

Vietnam: throwing good money after bad

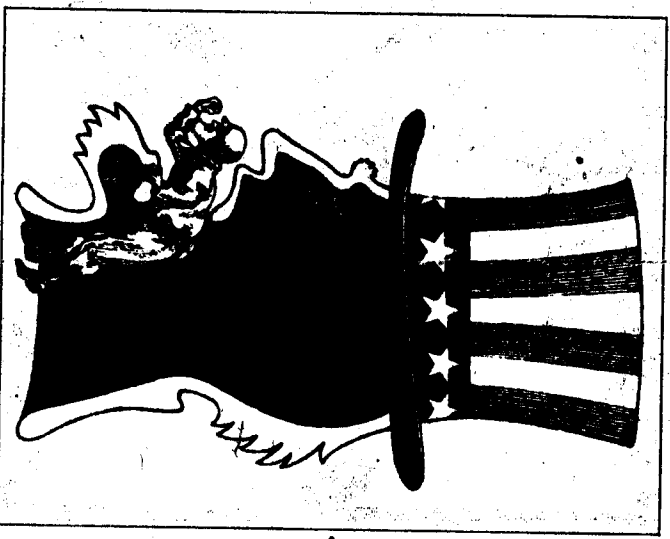
ABUSE OF POWER. By Theodore Draper. Viking, 244 pp. \$4.95; paperback, \$1.25.

By Hans J. Morgenthau

It is a besetting error to think about foreign policy in abstract terms rather than to consider the concrete merits of each individual case. Consistency in foreign policy is not a virtue but a refuge from political judgment. Thus it is a mark of rank dilettantism to suggest, as an aide to President Johnson recently did, that someone who favors military intervention in the Middle East ought by the same token also to favor military intervention in Vietnam. There is no *a priori* reason why one should not advocate military intervention in one place but not in another or in both places or in neither, as the distribution of interests and power might warrant. The use of military power is neither good nor bad in itself; it is the concrete circumstances of the case that make it so.

It is with this basic principle in mind that one must approach Mr. Draper's thesis. This thesis holds that American foreign policy is characterized by a pattern which "has brought us to the point of armed force as the key instrument of policy no less than three times in only four years." Thus "the Vietnam war is only the Cuban and Dominican crisis writ large." The resort to arms in all three instances results from the failure of our diplomatic efforts.

Hans J. Morgenthau is professor of political science and modern history at the University of Chicago.



I would agree with the general philosophic proposition that we have relied excessively on military force to combat social and political challenges to the status quo. Such a policy has generally proved to be self-defeating; for the military support of the status quo, far from de-

feating Communism, hands the Communists a monopoly of support for radical social change. This was the pattern of our intervention in the Dominican Republic, and this is the pattern of our present intervention, barely publicized, in Bolivia.

Our intervention in Cuba, it seems to me, was quite a different matter. It can be argued that our support of Batista paved the way for Castro. It can also be argued that if we had supported Castro in the initial stages of his rule we might have prevented him from joining the Soviet Union. But once he had made himself the political and military spearhead of the Soviet Union in the Western Hemisphere, I thought in 1962, and I still think today, that a good case could be made in support of effective military intervention.

The Vietnam war is a different matter altogether. Everything that is wrong in American foreign policy has conspired to get us involved in a major war which we can afford neither to win nor to lose. It is the main purpose of Mr. Draper's book to retrace the steps which led us into the present impasse, and he succeeds admirably in laying bare these steps, each taken under the illusory assumption that nothing more was needed for success. Mr. Draper analyzes seven turning points in our Vietnam policy: Truman's commitment of economic and military aid to the French, Eisenhower's support of Diem, Kennedy's increase of the number of U.S. military advisors from 800 to 17,000, Kennedy's withdrawal of support from Diem, Johnson's decision to bomb the North and commit American ground troops to the South, Johnson's decision . . .

Vietnam

(Continued from page 4)

the American commitment to half a million men, and finally, Johnson's decision to break the will of the government of North Vietnam by destroying its economic facilities.

The book has three major merits. First, it provides us with a historic account of what actually happened. The account is reliable and based upon extensive use of the literature.

Second, by telling the story of what actually happened and analyzing the reasons why it happened, Mr. Draper sheds an illuminating light upon the official doctrines explaining and justifying our involvement. His factual analysis shows convincingly the tenuous relationship between what our government says it is doing, and what it actually does.

Mr. Draper shows again how ambiguous, to put it mildly, our policy to seek a negotiated settlement has been. His analysis of the Tonkin Gulf incident is particularly revealing. According to Tom Wicker of *The New York Times*, the President "had been carrying it [the resolution] around in his pocket for weeks waiting for the moment." Mr. Draper's account sheds considerable doubt upon whether the "moment," that is, the North Vietnamese attack upon American destroyers, actually occurred the way it was officially presented.

One of the original and most useful contributions Mr. Draper makes to the establishment of historic truth is his analysis of the official justifications for the commitment of American ground troops in 1965. This commitment has been justified by foreign aggression in the form of the presence of a whole North Vietnamese division in South Vietnam at the beginning of 1965. According to repeated statements by the Secretary of

State, "From November of 1964 until January of 1965 they moved the 325th division of the North Vietnamese Army down to South Vietnam." Yet the State Department White Paper published a month later and entitled "Aggression from the North: The Record of North Vietnam's Campaign to Conquer South Vietnam" makes no mention of the presence of that division. On April 27, 1965, the Secretary of Defense is aware only of the presence "of the 2nd Battalion of the 325th Division"

in South Vietnam. In August of 1965, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was aware of "at least one regiment . . . of the 325th North Vietnamese division." And in October 1965, Bernard Fall could write: "As of the time I left a few days ago, no intelligence officer was ready to

swear that the 325th as a unit had joined the battle in South Vietnam."

What accounts for these contradictions not only between official pronouncements and reality but also among the pronouncements of different officials? Mr. Draper puts it correctly: "The theory of 'foreign aggression,' therefore, served the purpose of enabling the United States to take flight from the intractable problems of the South and to seek comfort in the illusion that the solution to the whole war was located in the North." And what is the ultimate cause of this whole tragic folly? As Mr. Draper puts it:

American policy in Vietnam, then, cannot be understood in terms of Vietnam alone. It can more nearly be understood in terms of what we have done in Vietnam. As a result of one miscalculation after another, we have gradually been drawn into making an enormous, disproportionate military and political investment in Vietnam. This investment — not the vital interests of the United States in Vietnam — has cast a spell on us . . . Once American resources and prestige are committed on such a profligate scale, the "commitment" develops a life of its own and, as the saying goes, good money must be thrown after bad.

Finally, in contrast to some other recent highly praised books on Vietnam, this is an honest book. It does not try to exonerate Kennedy in order to be able to blame Johnson, or vice versa. It does not try to rewrite history. It does not refrain from passing judgment and assessing blame, because, as another author on the same subject has put it, we are all guilty or nobody is guilty. That one feels constrained to praise the honesty of a book on Vietnam indicates the havoc that war has wrought not only with our foreign and military policies but with the quality of our domestic life as well.