

## Open Letter

# A Footnote to Kennedy's Reply

(A Joseph Alsop column last week was in the form of an open letter to Senator Edward Kennedy. Senator Kennedy has now replied by means of the following open letter to columnist Alsop.)

### An open letter to Joseph Alsop

Dear Joe:

I have never before replied to an open letter with an open letter — but I agree with you that the times demand some rules be broken.

Though I am flattered that you imply I may have the capacity to bring this land to some unanimity of view in these difficult moments, neither I nor anyone else except the President of the United States can bring this nation together. And he can do so only by ending the war.

It should be understood by now that the turmoil in America created by Vietnam results not from a public misunderstanding, but from deep and personal convictions of right and wrong.

I must say, without qualification, that I fully and openly protest against what has now become the war in Indochina. I am sure you feel that in taking this position I have allied myself with the naive, the idealistic, and the young. I ally myself with no one, and I seek no one to join with me.

I simply protest the war and its consequences, as one person who has obligations of office, some sense of the responsibilities memory has placed upon me, and as a man who has not escaped the "harshnesses of the historic process."

"Political lunacy" it was that brought upon us the events of the past two weeks. Yet, I would not place that charge against those who came to Washington, but on those who caused them to come here.

As a nation we have had enough of war, and death, and divisiveness. What goal do we have in mind, what prize so enviable, that this great nation must pursue Asians through endless jungles, across borders, in and out of their burning villages to give and take human life?

Do we do these things in 1970 for trucks and rice, rifles and bunkers, some mythical Pentagon in the forests? Or do some among our military or political leadership still suffer the illusion that a military victory can be won in Vietnam? Unfortunately, I must conclude, all public statements aside, that the motivation to move into Cambodia was the latter.

The continuation of these acts, if justifiable at all, could only be morally defended if the vital security interests and welfare of the people of the United States of America were at stake. I do not believe that they are, nor do I believe that it was the very survival of our country that involved us in this tragedy in the first place.

At this late date, then, how can one persist in asking the American people, and especially the young, to support this war as just another painful incident in history made necessary by some grand and mystical design?

How can we ask the American people to keep a stiff upper lip, to wait out what many consider an immoral war, in the hope that one day it will be clear to all how thousands and thousands of

innocent and combatant deaths were necessary to satisfy some archaic definition of the great power burden?

It is the question of America's survival that divides you and me. You attempt to draw an inverse relationship between United States and Soviet Union actions, i.e., as we show weakness in Vietnam or on our own campuses, Russia shows a greater boldness in her actions in the world. I could draw a direct relationship that maintains:

- The longer we remain bogged down in Southeast Asia, with periodic escalations that only serve to involve us deeper, the more latitude the Soviet Union feels in her Middle East adventures.

- The greater the growth in our military budget and preoccupation with things of war, the greater the growth in Soviet concerns with such matters.

- The louder the official noise and the more conflicting the arguments for an ABM system or Polaris or MIRV program, the more numerous the Russian implacements of nuclear missiles and construction of missile-bearing submarines.

- The more we escalate in Vietnam, the more the Soviet Union escalates her activities there.

In my view, it was our escalation in Southeast Asia that brought an end to the favorable developments that could have followed from the nuclear test ban agreement.

So it is that I cannot be deterred from my abhorrence of the Vietnamese war by the argument that our extrication from it means that America must assume the blame for the death of Jews in Israel: The strange logic that says that every Asian child who dies becomes a ghostly messenger to Moscow, warning the marshals of the Soviet Union that they must go easy on the banks of the Suez.

If it is Russia that we are now fighting in Indochina, then the American people should be so informed by their President. Then we will be forced to face at last the moral question of great powers destroying third countries to avoid the possibility of dealing with or facing each other.

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I wish to conclude on a note as personal as can be carried in an open letter. I have long valued our friendship and I mean to keep it. There are in America today enough people by half not talking, communicating, or understanding each other.

And I am mindful of the respect that President Kennedy and my brother Robert had for you. You are quite right in noting that President Kennedy did not hold the view that our country is immune from history's dangers. I would only add that while holding that view he also never doubted that the future could be different.

Your friend,  
Ted