

THE SOCIETY

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THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR

SP. 4 JAMES THOMAS DAVIS
of Livingston, Tennessee

DIED DEC. 22, 1961

The first American
combat fatality in Vietnam

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THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR

United States Army Specialist Fourth Class James Thomas Davis, twenty-five years old, had never heard of Vietnam when he received orders to go there in 1961. In December of that year he was killed in a Vietcong ambush twenty-five miles from Saigon, becoming the first American combat fatality of the war. Except for a headline in his home-town newspaper, the *Livingston* (Tennessee) *Enterprise*, his death went unnoticed in the United States.

Five years later Davis came to national attention when President Lyndon B. Johnson proclaimed him "the first American killed in the resistance to aggression in Vietnam."

Today Davis's death takes on added symbolic

importance. For, with peace seemingly close at hand, thoughtful Americans are beginning to look back over the years of fighting to add up the cost and ponder the consequences of the longest and in some ways most disruptive war in the nation's history. Davis's death was but the first of many sacrifices, the first of many consequences of a war whose repercussions will be felt for years to come.

With the aim of contributing to this assessment, we have asked a group of twelve distinguished correspondents, social thinkers, and commentators to tell us, each in his or her special field, precisely how the war has affected America and what that means for our future. Their answers occupy the following fifty-six pages.



Informed People Means A Good Government

LIVINGSTON ENTERPRISE, Friday, Janu

Davis Killed In Viet Nam Duty

James Thomas Davis, 25 year old son of Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Davis, gave his life in the service of his country on December 22, 1961. Davis, who was attached to the Military Assistance Advisory Group in Viet Nam, was killed instantly while actively performing his training mission.

In a report received here, young Davis was riding with a Viet Nam soldier in the cab of a truck which was transporting nine other Viet Nam soldiers when an electrically controlled land mine was set off directly under the truck bed. All nine of the men in the truck bed were killed instantly by the blast. Davis survived the mine blast to be killed moments later by a "bullet" fired from an

First Methodist and Rev. Clarence Stewart, pastor of First Baptist Church, officiated. Military rites were conducted at Good Hope Cemetery.

Davis was born in Livingston on June 1, 1936. He received his education in the Livingston schools where he was popular with both teachers and students. He graduated from Livingston Academy in 1954. He entered the Army in 1959, a week after he completed his studies at T. P. I. in Cookeville.

He was married to the former Miss Geraldine Martin of Livingston, and was the father of a daughter, Cindy.

Other survivors are three brothers, Bill, Joe and Jack Davis; a sister Janie Mar

1961 | 1962

The Political Consequences

THE VAST BACKFIRE OF ACTIVISM

By David Halberstam

The principal effect of the war, the author says, is "a growing skepticism about politicians in general and the political act as a creative force in life." In a sense, we have all become "Europeans."

Do you remember the high point, not so many years ago, in the latter part of the twentieth century it was, when he was at the peak of his power and his touch was still magic? Historians claim that the apex came at Atlantic City, where he sponsored his own rites of coronation; he orchestrated everything, his picture was everywhere, the band played "Hello, Lyndon" ("We have faith in thee, Lyndon," went the words), a popular hit that year among the Democrats (since the author had refused the Republicans' request for their own adaptation, there would be no "Hello, Barry"). A golden age seemed in the offing, a Great Society beckoned, we dreamed his dreams and he ours, the sick to be healed, the old to be comforted, the poor to become bourgeois. Why, even the Negroes in the crowds, he himself admitted, reached out for him like he was Jesus Christ. So the coronation was held without a sour note, though, of course, there were those people from Mississippi, young and black, and none of them very kempt, and while their grievances were certainly justified, was this the time and place to cause trouble, to call attention to the discrepancies between the rhetoric of Johnson and the reality of Eastland? To spoil such an otherwise flawless party? Clearly not, and we sighed a collective sigh of relief when Hubert Humphrey was assigned to pacify—using that word in the now obsolete sense—the party spoilers. We still liked Hubert then; he had—there is no better word—credibility with the liberals.

Then do you recall, somewhat later in that same century, the Democratic Convention of 1968? Held in Chicago, if memory serves correctly. He was still President then, though he was said to have a credibility problem, and certainly he changed press secretaries rather regularly (his most faithful one, George Reedy, was then in the process of writing a book entitled *Twilight of the Presidency*). Even so, he was not able to attend the convention that year, although the date for it, curiously

David Halberstam, who won a Pulitzer Prize in 1964 for his reporting from Vietnam, is the author of a recently published study of the escalation of the war entitled The Best and the Brightest.

enough, coincided with his birthday and a second coronation had been a definite possibility. Yet photographs of him still abounded; he was not yet a nonperson. The convention, you will recall, was a shade noisier and more discordant this time; the Mississippians had been joined by many of the very same people who had helped Hubert pacify them in 1964 and who had depacified themselves in the interim. By now he was an embattled President, and nobody reached out for him like he was Jesus Christ any more. Not everyone had turned against him, however. In Saigon his man Bob Komer was still telling him that pacification was going just fine and had promised that the war would not be an election issue; in Washington the President's closest national security adviser, Walt Rostow, was even more optimistic about the course of the war and did not see it affecting American politics either. Indeed, in December of 1968, as he was packing his bags to leave for a university job (not at MIT but at Texas, it would turn out), Rostow was still able to tell visitors that the war had not been an issue in the campaign.

Our third scene is still in this same century, this time in Miami in 1972 (security was considered good in Miami, and security by then had become a prime factor in selecting convention sites—the ability to seal off a nominee from many of his fellow citizens was of growing importance). The Democrats, now clearly also a minority party in American life, were talking at great length about boycotting lettuce and ending the war; the unwashed had washed and taken over. John Connally had fled back to Texas, where they still knew how to treat a gentleman, and that portly figure standing outside the hall without a ticket was, yes, Richard Daley. But Daley's humiliation, though painfully public, was smaller than the one accorded Lyndon Johnson, who was nearly erased from his party's memory. There were no ringing speeches recalling his good deeds, his many acts for mankind and Democrats alike. In the great hall itself, where



American advisors in Vietnam "are not combat troops in the generally understood sense of the word."

— J.F.K

1962

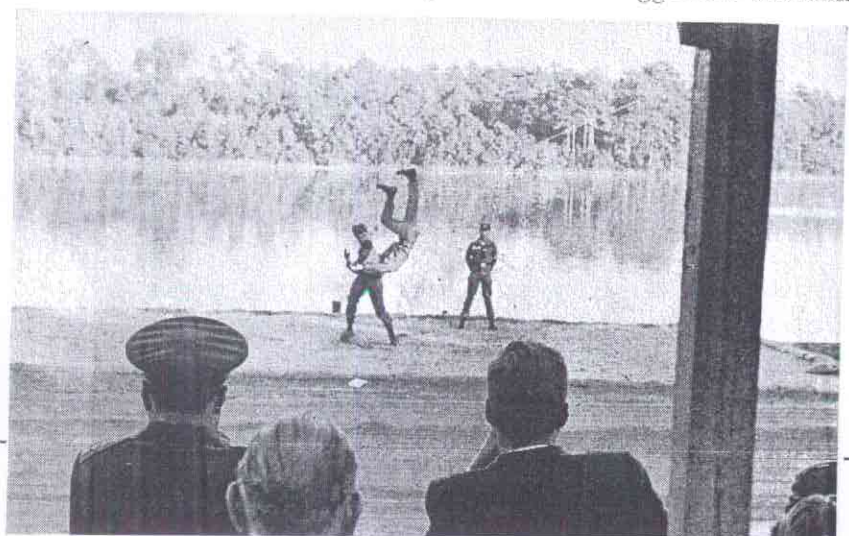
the Democrats unveiled huge photographs of their past heroes, Presidents and presidential candidates, one saw Roosevelt and Truman, Stevenson and both Kennedys. But no Lyndon. If you wanted to see what Lyndon looked like, a remembrance of things past, well, he was there all right, in a side room among smaller photographs of men who had been the leading Democratic *congressional* figures of those years. Clearly, then, there had been no President Lyndon Johnson; John F. Kennedy had been assassinated, after an inordinately long wait a special election had been held, Richard Nixon elected, and Richard Nixon had begun a war. And just to emphasize how far the mighty had fallen and the lowly had risen, a few weeks later in that same convention hall the Republicans nominated Richard Nixon, this time in a coronation ceremony of their own, the same Richard Nixon who in 1966 had dared criticize Johnson's war policies, provoking the President to refer to him the next day before reporters as "the lawyer for Pepsi-Cola."

And all because he sent American boys over there to do what Asian boys should have done for themselves. What irony, what tragedy, to be brought from a point so high to a point so low, a life's goals and ambitions wiped out by one decision. Particularly for a man who had so little taste for the military, so little desire to be around generals and admirals or to be a wartime President, who never wanted this particular little war, who had a sense of foreboding about what it might do to his domestic dreams but could not pull back from what he saw as the forces of history. (To George Ball, pleading for negotiations, he could say, "Pull me a rabbit out of the hat, George," which translated as, "Make it go away if you can.") And to top it all, he was brought low by a war against what he regularly described as a "raggedy-ass little fourth-rate power." (His awe of the other side was never very great; in 1964, annoyed by the lack of intelligence he was getting from Hanoi, he suggested that CIA chief John McCone hire some Chinese coolies

from a San Francisco laundry shop, airlift them over, and have them send out their messages in bottles.)

Who would have thought that all those brilliant men around him would also become casualties of war, that this dashing, confident team of elite managers would have their careers irreparably damaged, their future political activities forced almost underground (McGeorge Bundy quietly circulating memos on the war to Humphrey in 1968, knowing that by then no candidate could afford to be publicly associated with his name)? More importantly, who would have guessed in the giddy days of Camelot that what these men symbolized in terms of American centrist liberalism would be severely damaged and that the whole shape of American politics would be changed because of the war? For at the time they seemed the most luminary group of men assembled in government in this century—good, liberal, intelligent, humane men, yet tough-minded—and the promise of what they could do for America, like them a country at once strong and humane, seemed very great indeed. There was much to be accomplished to get America moving again after the phlegmatic indifference of the Eisenhower years. Now, finally, the Communists abroad and the racists at home had met their match. No wonder they mesmerized not only us but their future boss as well, who was awed by their talent and their brains on first meeting them. Johnson had come back from his first cabinet meeting as Vice-President and sought out Sam Rayburn, his old mentor, and he had rhapsodized about them, McNamara from the Ford Motor Co., Rusk from the Rockefeller Foundation, Bundy from Harvard; they were all so quick and brilliant. And Rayburn had listened for some time and had finally said, "Well, Lyndon, everything you say may be right, and they may be every bit as able as you say—but I'd feel a whole lot better if just one of them had run for sheriff once."

Amidst the ashes of all those dreams it is interesting to note that at almost the same time there had been a surprisingly similar warning from someone who could not have been more dissimilar in background and attitude to crusty old Sam Rayburn. This was David Riesman, the Harvard sociologist. Riesman had visited Washington in the early days of the Kennedy administration, and he had lunched with two of his old friends from academe, now key members of the new government. He found them primed with the aggressive liberalism of the



period, filled with enthusiasm and excitement over the possibilities for waging guerrilla wars throughout the world. Riesman had listened with mounting apprehension, and he had finally asked his two hosts whether they had ever been to Utah. Utah? they had asked. No, why Utah? Had Riesman been to Utah? He had not, Riesman answered, but he had studied a good deal about the Church of the Latter Day Saints, and he knew about the deep-seated jingoism and evangelical fervor that lay just beneath the surface of this country. He was aware that the fabric of this society had always been very thin and that it was stretched across a very disparate nation. He mentioned this to them, mentioned that the effect of a war upon America was hard to predict but that it was not likely to be beneficial, and they condescendingly pushed aside his doubts, saying that they knew what they were doing, this was a different era—and, besides, it was a very small war. He left, deeply uneasy about the direction of the administration, thinking that he had just lunched with Atlantic provincials—brilliant men, but provincials nonetheless—and feeling that they had no sense at all of the possible impact of their foreign policy deeds upon the thin and delicate fabric of American domestic society.

That proved to be true, of course; they did not. As Sam Rayburn instinctively knew, they were not men who had been produced by the American political process. They were brilliant men who had excelled in elitist areas and who had been grafted on at the top of the process. They took pride in the fact that they were not politicians and that their foreign policy decisions were not tainted by anything as base as political considerations (though, of course, in any real sense domestic considerations were always there—they hesitated to talk about realigning our mindless China policy for fear of the Right). They were not linked to the political process, and so they were not sensitive to the damage they might do. The remarkable political naïveté of the period was well illustrated by McGeorge Bundy. In 1965 Bundy argued for bombing the North, not because it would work, but because thereupon the President could say to his critics, as he disengaged, that he had tried everything possible. It was clear even then that the reverse was true, the bombing did not represent trying everything possible, and that, once having bombed, the United States was committed even more to attempting to save South Vietnam. The failure of the bombing meant that troops would inevitably follow—the ante could only go up.

As matters turned out, the American political fabric was stretched even thinner than anyone, including Riesman, knew. The essential fiber of American politics and, in particular, of the governing Democratic party had long been rubbed threadbare; the society had changed far faster than the capacity of the political process to respond. At the same time the basic governing coalition that had been put together in New Deal days seemed to have less and less relevance to new social problems—in fact, there were increasing numbers of people who

felt that the old programs and the government itself were the problem. There had not been a major new domestic program since the New Deal. The Democratic party had been a fragile piece of work at best; it had always meant different things to very different groups of people. The issues that had allowed it to dominate American political life for more than thirty years were less and less viable. The blue-collar white no longer had the same problems as the black; affluence and partnership in the society had come to some groups in the governing coalition but not to others. Urban decay and mounting racial tensions had weakened that most vital Democratic base, the cities. As the cities grew sicker throughout the Sixties, the structure of the party disintegrated further. Gaps became chasms, not just because of the sheer political and moral questions the war raised—though they could not be underestimated—but because of the parallel problems it caused: the rampant inflation that ripped the cities, the diversion of resources from domestic programs to the Pentagon, and the mounting dissent from established authority.

As the Sixties had opened, the old partners in the coalition were none too congenial with each other: Martin Luther King, Dick Daley, Kenneth Galbraith, George Meany, and John Connally were not easy bedfellows. They represented different Americas that were willing, quadrennially at least, to minimize their differences and were held together, increasingly as American life became more fragmented, not so much by common desires as by common enemies. Lyndon Johnson had gone on the ticket in 1960 and helped bind an uneasy South to the national party mainly because Sam Rayburn hated, really *hated*, Richard Nixon; the scars of the Fifties were not easily forgotten. (Given the new tensions in American life, it is easy to visualize Sam Rayburn in 1972 more at ease with Nixon than with McGovern–McCarthy–Ted Kennedy Democrats.) The great glue that held the coalition together in 1964 was not the charm of Lyndon Johnson but the fear of Barry Goldwater.

The war very simply brought out what Riesman had expected; powerful feelings thinly concealed in all kinds of people now surfaced. It cast a new political identity on them. Some thought the war proper and correct; for others it became a symbol of growing doubts about American life. A majority could begin by supporting the war, but a growing, articulate minority would be completely appalled. Patriotism, love of country, love of flag became issues. Some young Americans felt so strongly that they went to Canada to escape military service; more important, in sheer tactical and political terms, a liberal Democratic candidate like George McGovern had



to confront the issue of draft evasion—morally correct, politically unpopular.

The old coalition came apart with a special bitterness. Old allies felt betrayed by each other. Could Meany's anger at McGovern be matched by comparable feelings toward Richard Nixon—particularly since Nixon, like Meany, favored an essentially static America and felt threatened by the turbulence of a new, emerging America? Wasn't the bitterness of the liberal intellectuals toward Hubert Humphrey in 1968 and then again in 1972 (a bitterness that Humphrey and his supporters reciprocated) vastly more intense than their feelings against Nixon? In the late Sixties could anyone, reading the pages of *Commentary*, a classic liberal magazine, doubt that its editors viewed the real threat to American liberty as coming now from the far Left rather than the Right? To young, peace-oriented college students, potential members of a new Democratic coalition, the enemy in 1968 was not the ruling class of big business (whose children often went to the same colleges and shared the same attitudes) but rather those who upheld the agreed-upon rules of society—the cops and the hardhats. Nor did the feelings of the antiwar protesters go unreciprocated: Who will forget the hardhats marching in favor of the war in 1969 and 1970, carrying signs that said, "God Bless the Establishment"? Although it was the Democrats who escalated the war in 1965, the antiwar fervor by 1968 was centered, not in the nominal opposition party, but in the Democratic party. It was the most bitter and personal kind of fight—a family feud.

So it was hardly surprising that Richard Nixon became the chief beneficiary of the disintegration of the Democratic party. In contrast to the excessive visibility of Lyndon Johnson he was wise enough to maintain a singularly low profile. Whereas Johnson had been everywhere, irritating the conservatives one night by appearing on television to implore the nation to help the poor and then irritating the liberals the next night by demanding that they support the bombing or be branded disloyal Americans, Richard Nixon had learned a simple lesson about American politics. He had learned that most of our problems were not readily reversible, at least not within the four or eight years of his reign, and the less his fellow citizens connected him with the failure and frustration of their daily lives, the better; the less they saw of him, the harder it would be to make the connection. (Crime in the streets as an issue, for example, died the moment Richard Nixon, flanked by John Mitchell, was elected; crime in the streets as a problem for millions of Americans, however, remains very much alive today.)

Nixon knew that he could only continue the war on the sly, without the television cameras and his predecessor's constant boasting. (Johnson had taken the war too emotionally and had passed that emotion on to the public.) Clearly, the best way to wage war was from bombers at thirty-five thousand feet. Bombs that are not seen have not fallen. His administration was deliberately col-

orless and inaccessible. The single exception was Henry Kissinger, and it was soon discovered that a Washington press corps so desperate for news and access to somebody in authority would be willing to print Kissinger's views and analyses with remarkably little dissent. As for the President himself, he was rarely seen for any length of time except in places like Peking or Moscow, appearances that, if nothing else, helped erase the image of the red-baiting Nixon of the Fifties. Thus the diminution of an old enemy.

But what served Nixon particularly well—even better than his travels—was the fact that he operated in a society still numb from moral exhaustion. He was, in fact, almost ideally constituted for the times; those endless years of running for office, so many campaigns for so many jobs, had removed most of his human juices. He was a man not of the Left or the Right but essentially a neuter man, a man of whichever way the wind was blowing—and what better way to operate in a time when there was still so much bitterness around than by being neuter? He simply did not elicit powerful feelings, either positive or negative. It was hard for many, in the wake of the emotional trauma of the Johnson years, to feel strongly about Richard Nixon, if for no other reason than that there was so little to him. For all his myriad deceits and weaknesses it was impossible to blame the great failures of American life on Nixon—only to be angry about his indifference to them.

Indeed, sometimes it seemed as if Nixon had been invented for the post-Johnson years, a time when America had clearly reached beyond itself, had been carried away by its own myths and arrogance. Nixon was America's mirror image of de Gaulle, an anti-de Gaulle, if you will. For, if de Gaulle, by his presence, his elegance and eloquence, was what France had needed at a moment of singularly low national self-esteem, then Nixon, with his remarkable lack of those qualities, his instinct for the banal, his tarnished past, his obvious limits as a man, was exactly what America needed at a moment when it was in the process of groping for a more limited, humbler definition of itself. The very modesty of his proportions commended him to the era.

That redefinition became the special nemesis of the Democratic party and, in particular, of the liberal intellectuals within it. For the basic tenet of the liberal faith had always been activism, the belief that government was essentially good and could bring positive benefits to mankind, that maintaining the status quo was not sufficient if the state were to fulfill its obligations to the people. The vast backfire of activism in the Sixties destroyed that belief. Democratic intellectuals, once committed to a strong America headed by a strong President, were by the end of the decade talking about the limits of power and the need to strengthen the role of the Congress. There was a new sense of doubt, self-doubt really, about the role of government and its capacity to effect positive change. Recently I had lunch with one of the brilliant young presidential advisers of those years, a man

now in his late thirties, who had sat at the right hand of two powerful Presidents, and what he said seemed an epitaph for the era: "When I entered government in 1961, I thought that it could do good, that what we could accomplish for people was limitless. Now I feel differently. Now I feel that government is not only not a friend, but that it's probably the enemy."

Which leaves the Democrats a party with a shattered credo, believers whose god has failed. In 1968 the Democratic candidate who most excited the liberal intellectuals was Eugene McCarthy, precisely because he seemed not so much to be running for the presidency as against it (asked what he would do if elected, he satirized Eisenhower and said, "I will go to the Pentagon"). Indeed, it struck me that the vital—and unspoken—issue in the debate between Robert Kennedy and McCarthy during the '68 primaries centered on just this question of activism. McCarthy clearly felt that the Kennedys had raised the aspirations and expectations of the electorate at precisely the moment when they should have been lowered; that they held out the promise of solutions to our problems which no government could produce. Robert Kennedy regarded this position as essentially cynical and negative; we simply had to do better, he felt. McCarthy in essence replied: Yes, we have to do better, but can we? Aren't we finally too flawed to do better?

This very special dilemma still exists for the liberal politician; indeed, it was at the heart of George McGovern's problems in the campaign. How do you rally a party of traditional activists to play an essentially undramatic role? How do you excite people to care more about their government when they expect much less of it?

For the fact is that one of the more subtle by-products of the war is the general depoliticization of the society; the political act for many Americans is simply less important. If the successive election of two singularly able Presidents, surrounded by talented advisers, could bring about a catastrophe like the war in Vietnam, if daily life under someone as essentially mediocre as Richard Nixon is for most Americans no worse than it was in the expansive years of the Kennedy administration, then what was the great significance of the political act?

There is in this country a growing skepticism about politicians in general and the political act as a creative force in life. It is far from being a typically American

attitude: Americans, in contrast to Europeans, have usually been idealistic about politics and about the possibility of social change. (Europeans, burned more often in the past by foolish politicians and mindless wars, have long regarded politics with an abiding cynicism.) But if rational men have confounded us, if their decisions have produced irrational results, then man does not, after all, control his own destiny—at least not through the political act. Many Americans feel they can express their beliefs and identities, not so much in traditional political terms, but through life-styles that dissent from the country's norms—by wearing longer hair, by engaging in various forms of mysticism, by taking jobs that have no functional value to society.

Such widespread dissent was closely related to the break-up of the old coalition and hurt the Democrats in an even more fundamental way. For it represented a challenge to the basic pluralist concept of a major political party able to encompass broad and divergent viewpoints. This kind of pragmatism had always been one of the great truths of American politics, a way of binding together such a large and diverse nation. But if the quintessentially political act of compromise could lead to such a deeply immoral war, then purity of viewpoint was more important than breadth of base. A figure like women's rights advocate Gloria Steinem illustrates perfectly this continuing shift to purer, more extreme ideological positions. At the start of the Sixties she was a traditional liberal, able to work for the CIA in its attempt to win international youth groups away from the Communists. In the early years of the decade she was very much at ease with the Kennedys and seemed in no way to dissent from their programs. By the mid-Sixties she had become increasingly involved in more radical politics, championing someone like Cesar Chavez. By the



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end of the decade, however, she was concentrating most of her attention on the women's liberation movement, and her definition of a sexist described many of her former allies. In Miami Beach last July Ms. Steinem supported the nomination of Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm and described George McGovern as the best white male candidate.

In the late Sixties and early Seventies American society was in the process of breaking up into an ever increasing number of smaller groups that entered the political arena

to advance their own special concerns—women's rights, homosexuals' rights, students' rights, or whatever. Each of their voices became more strident, more assured, less willing to compromise with centrist values. We had moved a long way from that chilly January morning in 1961 when John Kennedy electrified the nation by asking us to think, not of what we could do for ourselves, but of what we could do for our country. Perhaps the toll the war has taken can be measured by how faintly the echo of that call resounds today. □

The Effect on the Balance of Power, Part I

REAPING THE BENEFITS OF DEFEAT

By Edwin O. Reischauer

In strict balance-of-power terms, declares Professor Reischauer, the irony is that losing the war has proved more profitable than winning it; yet certain domestic and foreign reactions to the outcome could be dangerous.

The supreme irony of the Vietnam War may be that, because of our failure to achieve our goals there, the global balance of power has become more stable and may even have shifted in ways favorable to the United States—at least in the short run. The long-run prospects, however, are more disconcerting.

Let me try to untangle the threads. To begin with, we did not become involved in Vietnam out of a concern with the political and social institutions under which Vietnamese people live, nor certainly out of economic considerations, but rather because we sought to maintain the balance of power in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, which appeared to us to be in danger of becoming unbalanced.

In the early years after World War II we supported the French in Indochina because we feared that French reverses and disappointments there would adversely affect the stability of France and thus upset the fragile balance of forces in Europe. As the Cold War intensified, China came under Communist rule, the Korean War gave a searingly hot reality to Cold War fears, and the nations of Indochina came to loom in American minds as front-line defense posts in the global conflict with Communism. Vietnam was seen as a teetering domino in a line stretching back into unspecified heartlands; it was the weak spot in the dike holding back the rising Communist flood;

it was the test case in the deadly international game of chicken; it was the place where we would prove definitively that "wars of aggression do not pay." Our hope in Vietnam was that, by a judicious incremental addition of power from our virtually limitless resources, we would, at the least cost to ourselves, find the point at which the other side would cry "uncle." Thus we would demonstrate that we had the will and the capacity to stop the Communists anywhere on the earth. If we proved this point in Vietnam, we believed we would not be faced with other tests and the balance of power would be restored—or perhaps even tipped in our favor.

The war, of course, has turned out quite differently. If anything has been proved, it is that the United States is extremely unlikely to engage again in this sort of misadventure. Whatever the Nixon Doctrine means in a positive sense, it also gives a very clear negative message: "No more Vietnams." If Vietnam, then, was a test case, the way is far more open today than it was before to similar wars of "aggression" or "national liberation" or whatever the Vietnam War has been. The "other side" can now engage in such activities with the understanding that the United States will be very reluctant to intervene in the same massive way it did in Vietnam. Our allies, insofar as they fear such aggression, can have little confidence that we will come to their rescue. In short, we

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