of the provisions of these agreements.
2. The Conference expresses satisfaction at the ending of hostilities in Cambodia, Laos and Viet-nam; the Conference expresses its conviction that

the execution of the provisions set out in the present Declaration and in the Agreements on the cessation of hostilities will permit Cambodia, Laos [and] Viet-nam henceforth to play their part, in full independence and sovereignty, in the peaceful community of nations.

3. The Conference takes note of the declarations made by the Governments of Cambodia and of Laos of their intention to adopt measures permitting all citizens to take their place in the national community, in particular by participating in the next general elections, which, in conformity with the constitution of each of these countries, shall take place in the course of the year 1955, by secret ballot and in conditions of respect for fundamental freedoms.

4. The Conference takes note of the clauses in the Agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Viet-nam prohibiting the introduction into Viet-nam of foreign troops and military personnel as well as of all kinds of arms and munitions. The Conference also takes note of the declarations made by the Governments of Cambodia and Laos of their resolution not to request foreign aid, whether in war material, in personnel or in instructors except for the purpose of the effective defence of their territory and, in the case of Laos, to the extent defined by the Agreements on the cessation of hostilities in Laos.

5. The Conference takes note of the clauses in the Agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Viet-nam to the effect that no military base under the control of a foreign State may be established in the regrouping zones of the two parties, the latter having the obligation to see that the zones allotted to them shall not constitute part of any military alliance and shall not be utilized for the resumption of hostilities or in the service of an aggressive policy. The Conference also takes note of the declarations of the Governments of Cambodia and Laos to the effect that they will not join in any agreement with other States if this agreement includes the obligation to participate in a military alliance not in conformity with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations or, in the case of Laos, with the principles of the Agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Laos or, so long as their security is not threatened, the obligation to establish bases on Cambodian or Laotian territory for the military forces of foreign Powers.

6. The Conference recognizes that the essential purpose of the Agreement relating to Viet-nam is to settle military questions with a view to ending hostilities and that the military demarcation line is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary. The Conference expresses its conviction that the execution of the provisions set out in the present Declaration and in the Agreement on the cessation of hostilities creates the necessary basis for the achievement in the near future of a political settlement in Viet-nam.

7. The Conference declares that, so far as Viet-nam is concerned, the settlement of political problems, effected on the basis of respect for the principles of independence, unity and territorial integrity, shall permit the Vietnamese people to enjoy the fundamental freedoms, guaranteed by democratic institutions established as a result of free general elections by secret

ballot. In order to ensure that sufficient progress in the restoration of peace has been made and that all the necessary conditions obtain for free expression of the national will, general elections shall be held in July 1956, under the supervision of an international commission composed of representatives of the Member States of the International Supervisory Commission, referred to in the Agreement on the cessation of hostilities. Consultations will be held on this subject between the competent representative authorities of the two zones from 20 July 1955 onwards.

8. The provisions of the Agreements on the cessation of hostilities intended to ensure the protection of individuals and of property must be most strictly applied and must, in particular, allow everyone in Viet-nam to decide freely in which zone he wishes to live.

9. The competent representative authorities of the Northern and Southern zones of Viet-nam, as well as the authorities of Laos and Cambodia, must not permit any individual or collective reprisals against persons who have collaborated in any way with one of the parties during the war, or against members of such persons' families.

10. The Conference takes note of the declaration of the Government of the French Republic to the effect that it is ready to withdraw its troops from the territory of Cambodia, Laos and Viet-nam, at the request of the governments concerned and within periods which shall be fixed by agreement between the parties except in the cases where, by agreement between the two parties, a certain number of French troops shall remain at specified points and for a specified time.

11. The Conference takes note of the declaration of the French Government to the effect that for the settlement of all the problems connected with the re-establishment and consolidation of peace in Cambodia, Laos and Viet-nam, the French Government will proceed from the principle of respect for the independence and sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Cambodia, Laos and Viet-nam.

12. In their relations with Cambodia, Laos and Viet-nam, each member of the Geneva Conference undertakes to respect the sovereignty, the independence, the unity and the territorial integrity of the above-mentioned States, and to refrain from any interference in their internal affairs.

13. The members of the Conference agree to consult one another on any question which may be referred to them by the International Supervisory Commission, in order to study such measures as may prove necessary to ensure that the Agreements on the cessation of hostilities in Cambodia, Laos and Viet-nam are respected.

The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, 1964

Whereas naval units of the Communist regime in [North] Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace; and

Whereas these attacks are part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the Communist regime in North Vietnam has been waging against its neighbors and the nations joined with them in the collective defense of their freedom; and

Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of southeast Asia to protect their freedom and has no territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these peoples should be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.

Sec. 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

Sec. 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.

President Lyndon Johnson's Advisers Debate Expanding the War, 1965

Robert S. McNamara

[26 June 1965; revised 1 July 1965]

Introduction

Our objective is to create conditions for a favorable settlement by demonstrating to the VC [Viet Cong]/DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam—North Vietnam] that the odds are against their winning. Under present conditions, however, the chances of achieving this objective are small—and the VC are winning now—largely because the ratio of guerrilla to anti-guerrilla forces is unfavorable to the government. With this in mind, we must choose among three courses of action with respect to South Vietnam: (1) Cut our losses and withdraw under the best conditions that can be arranged; (2) continue at about the present level, with US forces limited to say, 75,000, holding on and playing for the breaks while recognizing that our position will probably grow weaker; or (3) expand substantially the US military pressure against the Viet Cong in the South and the North Viet-

name in the North and at the same time launch a vigorous effort on the political side to get negotiations started. An outline of the third of these approaches follows.

I. Expanded Military Moves

The following military moves should be taken together with the political initiatives in Part II below.

A. Inside South Vietnam. Increase US/SVN military strength in SVN enough to prove to the VC that they cannot win and thus to turn the tide of the war. . . .

B. Against North Vietnam. While avoiding striking population and industrial targets not closely related to the DRV's supply of war material to the VC, we should announce to Hanoi and carry out actions to destroy such supplies and to interdict their flow into and out of North Vietnam. . . .

II. Expanded Political Moves

Together with the above military moves, we should take the following political initiatives in order (a) to open a dialogue with Hanoi, Peking, and the VC looking toward a settlement in Vietnam, (b) to keep the Soviet Union from deepening its military involvement and support of North Vietnam until the time when settlement can be achieved, and (c) to cement the support for US policy by the US public, allies and friends, and to keep international opposition at a manageable level. While our approaches may be rebuffed until the tide begins to turn, they nevertheless should be made. . . .

III. Evaluation of the Above Program

A. Domestic US Reaction. Even though casualties will increase and the war will continue for some time, the United States public will support this course of action because it is a combined military-political program designed and likely to bring about a favorable solution to the Vietnam problem.

B. Communist Reaction to the Expanded Programs.

1. *Soviet.* The Soviets can be expected to continue to contribute materiel and advisors to the North Vietnamese. Increased US bombing of Vietnam, including targets in Hanoi and Haiphong, SAM [surface-to-air missile] sites and airfields, and mining of North Vietnamese harbors, might oblige the Soviet Union to enter the contest more actively with volunteers and aircraft. This might result in minor encounters between US and Soviet personnel.

2. *China.* So long as no US or GVN [Government of Vietnam—South Vietnam] troops invade North Vietnam and so long as no US or GVN aircraft attack Chinese territory, the Chinese probably will not send regular

ground forces or aircraft into the war. However, the possibility of a more active Soviet involvement in North Vietnam might precipitate a Chinese introduction of land forces, probably dubbed volunteers, to preclude the Soviets' taking a pre-eminent position in North Vietnam.

3. *North Vietnam.* North Vietnam will not move towards the negotiating table until the tide begins to turn in the south. When that happens, they may seek to counter it by sending large numbers of men into South Vietnam.

4. *Viet Cong.* The VC, especially if they continue to take high losses, can be expected to depend increasingly upon the PAVN [People's Army of Vietnam, regular forces of North Vietnam] forces as the war moves into a more conventional phase; but they may find ways of continuing almost indefinitely their present intensive military, guerrilla and terror activities, particularly if reinforced with some regular PAVN units. A key question on the military side is whether POL [petroleum-oil-lubricants], ammunition, and cadres can be cut off and if they are cut off whether this really renders the Viet Cong impotent. A key question on the political side is whether any arrangement acceptable to us would be acceptable to the VC.

C. Estimate of Success.

1. *Militarily.* The success of the above program from a military point of view turns on whether the increased effort stems the tide in the South; that in turn depends on two things—on whether the South Vietnamese hold their own in terms of numbers and fighting spirit, and on whether the US forces can be effective in a quick-reaction reserve role, a role in which they have not been tested. The number of US troops is too small to make a significant difference in the traditional 10-1 government-guerrilla formula, but it is not too small to make a significant difference in the kind of war which seems to be evolving in Vietnam—a "Third Stage" or conventional war in which it is easier to identify, locate and attack the enemy. (South Vietnam has 141 battalions as compared with an estimated equivalent number of VC battalions. The 44 US/3d country battalions mentioned above are the equivalent of 100 South Vietnamese battalions.)

2. *Politically.* It is frequently alleged that such a large expansion of US military personnel, their expanded military role (which would put them in close contact and offer some degree of control over South Vietnamese citizens), and the inevitable expansion of US voice in the operation of the GVN economy and facilities, command and government services will be unpopular; it is said that they could lead to the rejection of the government which supported this American presence, to an irresistible pressure for expulsion of the Americans, and to the greatly increased saleability of Communist propaganda. Whether these allegations are true, we do not know.

The political initiatives are likely to be successful in the early stages only to demonstrate US good faith; they will pay off toward an actual settlement only after the tide begins to turn (unless we lower our sights substantially). The tide almost certainly cannot begin to turn in less than a few months, and may not for a year or more; the war is one of attrition and will be a long one. Since troops once committed as a practical matter cannot be

removed, since US casualties will rise, since we should take call-up actions to support the additional forces in Vietnam, the test of endurance may be as much in the United States as in Vietnam.

3. *Generally (CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] estimate).* Over the longer term we doubt if the Communists are likely to change their basic strategy in Vietnam (i.e., aggressive and steadily mounting insurgency) unless and until two conditions prevail: (1) they are forced to accept a situation in the war in the South which offers them no prospect of an early victory and no grounds for hope that they can simply outlast the US and (2) North Vietnam itself is under continuing and increasingly damaging punitive attack. So long as the Communists think they scent the possibility of an early victory (which is probably now the case), we believe that they will persevere and accept extremely severe damage to the North. Conversely, if North Vietnam itself is not hurting, Hanoi's doctrinaire leaders will probably be ready to carry on the Southern struggle almost indefinitely. If, however, both of the conditions outlined above should be brought to pass, we believe Hanoi probably would, at least for a period of time, alter its basic strategy and course of action in South Vietnam.

Hanoi might do so in several ways. Going for a conference as a political way of gaining a respite from attack would be one. Alternatively it might reduce the level of insurgent activity in the hopes that this would force the US to stop its punishment of the North but not prevent the US and GVN from remaining subject to wearying harassment in the South. Or, Hanoi might order the VC to suspend operations in the hopes that in a period of temporary tranquility, domestic and international opinion would force the US to disengage without destroying the VC apparatus or the roots of VC strength. Finally, Hanoi might decide that the US/GVN will to fight could still be broken and the tide of war turned back in favor of the VC by launching a massive PAVN assault on the South. This is a less likely option in the circumstances we have posited, but still a contingency for which the US must be prepared.

George W. Ball

[1 July 1965]

1. *A Losing War:* The South Vietnamese are losing the war to the Viet Cong [formally, the National Liberation Front]. No one can assure you that we can beat the Viet Cong or even force them to the conference table on our terms no matter how many hundred thousand *white foreign* (US) troops we deploy.

No one has demonstrated that a white ground force of whatever size can win a guerrilla war—which is at the same time a civil war between Asians—in jungle terrain in the midst of a population that refuses cooperation to the white forces (and the SVN [South Vietnam]) and thus provides a great intelligence advantage to the other side. Three recent incidents vividly illustrate this point:

(a) The sneak attack on the Danang Air Base which involved penetration of a defense perimeter guarded by 9,000 Marines. *This raid was possible only because of the cooperation of the local inhabitants.*

(b) The B-52 raid that failed to hit the Viet Cong *who had obviously been tipped off.*

(c) The search-and-destroy mission of the 173rd Airborne Brigade which spent three days looking for the Viet Cong, suffered 23 casualties, and never made contact with the enemy *who had obviously gotten advance word of their assignment.*

2. *The Question to Decide:* Should we limit our liabilities in South Viet-Nam and try to find a way out with minimal long-term cost?

The alternative—no matter what we may wish it to be—is almost certainly a protracted war involving an open-ended commitment of US forces, mounting US casualties, no assurance of a satisfactory solution, and a serious danger of escalation at the end of the road.

3. *Need for a Decision Now:* So long as our forces are restricted to advising and assisting the South Vietnamese, the struggle will remain a civil war between Asian peoples. Once we deploy substantial numbers of troops in combat it will become a war between the United States and a large part of the population of South Viet-Nam, organized and directed from North Viet-Nam and backed by the resources of both Moscow and Peiping.

The decision you face now, therefore, is crucial. Once large numbers of US troops are committed to direct combat they will begin to take heavy casualties in a war they are ill-equipped to fight in a non-cooperative if not downright hostile countryside.

Once we suffer large casualties we will have started a well-nigh irreversible process. Our involvement will be so great that we cannot—without national humiliation—stop short of achieving our complete objectives. *Of the two possibilities I think humiliation would be more likely than the achievement of our objectives—even after we had paid terrible costs.*

4. *A Compromise Solution:* Should we commit US manpower and prestige to a terrain so unfavorable as to give a very large advantage to the enemy—or should we seek a compromise settlement which achieves less than our stated objectives and thus cut our losses while we still have the freedom of maneuver to do so?

5. *Costs of Compromise Solution:* The answer involves a judgment as to the costs to the United States of such a compromise settlement in terms of our relations with the countries in the area of South Viet-Nam, the credibility of our commitments, and our prestige around the world. In my judgment, if we act before we commit substantial US forces to combat in South Viet-Nam we can, by accepting some short-term costs, avoid what may well be a long-term catastrophe. I believe we have tended greatly to exaggerate the costs involved in a compromise settlement. An appreciation of probable costs is contained in the attached memorandum.

6. With these considerations in mind, I strongly urge the following program:

A. Military Program

1. Complete all deployments already announced (15 battalions) but decide not to go beyond the total of 72,000 men represented by this figure.
2. Restrict the combat role of American forces to the June 9 announcement, making it clear to General Westmoreland that this announcement is to be strictly construed.
3. Continue bombing in the North but avoid the Hanoi-Haiphong area and any targets nearer to the Chinese border than those already struck.

B. Political Program

1. In any political approaches so far, we have been the prisoners of whatever South Vietnamese Government was momentarily in power. If we are ever to move toward a settlement it will probably be because the South Vietnamese Government pulls the rug out from under us and makes its own deal or because we go forward quietly without advance pre-arrangement with Saigon.
2. So far we have not given the other side a reason to believe that there is *any* flexibility in our negotiating approach. And the other side has been unwilling to accept what *in their terms* is complete capitulation.
3. Now is the time to start some serious diplomatic feelers, looking towards a solution based on some application of the self-determination principle.
4. I would recommend approaching Hanoi rather than any of the other probable parties (the National Liberation Front, Moscow or Peiping). Hanoi is the only one that has given any signs of interest in discussion. Peiping has been rigidly opposed. Moscow has recommended that we negotiate with Hanoi. The National Liberation Front has been silent.
5. There are several channels to the North Vietnamese but I think the best one is through their representative in Paris, Mai Van Bo. Initial feelers with Bo should be directed toward a discussion both of the four points we have put forward and the four points put forward by Hanoi as a basis for negotiation. We can accept all but one of Hanoi's four points and hopefully we should be able to agree on some ground rules for serious negotiation—including no pre-conditions.
6. If the initial feelers lead to further secret exploratory talks we can inject the concept of self-determination that would permit the Viet Cong some hope of achieving some of their political objectives through local elections or some other device.
7. The contact on our side should be handled through a non-governmental cutout (possibly a reliable newspaperman who can be repudiated.)
8. If progress can be made at this level the basis can be laid for a multi-national conference. At some point obviously the government of South Viet-Nam will have to be brought on board but I would postpone this step until after a substantial feeling out of Hanoi.
9. Before moving to any formal conference we should be prepared to agree that once the conference is started (a) the United States will stand down its bombing of the North, (b) the South Vietnamese will initiate no

offensive operations in the South, and (c) the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam] will stop terrorism and other aggressive acts in the South.

10. Negotiations at the conference should aim at incorporating our understanding with Hanoi in the form of a multi-national agreement guaranteed by the United States, the Soviet Union and possibly other parties, and providing for an international mechanism to supervise its execution.

War Stories as Told by the Combatants, Collected 1981

Boot Camp

The bus pulls into the receiving area. There's a guy with a Smokey Bear hat out there really looking lean and mean. He gets on the bus and starts reeling this shit off, "All right, you'll grab your bag. You'll get off the bus. You'll fall into the yellow footprints painted on the pavement . . ."

It was really funny, a take-off from *Gomer Pyle*. The guy within arm's reach of the Marine was laughing just like everybody else. Smokey Bear whipped around and smacked him right in the face, knocked him halfway through the window. His head bounced off the luggage rack and he reeled back out in the aisle.

Smiles froze on faces. My heart stopped. We realized, "Hey, this guy isn't fooling around. He's going to come through this bus and kick all our asses." People started flying out of the door.

I came down with a couple of guys who were Puerto Rican street gang material from the big city and they thought they were bad news. They fell down the steps on top of me. We all stumble into the right footprints on the ground and Smokey marches us into some barracks and stands us at attention. He's yelling and screaming, really intimidating. You dumped all of your stuff out on a table and he went by and just threw everything away. We were too scared to say anything to him.

I was next to this big Puerto Rican dude. Smokey catches the dude looking at him out of the corner of his eye. He says, "Are you eye-fucking me, boy? I don't want your seuzzy eyes looking at me. You think this is funny? I hope you fuck up. I hate you Puerto Rican cocksuckers."

Eyes in the back of his head, Smokey sees a guy's eyes flick and he's there to punch him in the chest, five feet to the wall and back again. My knees were shaking. "What the fuck have I gotten myself into?"

Then they march us into some barracks. Bare mattresses and springs. It's like a concentration camp. They turn the lights on and leave us there. My stomach is in a knot. I'm lying there thinking, "What happened to my world?" Reality has suddenly turned to liquid shit before my very eyes. Kids

From *NAM: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There* by Mark Baker. Copyright 1982. Reprinted with the permission of William Morrow & Co., Inc., Publishers, New York.

were crying, rolling in their bunks. I'm so depressed, I can't believe this is happening to me.

We're there for a couple of hours. You're in your civilian clothes and you've been in them for a couple of days. You feel like shit. When they march you out, all of a sudden it's by the numbers. All your hair's gone. You don't even know who you are. You get a duffel bag and they're dumping things in it. Everybody hates you and they're fucking with you left and right. You get your shots. You stand at attention. People are passing out on their feet. Going rigid and falling on their faces and the corpsmen are laughing at them. Nobody talks to you, they scream. Nothing they give you fits. You look like shit and you feel like shit. A bunch of drill instructors put you back in receiving and that's when the shit really hits the fan.

"Going Down South"

"Going down South" they called it in Okinawa. Braniff Airlines comes down all painted in their designer colors, puce and canary yellow. There were stewardesses on the plane, air conditioning. You would think we were going to Phoenix or something. But you know that you're going to Vietnam with a plane full of Marines.

It's about a two-and-a-half-hour flight down there. I was looking out the window as we were landing in Da Nang and there ain't nothing. It's just sticks, hovels with tin roofs. It's Dogpatch. That's what they called the area where we were.

The door opens and there's a blast of hot air that drops you to your knees. The head stewardess gets up and says, "Well, we're here in Da Nang. We hope you boys have a good tour. We'll see you one year from now." Those words kicked in an echo chamber in my mind—One Year From Now. Oh shit.

The First Guys I Saw Killed

I remember the first guys I saw killed. We were providing security for Army engineers on an island formed where two rivers split apart. The island was an R&R resort for the VC. The engineers were bulldozing it flat, making the whole place into a big parking lot to deny the VC that area. We'd go on sweeps and they would follow us in with the bulldozers. I was weapons platoon commander which meant I just sort of tagged along with one CO. It was all horseshit.

We were walking along and there was an explosion, we got popped. Then just dead silence.

"Corpsman up!" I was right next to the corpsman, so I went running with him. There was a guy up the trail who had been hit and a guy right next to us. The man closer to us was writhing on the ground, his back arching up. He was gasping, hoarse, dragging air into his lungs. There was a perfect round hole about the size of a pencil, right in the middle of his sternum.

Then he just stopped moving. The corpsman started giving him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and I was giving him heart massage. No response. So the doc gave him a tracheotomy, opened his throat and stuck in a black tube. I started breathing through that and the corpsman gave him heart massage and we switched off.

We did it for about five minutes to no avail. The kid was gone, dead. Except for that little hole, there was no blood—just that little hole in his chest.

I looked at him—blond, All-American, crewcut with these pale ice-blue eyes. I stood up and looked back into those eyes. Those eyes looked right through me, right through my skull and out the back of my head. I turned around and looked at the sky in the direction that his eyes were looking to see what he was staring at. I thought I was going to see something.

It ran through my mind for a moment, "Did his mother feel something, did his father feel something, did anybody? Was she reaching for a can of peas in the supermarket and feel a tug or a jolt and not know what it was? Does anybody close to him know that he just died?"

He Bought the Farm

I was following a blood trail. He was losing more and more blood. It was twenty minutes after the fire fight, so some of the blood was dry right by the first bushes I came to. The color really changes as you follow along. It gets more bubbly, frothy-looking and wetter. Which means that you're gaining on the guy.

The tension really increases. I'd seen all those stories of these fucking heroes who are badly wounded and stay behind to keep the heat off their buddies. American war movies are filled with those scenes. You figured the Vietnamese are about the same.

As the trail got fresher my steps got slower. In the beginning there was a lot of blood, but I guess he probably stemmed the flow. When I came to him, he had this tourniquet on his left leg. That's where he got shot pretty bad. He'd done a good job with the tourniquet. You would figure that—well, maybe not, I guess he was an ignorant North Vietnamese soldier—he could have just put up a white flag and I would have left him alone, you know just captured him. He could have surrendered or something. I wasn't out there to fuck with him at that point.

I heard a noise and me and a couple of guys nearby all fired at one time and put about 300 rounds in that one bush. That was it. He bought the farm. We were pretty upset when we saw the guy. He didn't have a piece in his hand, he didn't have a weapon on him. About fifteen feet from his body was an AK.

He had on black tennis shoes, black canvas with the ball on the ankles like you used to wear when you were a kid. I had seen the print of his sneakers every once in a while on the ground.

An American P.O.W.

They harped on this business of, "Cooperate and we'll let you go home. Know the truth and you'll know what you have to do. As soon as you demonstrate your good faith, we'll let you go home." Demonstrating good faith was doing whatever they told you to do. In this case, they wanted me to write a political statement and sign it, which I refused to do. Eventually they wrote one for me and I refused to sign it, too.

Then the really severe physical torture started. Initially they were kind of crude, just being beaten with a heavy stick. Later on they became more sophisticated with their torture, particularly after I was moved to North Vietnam. One of their most effective tortures is one we called the rope trick. They tie your body in an extremely uncomfortable position and leave you like that for a couple of days.

Pain is a natural defense mechanism of the body. You touch something that's hot and the signals go up to the brain. The brain sends a message back to the muscles to pull back within a split second. It's an electrical system. Just like any electrical system, the human nervous system has circuit breakers built into it, because the brain can stand just so much pain sensation before it causes damage. When the pain gets too great, these circuit breakers shut off any feeling of pain. I'm sure you've heard cases of people losing limbs in a car wreck or other accident and they say they feel nothing. Several days later when the pain begins to return, the doctor is pleased because that means they are getting better. The pain has actually subsided before they can feel it. That same principle applies to torture.

A beating is not effective torture because after the first few blows, you don't feel anything. To force a person into an extremely uncomfortable position and then make him stay that way causes excruciating pain—but not quite enough to activate the circuit breakers.

One time I was put into a cage that was about eighteen inches square and five feet long. I'm broader than that in the shoulders and well over five feet tall, so you can imagine the cramping effect that had. I was chained hand and foot with wrist locks jammed tightly together, crammed into this cage and left there for three months. I had refused to bow to them. After three months they took me out and beat the living hell out of me and eventually taught me to bow. But I made them work for it.

Interrogating a Captured Vietnamese

When we had to interrogate some of the prisoners, we used to take three gooks up in a helicopter about a thousand feet. We're with an intelligence officer, G2 section from the general staff. He's in civilian clothes. We got our Kit Carson up with us to do the translation.

He grabs the first one and says, "Talk." We say, "*Crackadill, sakmile, crackadill.*" *Crackadill* was "to kill."

The first gook wouldn't talk, Intelligence give you the signal, thumb

toward the door, and you push the guy out. The other two gooks look to see this guy going out the helicopter door.

If the second guy didn't look like he wants to say something or he's lying, the intelligence officer says, "This guy out the door." You'd kick him out, because you're supposed to do what these intelligence officers tell you to do. They're speaking for the Army. The last prisoner is crying and he's like a typewriter. He's talking Vietnamese like crazy. That's human nature. This guy is running his mouth. You can't keep him from talking. You'd have to gag him to make him shut up. The Kit Carson is translating all this thing.

Before we get back to the base camp, after this guy do all the talking and the intelligence officer document everything, they kick him out the door anyway. Even the good gook, they'd give the word on him and throw him out the door.

We went up with three prisoners and we come back with zero prisoners. Nobody looks around and asks, "You went up with three prisoners, what happened to them?" We come back, and the intelligence officer goes back to wherever they go back to and carry the information to the command.

We're Supposed to Be Saving These People

I know Marines that made more gooks than they killed, just by treating them bad. It's funny when you don't expect to get mercy from anyone, you're very reluctant to show it. So you really breed hideous people over there, for the cause of National Defense. If you sit down here on the couch, it seems ugly. At the time, they weren't ugly. They were the things to do. Considering what else is going on this was nothing.

I Blew Up a Village One Time

I blew up a village one time. It was a village outside of which my squad got ambushed. Myself and my three squad leaders went in with three demolition packs, twenty pounds of C4 apiece.

We crimped the blasting caps onto the time fuses with our teeth. Stick them in the C4, load up the hooch with whatever there was. Smoke a cigarette to light up the fuse. Time it.

"Okay, we're lighting now."

"Hey, mine's not lit."

"You better get it fast, man, 'cause mine's lit."

"You got about five or six seconds. Go." Then we hauled ass out of there and BLAM. That was fun.

All the people were gone by then, so it was nothing but pigs and chickens. We got in line and shot the shit out of the livestock, pigs squealing across in front of us. It was a way of blowing off steam. We did My Lai with farm animals.

They Got Pears

We were running security on a road in a free-fire zone. In Vietnam you had a friendly zone and you had a free-fire zone. Anything that crossed into the free-fire zone was fair game. Any gook—woman, man, boy, girl—it was game to you. Anybody come along with a cart or just walking and we would go through their stuff.

We was in the field twenty days or so. Up in the depots in the rear they got steaks. We didn't get steaks. We ate mainly C-rations, lousy C-rations and dry things that came out of cans.

These gooks are riding by in a Lambretta, which is like a motorbike except you sit people in the back. We say, "Hey, let's stop these gooks." So we came out of the bush and we pulled them over to the side.

"What you got there? Hey, you VC? What do you got?" It was a baby-san and a papa-san. I guess she was a teenager, maybe about fifteen or sixteen. The papa-san was forty, a mature man.

They had a can of pears! American pears in a big green can marked with a big U.S. on it in large print. We say, "Isn't this some shit. Here we are in the field, we don't know what pears is. They got pears! and we don't have pears." I'll never forget the guys' faces in the unit from the GIs up to the captain. We are shit in the field, and the guys in the rear have given these gooks pears, man.

Right away a guy took a bayonet and he opened up the pears. We're fighting, literally fighting, to eat pears. Food! It wasn't fresh, but it was something other than the shit they put together chemically and pressed into a can. It was like the man brought me steak and potatoes and I was back in my mother's house eating Sunday dinner.

Most of the guys didn't get any pears. I got a few pears and I got to drink the juice in the can. So we turned around and we said, "Hey, ain't this something? These gooks is riding around with pears. How did you get pears?"

"GI give them to me." He worked in a mess hall back in the rear somewhere.

"The GIs gave you pears? Oh, yeah? For that, we're going to screw your daughter." So we went running, taking the daughter. She was crying. I think she was a virgin. We pulled her pants down and put a gun to her head.

Guys are taking turns screwing her. It was like an animal pack. "Hey, he's taking too long to screw her." Nobody was turning their back or nothing. We just stood on line and we screwed her.

I was taking her body by force. Guys were standing over her with rifles, while I was screwing her. She says, "Why are you doing this to me? Why?" Some of the gooks could talk very good. "Hey, you're black, why are you doing this to me?"

We turned back to the father and we said, "So, you got pears. GIs are nice enough to give them to you." All the Vietnamese carried this ID card. Big old plastic ID card with a picture on it that says that they are okay in

the Republic of Vietnam. So we ripped up the ID card. "Hey, we got a VC here, fellas. A VC stealing government stuff, huh? So you must be an infiltrator." We shot him.

As I said we was in that *free-fire zone*. We just started pumping rounds into him until the guy just busts open. He didn't have a face anymore.

Baby-san, she was crying. So a guy just put a rifle to her head and pulled the trigger just to put her out of the picture. Then we start pumping her with rounds. After we got finished shooting her, we start kicking them and stomping on them. That's what the hatred, the frustration was. After we raped her, took her cherry from her, after we shot her in the head, you understand what I'm saying, we literally start stomping her body.

And everybody was laughing about it. It's like seeing the lions around a just-killed zebra. You see them in these animal pictures, *Wild Kingdom* or something. The whole pride comes around and they start feasting on the body. We kicked the face in, kicked in the ribs and everything else.

Then we start cutting the ears off. We cut her nose off. The captain says, "Who's going to get the ears? Who's going to get the nose? So-and-so's turn to get the ears." A good friend of mine—a white guy from California—he flipped out in the Nam. The dude would fall down and cry, fall down and beg somebody to let him have the ears. Captain says, "Well, let So-and-so get the ears this time. You had the last kill. Let him get it this time." So we let this guy get the ears. We cut off one of her breasts and one guy got the breast. But the trophy was the ears. I had got a finger from the papa-san. That was about it, what I got from the incident. We let the bodies stay there mutilated.

Coming Home

I got back to the World, but this wasn't the World that I had left. I was born again. Like the Christians say, "Be born again." I did not fit into the real world anymore. For that twelve months in the Nam, I used to sit down and imagine what I would do in the World when I got back. I'll be with this woman, I'm going to do this and that. I came back to the World and I see people rioting about Nam. People hated GIs for being in the Nam. They was blaming us. I flipped out. I couldn't believe it.

I was in a VA hospital the first time I heard anybody saying, "Those fucking guys over in Vietnam. Look what they're doing." Man, it did something to me. Like I was guilty. I was a criminal. You had sentenced me to die. These are the same people from when I left the year before. I'm back but I don't belong. I wanted to go back to the Nam. I would have re-upped, but I was all wounded. This world was alienating, what people was talking about, what people was liking.

When my mom came to see me, she was a different person. I didn't hate her or nothing like that. But it was a different person. I couldn't communicate with her. I just looked at her. We talked and it was over.

I would just sit in the room in the hospital and my mind would flash back. I would have dreams about the Nam, the Nam and action. I could

see myself fighting, when I'm actually sitting in a VA hospital on the bed. I could see myself back in the Nam.

This is not the World. Lord, how can they do this to me? How can they bring me back to a World where I don't know what they're talking about? The United States is saying one thing. The people are saying something else. President Nixon is talking about the Silent Majority. The people are in the streets protesting. Who are these people out here protesting while there are guys in the Nam going through psychological and physical hell? Walking in monsoon when it rains for months at a time. Being sniped at. Being killed. Stepping in booby traps. Catching jungle rot. Getting eaten up by leeches. How can they say the war is unjust? How can you walk out of Nam and leave guys out in the field or missing in action?

I wasn't thinking they were un-American, but man, somebody pulled the rug out from under us. Somebody stabbed us in the back. The average person in the peace struggle didn't understand. We got stabbed in the back by the Army, while we were in the Army. We got stabbed in the back when we got back to the United States by the Peace people. We got stabbed in the back by President Nixon. He's talking nonsense. Henry Kissinger is talking about peace and ending the war. All this is garbage.

Wrong, Rambo! A Vietnam Veteran Looks Back, 1985

August 13, 1969. I was a 19-year-old member of India Company, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines. As we moved through a strip of Vietnam known to the Americans as the Arizona Territory, we walked into an L-shaped ambush sprung by the North Vietnamese Army.

The enemy's opening fire instantly killed our battalion commander and his radio operator. Pinned to the ground in a rice paddy, the rest of us faced a choice: lie low and wait to be picked off one at a time, or charge the enemy guns, and, with luck, some of us would shoot our way to safety.

Our wounded captain gave the order to charge. Somehow we outfought the enemy and turned them back. But not without a heavy price: Half of India Company lay dead or wounded.

The next day, those of us who survived rested in the tranquil refuge of China Beach, just 23 miles from where the battle had taken place, and began to write letters to the families of those who didn't. Searching for reasons to explain their sons' sacrifice, I sat on China Beach and questioned why America had come to Vietnam. I didn't have the answers. I decided then that those who had died in Vietnam had died for nothing.

After my tour in Vietnam was up, I came back to the States and fought to end the war. There had to be another way to be for freedom in the world than through tragedies like Vietnam. By ending the war, we could bring the survivors home from a place where they never should have been.

On the 14th of August, 1985, however, 16 years to the day since my first time there, I returned to China Beach. I came not as a Marine in combat

Thomas J. Vallely, "Dishonoring the Vietnam Tragedy." *Boston Globe*, November 10, 1985.

gear, but as a civilian, a guest of the Vietnamese government, a member of the first group of American veterans to travel the land we fought upon with veterans of the Vietnamese army.

China Beach hadn't changed much. I thought again of those who had died. I thought of those who had come home wounded in body or spirit, many of them to die later in the States. I thought of how long it took our country to honor their service, finally on a black marble wall in Washington, on Veterans Day just three years ago tomorrow.

More than anything else, though, I no longer felt, as I had 16 years before, that my friends had died for nothing. For in their dying, we, as a nation, became wiser about ourselves, about the world and our role in it.

The members of India Company, and millions of other Americans, fought to change Vietnam. But, in the end, Vietnam changed little. What changed was America. Most Americans no longer accept the illusion that we can defy history, as we tried to in Vietnam. We should mourn the loss of American lives in Vietnam. We needn't mourn the loss of the illusions that brought us there.

Today, as a veteran, I am bothered that some would dishonor the memory of those who died in Vietnam by reviving America's shattered illusions. "Are you gonna let us win this time?" Rambo demands to know as impressionable kids watch in air-conditioned awe. As the Rambo illusion would have it, our gallant soldiers would've won in Vietnam if only they'd been turned loose by the bureaucratic wimps on the home front.

Wrong, Rambo, dead wrong. The bureaucrats didn't put us into a winnable war and then tie our hands. What they did was actually far worse. They put us into a war that was as unwinnable as it was immoral. They put us into a war that even they could not explain, and, so, young men died for old men's pride.

The fact is, the Vietnam War was probably settled long before we ever got there. Ho Chi Minh's forces gained dominance with their victory at Dien Bien Phu, a good decade before the first US Marine landed. And our ally, what we knew for 20 years as South Vietnam, wasn't a real nation but a make-believe government with little popular support. An illusion.

The illusion of American invincibility should have been left behind in Vietnam. But, then, there's Rambo, whose appeal, unfortunately, is not limited to youthful moviegoers alone. The Rambo mystique even invades Washington: While policy makers fall over themselves to flex American muscle in the world, macho journalists, from the safety of their typewriters, lob verbal grenades at tiny Third World countries.

The truth is, these veterans of tough-talk know as much about war as the gullible teen-agers flocking to suburban mall theaters for a glimpse of Rambo.

On China Beach this August, I wondered if we could have handled Vietnam differently. We tried to beat history—to stop the inevitable from happening, and we were wrong. We should learn from Vietnam that history can't be beaten.

But neither can history be ignored. We cannot allow the need to avoid another Vietnam let us selfishly retreat from the realistic problems of the world. America *does* have a role to play in the world, as a moral force, a beacon of hope, a model of democratic idealism. We cannot turn our backs to injustice, whatever its form, be it terrorism, tyranny, poverty, hunger or torture.

We will come closer to knowing how we should engage the world if we understand what happened to us in Vietnam. We entered that war in defiance of history, we stayed there in defiance of morality. If we, as a nation, are to live up to our moral responsibilities and stand up for freedom around the globe, we had better be able to answer the questions I asked myself as a Marine at China Beach.

15 THE GULF OF TONKIN RESOLUTION (1964)

Whereas naval units of the Communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace; and

Whereas these attacks are part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the Communist regime in North Vietnam has been waging against its neighbors and the nations joined with them in the collective defense of their freedom; and

Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of southeast Asia to protect their freedom and has no territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these peoples should be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.

Sec. 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

Sec. 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.

My fellow Americans: One week ago, half a world away, our Nation was faced by the challenge of deliberate and unprovoked acts of aggression in southeast Asia.

The cause of peace clearly required that we respond with a prompt and unmistakable reply.

As Commander in Chief the responsibility was mine — and mine alone. I gave the orders for that reply, and it has been given.

But, as President, there rested upon me still another responsibility — the responsibility of submitting our course to the representatives of the people, for them to verify it or veto it.

I directed that to be done last Tuesday.

Within 24 hours the resolution before me now had been placed before each House of Congress. In each House the resolution was promptly examined in committee and reported for action.

In each House there followed free and serious debate.

In each House the resolution was passed on Friday last — with a total of 502 votes in support and 2 opposed.

Thus, today, our course is clearly known in every land.

There can be no mistake — no miscalculation — of where America stands or what this generation of Americans stand for.

The unanimity of the Congress reflects the unanimity of the country.

The resolution is short. It is straightforward. I hope that it will be read around the world.

The position of the United States is stated plainly. To any armed attack upon our forces, we shall reply.

To any in southeast Asia who ask our help in defending their freedom, we shall give it.

In that region there is nothing we covet, nothing we seek — no territory, no military position, no political ambition.

Our one desire — our one determination — is that the people of southeast Asia be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way.

This resolution stands squarely within the four corners of the Constitution of the United States. It is clearly consistent with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations.

This is another new page in the outstanding record of accomplishments the 88th Congress is writing.

Americans of all parties and philosophies can be justly proud — and justly grateful. Proud that democracy has once again demonstrated its capacity to act swiftly and decisively against aggressors. Grateful that there is in our National Government understanding, accord, and unity between the executive and legislative branches — without regard to partisanship.

This is a great strength that we must always preserve.

This resolution confirms and reinforces powers of the Presidency. I pledge to all Americans to use those powers with all the wisdom and judgment God grants to me.

It is everlastingly right that we should be resolute in reply to aggression and steadfast in support of our friends.

But it is everlastingly necessary that our actions should be careful and should be measured.

We are the most powerful of all nations — we must strive also to be the most responsible of nations.

So, in this spirit, and with this pledge, I now sign this resolution.