The Effect on the Balance of Power, Part III

A VICTORY FOR ALLIANCE

By Lord George-Brown

The mere fact that the Vietnam battle was fought by the United States, writes a former British Foreign Secretary, is in itself a great victory for "the freedom to establish freedom."

As I write this, amid speculation that the war in Vietnam is genuinely moving to a conclusion, certain things impress me. In the first place, America's willingness ever to have taken on this highly unpleasant and, in a narrow, national-interest sense, very unrewarding task. It has always seemed to me to be right and justified for America to do so. I have always been convinced that there were not only sound international reasons but also treaty obligations on the part of the United States and others that justified the "intervention"—as critics are pleased to describe the U.S. action.

As a Britisher, I have always found it exceedingly difficult to understand the violence of the opposition to the war in the United States. It has always seemed quite naïve to me to proclaim the Four Freedoms, to have been so successful in preventing their complete extinction so very recently throughout the world at the cost of World War II, and yet to pretend that they have not been or are not being threatened in the world. Not exclusively, but very noticeably, they are threatened in Southeast Asia.

And if they are to remain unextinguished, one cannot rule out the need for alliances and mutual aid treaties as part of the mechanism to sustain them. This course, once embarked on, must involve the honoring of such treaties, even though they involve unforeseen consequences and a wide scope of involvement. To renege at the point at which costly involvement becomes inescapable means not only to acquiesce in the downfall of the cause originally espoused; much more important, it means to lend comfort and support to those who wish to destroy similar freedoms elsewhere and the societies that —whatever their other failings—provide the opportunity for their survival and ultimate fulfillment.

Therefore, I have always felt, both as a British minister and as a British subject, that the United States was entitled to our support and our understanding, even when it seemed to us that perhaps the aims were becoming clouded and the means highly questionable. But the mere fact that the battle was engaged—and a take-over by the Communist forces prevented—was in itself a great victory for the freedom to establish freedom. If the eventual settlement in Vietnam is not as clear-cut as the aims have always been declared to be, this fundamental point still remains. It will remain even when the Communist leaders and their trusting apologists in our midst busily and stridently tell us that a settlement was available all along if only our forces hadn't done this or that in the course of the struggle.

The end of the struggle is the point at which both the American leaders and the American people must be realistic. There is no virtue in prolonging a war beyond a point where a less than ideal but more than tolerable basis for its ending becomes available. Just as obviously, there would have been total madness in the dreadful betrayal of throwing in the towel before that point was reached. But being realistic means more than recognizing this crucial point when it has arrived. It also involves a very close attention to the form and detail of the settlement. It would be a betrayal to leave too much for future arrangements, even though everyone recognizes how limited the immediate agreements are likely to be. The original aim of the exercise must be recalled. And what is left behind to implement, to monitor, and to ensure the fulfillment of the settlement must be sufficiently realistic to do the job. The inevitable human reaction, namely, to be overcome with relief, happiness, and weariness and seek only to erase the unhappy memories, must be resisted. The cease-fire must not be the end if the aims for which so much blood has been shed are to be realized. It must be the beginning of the attempt to achieve the still justified aims by means other than force—force having provided the opportunity that otherwise was not available.

If, as appears to be the case, this is the established position of the U.S. government and if it is fully appreciated that the justified aims must continue to relate to all of Indochina and not just one territorial part, then and only then will the proper moment for a settlement be present. As great as the benefits accruing from a peaceful conclusion to the war in these circumstances are, so equally great, even disastrous, would be the consequences of what on any other terms would only be a surrender affecting the whole world.

My conclusion, therefore, is that it appears that America will be justified by the end of the struggle as well as by its actions during the war. Whether or not all the means used, on reflection, helped or hindered, were nec-

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essary or equally justified, will be debated. But such debate does not, in my view, invalidate the conclusion stated above. I believe that, once the old "imperialist powers" were excluded—helped vigorously on their way by America, it's worth a note of ironic recall—America could only have refused such a role as it served in Vietnam by failing the rest of the "free" world. It is, I think, tremendously important that America should face this fact. For the United States continues to have a vital, continuing role to play in world security, stability, and development. It has for long been a potent worry that the scars left by this traumatic experience would be of such magnitude that the American people might leave the scene with their tails down, asking that the world be stopped while they get off. While we devoutly hope that everyone, not merely the West, has learned enough not to create the conditions for such a mess again, we have a long way to go to be sure of that.

Meanwhile, political and military alliances will continue to be required. External, economic, social, and regional development policies must be coordinated and made effective. Organizations with the required competence, authority, and power must somehow be brought into existence. The final lesson of the Vietnam tragedy is just how much more necessary and urgent such tasks are now than they were a decade ago. □

The Cost in Human Lives

WHO REALLY DIED IN VIETNAM?

By Leslie Fiedler

"It dawned on me slowly," the author writes, "that I had never known a single family that had lost a son in Vietnam." And the reason, he concludes, is that this has been the first war that "has been fought for us by our servants."

It is often said that the war in Vietnam has divided our society, pitting generation against generation and class against class; like much that is "often said" about public issues, this is true—but not deeply revealing. It is more revealing, I think, to say that the war in Vietnam has mercilessly brought to light a profound division in our society by demonstrating that the actual fighting of war has become more and more exclusively an occupation of the exploited and dispossessed, while protest against war has been more and more preempted by the privileged and economically secure. As any newspaper reader with a feeling for statistics must have noticed, since about 1962 it has been by and large the obligation of the children of the poor to die in a war they do not understand, while the sons and daughters of the rich are demonstrating at home against that same conflict, which they have come to understand too well to endure.

The place in which the children of the rich have come to their understanding, and then mounted demonstrations, is the university, where their status as students has exempted them from combat. It has been, in fact, the prestige of higher education that has converted universal selective service from a democratic to a discriminatory institution, thus turning the Vietnam War into the first war of which it can be said unequivocally that it is being fought for us by our servants. Yet the university system in the United States is the least elitist of any in the world. Some 25 per cent of our young people between eighteen and twenty-four attend college, and we are presumably on the way to fulfilling the goal of universal higher education implicit in the constitutions of the Land-Grant colleges, which pledge that their doors will remain open to all and that "the tuition shall be forever free."

How did such anomalous inequities arise from the conjuction of two democratic dreams: the dream of sixteen years of schooling for all who desire it and the utopian vision of a citizens' army? From the first there were attempts to subvert the dreams by buying military substitutes, for instance, but not until Vietnam was the privileged evasion of service sanctioned by law. Of course, the exemption of college students would not have made so flagrant a difference had not the population of the universities already been so out of line with the ethnic and class balances of the larger community. Certain groups, such as the Jews, enroll more than 70 per cent of their children in universities, while the blacks have reached only half of the national average and the Indians half that of the blacks.

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