VIETNAM
WAS IT WORTH IT?

BY WALT W. ROSTOW

"If we mindlessly walk away...we shall make sure it was not worth it."

The costs to us of the struggle in Southeast Asia make sense only if you agree with the last six American Presidents that the United States will be endangered if a potentially hostile power gains control of Asia, and that control over Southeast Asia is critical to the fate of all Asia.

Southeast Asia contains nearly 300 million people – as many as Africa or Latin America. It commands the sea routes of the South Pacific and the eastern Indian Ocean. It is a buffer area separating the two giants, China and India. If any single power attempts to seize control of Southeast Asia, the other major powers must instinctively react.

America, for example, passively stood by while the Japanese took over Manchuria in 1931 and then seized the major cities of China. But in 1940-41, the Japanese moved into Indochina and toward Indonesia. President Roosevelt had every interest at that time in concentrating American attention and resources on rearming at home, and on aid to Britain and, then, to Russia. But he refused to accept passively the Japanese take-over of Southeast Asia and the balance of power in Asia, including control of the sea routes to Australia, New Zealand and India. He cut off shipments to Japan of oil and scrap metal, and he froze Japanese assets in the U.S.

Indochina was at the center of our diplomatic dialogue with Japan right down to the eve of Pearl Harbor.

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For similar reasons, President Truman threw our resources behind the French in Indochina at the time of the Korean War, despite reservations about the viability of French colonialism.

The same rationale lay behind President Eisenhower's (and the Senate's) support for SEATO in 1954-55; President Kennedy's policies in Laos and South Vietnam and his flat affirmation of the domino theory on September 9, 1963; President Johnson's basic Vietnam decisions of 1965; and President Nixon's insistence that America withdraw from Vietnam in ways compatible with stable peace.

Throughout this period of at least 30 years, it has been U.S. policy to sustain the independence of Southeast Asia from potentially hostile control. But sacrifice for a policy that cannot succeed is meaningless or worse. What have the sacrifices since 1965 achieved?

Look back and consider the panorama of Asia in 1965.

☐ South Vietnam was on the verge of defeat and take-over, as the weight of North Vietnamese regular-army units, introduced in 1964, was fully felt.

☐ Indonesia was out of the United Nations, in confrontation with Malaysia, making common cause with Peking, and eager to complete what both Jakarta and Peking described as a pincer movement to envelop the whole of Southeast Asia, through a "Jakarta-Phnom-Penh - Hanoi - Peking - Pyongyang Axis"—a concept enunciated on August 17, 1965, by President Sukarno himself.

☐ Peking was proclaiming that "Thailand is next."

All of Asia knew that its future hung in the balance. Robert Menzies, then Prime Minister of Australia, said if Vietnam fell, it would be "not so very long" before Australia would be menaced. And the danger was still closer and more obvious in the other capitals—as, for example, Macapagal, in Manila, and Abdul Rahman, in Kuala Lumpur, made clear.

The domino theory was not just a theory in the first seven months of 1965: every observer of the scene knew the dominoes were about to fall unless American power was rushed into the balance.

Then, at the end of July, 1965, President Johnson moved to commit American forces.

Now, six years later, there is a different Asia.

☐ South Vietnam has harvested the greatest rice crop in its history and is about to conduct its second presidential election under a democratic constitution. Well over 90 percent of its population live under reasonably reliable government administration.

☐ Indonesia is independent and advancing hopefully in economic and social progress, after the successful defense of its independence in October, 1965, which, incidentally, triggered the Cultural Revolution in China.

☐ Asian regional organizations have come into being; for example, the Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Asian Development Bank. These offer great promise that in the future, Asians, working together, can increasingly shape their own destiny.

☐ Japan, now the third industrial power in the world, is evidently prepared to use its expanding economic resources to help others in the region whose modernization began much later, but who are now moving forward with astonishing momentum: South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore.

☐ China is beginning to enjoy economic progress after a decade of external frustration and internal violence and is experimenting, at least, with the idea of normalizing its relations with Asia and the rest of the world.

Without the U.S. effort in Southeast Asia, there would now be no Ping-Pong diplomacy and no presidential visit to Peking planned.

But all this is still precarious and fragile.

As the South Vietnamese assume increasing responsibility for their own defense and try to make a constitutional system work (which very few post-colonial nations have been able to manage), they feel every day the threat of hasty, total American withdrawal and the pressure of those who would cut off all military aid to them in order to guarantee a Communist victory.

North Vietnamese troops are embedded, without a shred of legality, deep in Cambodia and Laos, threatening the Mekong towns and the Thai border. Not one weapon they carry or shell they fire was manufactured in North Vietnam. Putting aside their long-neglected tasks of economic and social development, the leaders in Hanoi continue to pour young men into the infiltration pipelines to South Vietnam in an effort to destroy the process of Vietnamization.

There is a decent hope that in the years ahead an Asia could emerge in which the North Vietnamese will go back within their own borders; the independent states will survive and increasingly work together; relations with China—and, indeed, North Vietnam—will be normalized; and the American role will continue to diminish, while remaining a relevant force in Asian and Pacific affairs.

There is also a real danger that all that has been achieved since 1965 by Asians and ourselves will be lost; that a vacuum will develop in Southeast Asia which Peking, as well as Hanoi, will feel impelled to try to fill; and that Asia will move from the promise of stability and progress to chaos or a war far worse than what we now see in Indochina.

Was it worth it? Clearly, the outcome of the common effort is still uncertain. If we mindlessly walk away from Asia, we shall make sure it was not worth it. If we patiently stay the course, the suffering of these years could be repaid with stable peace and security for ourselves and the two thirds of

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pending on the behavior of the newlyweds, children may feel left out—or, just as bad, rushed into an intimacy they're not ready for.

In *Divorce and After*, Bohannan tells of a new wife greeting her husband's daughter for the first time: "I am your new mother!" she cooed. "The hell you are," said the daughter. Children generally resent stepparents, both when they try to replace a living parent, or when they are, actually, replacing a dead one. But the new parent is, after all, not a replacement of a parent, but an additional parent, and, apparently, that's how most kids come to feel about it. "At first I rejected her wanting me as a daughter," says a 20-year-old California college girl of her stepmother. "She has two sons of her own. . . . But she was so lovely to me—even when I was mean to her. I rejected her at first because of my mother. But now I can really accept her. It took a while, but now I guess I love her."

Similarly, step-siblings become either rivals or friends, and there is no evidence that rivalry is prevalent. It depends largely, of course, on the behavior of the adults. If the principle and practice of addition rather than replacement is carried out successfully, it will work against the problem of conflicting loyalties.

As long as there are children, ex-wives and ex-husbands remain not only linked to each other as parents but as part of each other's family. Bohannan calls such relationships "divorce chains," but they are not, he maintains, the bitter connections one would expect. Not after a while, anyway. He tells of many divorce-chain families where exes and exes are not only civil, but friendly.

Probably it's the "sweat" factor that operates when remarriages with kids work out. Part of making the new marriage work is making it work with, and for, them. Like the new marital partner, the child of that partner needs to be wooed too. If the wooing is genuine, and if the wooer is patient, the child is usually won. Kids have great resilience and flexibility; after all, they want the "gap" filled, and they respond, like their parents, to love. "The divorce," says one mother, "was very hard on Erica. She was very attached to her father, and he used to put me down. When I married again, Erica was five. At first she was frightened of Ted. He is such a silent man compared to her father. It was a long, hard row for both of them. But, finally, he won her over."

Washington psychiatrist Dr. William Davidson thinks that children involved in divorce/remarital shake-ups can emerge not only with their mental health intact, but the better for it. "This kind of ambiguous, expanded experience," he says, "moves kids to better adjustment in a society that is highly ambiguous and expanded. I've discovered that people who have grown up in these situations cope better with the ambiguities of life. . . ." Davidson says, too, that parental guilt can "help" children feel victimized, even when they are not.

To point out remarital success is not to suggest that one should change spouses like partners at a dance, and then dance away until the next little tap on the shoulder. Even with the sensible no-fault divorce idea, it is unlikely, as some fear, to make passing fancies out of marriage and divorce. The beginnings and ends of marriages are still among the most important and emotionally charged events in a lifetime. But there are certain new realities—like longevity, like more mobility, like more willingness, healthy willingness, I think—to change and grow and then do something about the change and growth. One would hope that marital choices will become even broader, broad enough to include monogamous forever marriages *and* unlimited remarriages, and a whole lot in-between. It would be nice, for example, if it were more socially and psychologically comfortable not to be married at all, or to be married very late, or not to have children, or not to have those ill-conceived, ill-worked out young marriages be legal marriages at all. Of course, many kids who live together know perfectly well that it is better not to marry young. (In one sense, their living together in what used to be called sin suggests they take marriage more seriously—and more thoughtfully—than their parents.) It should be more possible for older women whose husbands have died or divorced them to marry and/or enjoy younger men, if necessary. It should certainly be more possible for them to be more independent, so that, if/when they are left out of the twilight marriage market, they won't dissolve into useless misery.

And how about more leeway within the institution of marriage, itself? Institutions should serve individuals, after all, and individuals are different.

Of course, the cornerstone of individuality is choice. But from society's viewpoint, it is more orderly and efficient to have conformity, not choice. All right, things must work, but why not a more joyous and individualistic pragmatism? To act on choices well made is, after all, what it's all about, isn't it? END

humanity who live in Asia.

What still remains to be done in Asia may not, if we are wise, involve the use of much American military force. Asians are now able to do vastly more to defend themselves than they were in 1965. And China, with some 50 Soviet divisions on its frontiers, may now be influenced to move in more peaceful directions than in the past.

But our resources and our treaty guarantees remain a decisive margin in the Asian balance of power. We ought to ask ourselves bluntly: What is likely to happen if we bury the past and leave Asia to its own devices?

First, the end of America's commitment in Southeast Asia would change the debate now under way in mainland China. Powerful forces there are working to move China toward the long-delayed concentration of its energies and talents on the modernization of life. American withdrawal would inevitably lead Peking to exploit its new opportunities to the South. No one can predict the precise form in which a nuclear China, with its huge ground forces, would exercise its power in the vacuum we would create. But I cannot believe that Peking would remain passive.

Second, the nations of South-

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east Asia, certainly as far as Singapore—quite possibly as far as Indonesia—would lose their independence, as, for example, Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore, believes; or they would be forced into a protracted military or quasi-military struggle that would force them to abandon their exceedingly promising economic, social and political development.

Third, Burma, in particular, would either fall under Communist domination or become the scene of an Indian-Chinese struggle. For Burma, not Tibet, is the point of strategic danger for the Indian subcontinent—a warning consistently made to me in private by high and responsible officials of both India and Pakistan.

Fourth, Japan and India would quickly acquire nuclear weapons, and the Nonproliferation Treaty would quite possibly die elsewhere in the world as well. The willingness of many nations to forego the production of nuclear weapons depends on a carefully balanced calculation—a calculation that says the United States can provide greater security at less risk than going it alone with a national nuclear capability. An America that walks away from a treaty commitment, after bringing into the field a half-million of its armed forces and encouraging a small ally to fight desperately for its independence, would not be regarded as a reliable ally on such a mortal issue as nuclear deterrence in Asia or anywhere else.

There are many, I know, who believe that, somehow, the United States can live safely divorced from the fate of Asia.

I do not.

Thirty years ago, an Asian power, reaching for Asian hegemony, was able to mount Pearl Harbor.

There is already one nuclear power in Asia, now moving to produce ICBM's. If we walk away from our commitments in Asia, there are liable soon to be at least three. Having come in these hard years as close as we now are to the possibility of stable peace in Asia, I think it would be disastrous to throw in our hand and leave future Americans to bear the inevitable costs of a nuclear-armed Asia.

The more than 50,000 Americans—and the more than one million Asians—who died in this struggle for a stable, peaceful Asia deserve better of us.