purity, and then brutalized those here who tried to stop the killing. Like desert tribemen putting their scapegoats in the desert for a rite of purification, we left our children in Asia to expiate the abstraction of our honor, while at home—in courtrooms, jails, and in the bloodied streets of demonstrations—they preserved the little true honor and true innocence the country had left.

Like the young of America, George McGovern has been overwhelmingly concerned with criticizing the consequences of our colossal power. Although I am writing before Election Day, I venture that his defeat will show the degree to which Vietnam heightened the nation's self-idolatry, made us increasingly defensive to criticism, and fragmented the forces needed for a massbased progressive movement. McGovern criticized the entire thrust of American messianism. Like the young, he criticized the nation's moral values, not just the ethics of the opposite party. Like the young, he threatened the country with the maturity of self-criticism, with the end of our myth of innocence. McGovern was trying to demythologize our cults of Americanism and point to a new transnational morality that would allow American priests to pray, unharassed, for the dead of North Vietnam.

To a greater extent than any candidate in decades, George McGovern tried to infuse into our global role some of the prophetic dimension of his Christian heritage, which teaches the redeeming power of guilt and penance. But the majority of this nation hated him for recalling its failures. McGovern talked about saving lives rather than saving face, and we urged upon him our mythology of "honor." He warned us of self-idolatry, and the administration accused him of indulging in "self-hate" for America. He warned us of the potential dangers of our colossal power, and Nixon's entourage accused him of hoisting "the white flag of surrender."

It is increasingly clear that Nixon's and Kissinger's tactic was to endorse in theory a goal-the stability of a non-Communist South Vietnam-which they knew they could not achieve in practice. The cornerstone of their policy was the obscene rationale of the "decent interval": The United States must choreograph its eventual departure from Vietnam-thousands of lives lost in the process-in such a way that it does not appear to abandon the Saigon regime, thus absolving us of guilt in the tragedy. This search for a false and abstract purity has been but a new modulation of our traditional obsession with American innocence. It is based on myths of moral perfection as theologically antiquated as they are symbolically false. Our hunt for honor in Vietnam, as our historic search for purity, is well summed up by D. H. Lawrence's description of Ahab's crew, "monomaniacs of the idea . . . searching for the white abstract evil." That white, abstract evil is the myth of American innocence, and it can only be perpetuated with the concomitant of all false innocence: violence

Speculative Consequences

## FOUR "WHAT IFS" FOR VIETNAM

By Herman Kahn

"To abandon South Vietnam at the present moment," writes Herman Kahn, "is to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory." Among the consequences of a too hasty withdrawal, he continues, might be a Ronald Reagan-Creighton Abrams ticket in 1976 and the possibility that Hanoi might win in a ceasefire what it has lost on the battlefield.

These post-election days of 1972 would seem an appropriate time to consider the consequences of America's involvement in Southeast Asia. We are now far enough removed from the origins of our involvement to be able to take in the whole scene from a distant perspective,

Herman Kahn is director of the Hudson Institute and coauthor, most recently, of Things to Come. and the fog of campaign rhetoric no longer obscures the strategic horizons. I propose to attempt to illuminate the consequences by outlining four different Vietnam scenarios, each of them predicated on divergent courses of action taken by the United States. They are: First, what would have happened if the United States had not escalated its commitment in Vietnam in 1965? Second, what would happen if the United States precipitously and unilaterally withdrew from Vietnam? Third, what are the likely consequences of a cease-fire? And fourth, what would it take to achieve a "victory" in Vietnam?

What would have happened if the United States had not escalated its commitment in Vietnam in 1965?

It is possible that Vietnam will prove to be the last pivotal battle in the Cold War, the battle that confirms the success of our containment policy and ushers in an era of stability. This hypothesis is not provable in any final sense, but I will argue that it is a perfectly defensible one. In order to make that case, I would like to recall another time when the world faced the need to contain an aggressive

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power—March 7, 1936, the day that German troops occupied a piece of indubitably German territory, the Rhineland. Many historians now believe that British and French intervention on that fateful day would very likely have resulted in the overthrow of Hitler—perhaps by his own generals—or at least proved so severe a blow to his charisma and authority that World War II could never have occurred.

But even if Britain and France had intervened successfully, they would hardly have escaped criticism. Any subsequent instabilities in the German government or feelings of grievance among the German people would doubtless have been blamed on this "premature and unnecessary" action—particularly since the world would not know (and could hardly be able to conceive in its most far-flung imaginings) what this action had averted.

Of course, one might argue that World War II had some positive effects; a successful worldwide move toward decolonization and the rapid rise of Europe and Japan to new levels of prosperity were partly due to the after-shock of the war. But these are conjectural matters, and I would guess that today most people would agree that France and Britain should have intervened in the Rhineland. They did not, and as Churchill said in a speech two weeks later, the result was "an immense gain in prestige to the Nazi government."

Its new prestige spread well beyond the borders of Germany. In Latin America quite disparate forces began to coalesce around fascist ideologies of one sort or another, probably less because these ideologies were intrinsically attractive than because fascism seemed a likely winner against democratic and capitalist alternatives modeled on the United States. In much the same way anti-Soviet factions in Eastern Europe began to rally to Hitler's banner. And extremist elements in Italy and Japan were also encouraged by the prevailing indications of France's and Britain's weakness.

I would argue that similar "domino" effects were avoided because the United States was not willing to practice appeasement in Vietnam. Shortly after the election of Lyndon Johnson in 1964, there were 20,000 American "advisers" in Vietnam. What would have happened if President Johnson had let the number of American troops remain at that level and had not begun to bomb the North?

In retrospect, it seems almost certain that South Victnam would have fallen within a few months. Indeed, between Election Day in the United States and the assumption of power by General Ky in mid-June (and even perhaps for some time afterward), few sober observers in the United States would have given great odds that even such drastic reinforcement as President Johnson did undertake could prevent the collapse of the Saigon regime. In their hearts many American officials and nearly all of the U.S. and foreign press corps on the scene were almost totally pessimistic in their appraisal of the situation.

In the wake of the likely collapse of the Saigon regime,

there would have been a hasty withdrawal of all U.S. advisers—perhaps after some bloody incidents. Most observers concede that Hanoi would have moved quickly to unite the two Vietnams, possibly under the cloak of holding, somewhat belatedly, the referendum on reunion originally scheduled for 1956.

The government of this newly united country of more than thirty million people would have enjoyed the highest morale. (Had it not, after all, just triumphed over the strongest power in the world?) A Communist Vietnam would doubtless have been anxious to settle scores with some of its neighbors. Prince Norodom Sihanouk, then head of the neutralist Cambodian government, has said on several occasions that under these circumstances his country would have been forced to come to terms with the Communists and might even have been absorbed by Vietnam. Laos would clearly have gone under, too, unless the United States had tried to make a stand there—a much more difficult and hopeless job than in Vietnam. While today the Thai government looks relatively strong, the many points of strain that existedand still exist—in that country would clearly have been increased; and at least in northeast Thailand a serious Communist rebellion would have been entirely feasible. Perhaps the United States would have sent troops to put down this rebellion—that cannot be predicted. But it is entirely possible that Thailand, which throughout its history has not been known to sacrifice itself in the service of a consistent policy, would have attempted to switch sides under increased Communist pressure.

Flanked by a united Communist Vietnam and Sukarno's fellow-traveling Indonesia—and with a sanctuary for insurgents along its borders-Malaysia would have been in a tight spot indeed. Presumably, the 500 or so Communist guerrillas still left in northern Malaysia would have been greatly reinforced, creating a serious threat to the government. Doubtless, also, many of the country's Malays, realizing that they now faced a Hobson's choice between a revival of civil war and acquiescence to a people of the same race and religion, would have pushed for a settlement with Indonesia. Such an eventuality, in turn, might have sufficiently altered the balance of power within Indonesia for the local Communists to have staged a successful uprising—similar to the one that was thwarted in that country in September 1965—with the result that Indonesia would have gone Communist or at least firmly aligned itself with Peking.

At this point we can assume that leftist dissidents around the world would have sought advice from China and Vietnam on "how to do it." Certainly, the kind of person in Latin America whose politics are motivated principally by an anti-American bias (and who was thus pro-fascist in the Thirties, pro-Soviet in the late Forties and early Fifties, and pro-Chinese in the late Fifties) would have turned pro-Chinese again. Forced to compete with a worldwide resurgence of Chinese influence, the Soviet Union might have been driven to a more extreme

position in international affairs, particularly since extremist tactics might now pay greater dividends.

While the above scenario may seem as if it has many contingent elements, I would argue that the biggest uncertainty would not have been the events in Southeast Asia but rather their effect on the rest of the world. I feel relatively sure that the American escalation in 1965 sharply reduced the substantial possibility that Southeast Asia would have gone Communist. Whether this situation would have created an overwhelming "wave of the future" psychology in the worldwide Communist movement—and greatly discouraged its opponents—remains a more debatable proposition.

What would happen if the United States precipitously and unilaterally withdrew from Vietnam?

Imagine that the United States instituted the policy of withdrawal suggested by Senator McGovern during the campaign. That is, if after all these years of fighting and preventing the catastrophes enumerated above, we simply informed the South Vietnamese government of our intention to evacuate all American troops and equipment, while simultaneously letting the Thai government know that we were going to keep our bases in Thailand until the North Vietnamese released our prisoners of war and then we would pull out of their country as well. It seems to me that this approach overlooks the near certainty that the Thais and South Vietnamese, whose lives we were playing with, would be furious at these actions, viewing them with good reason as a double cross. A separate peace is always an extremely unpleasant betrayal. In this case the South Vietnamese would have nothing to lose by executing their legal rights to the limit. Even if they didn't try to interfere physically with the departure of American troops, Saigon would almost certainly insist that we leave most or all of our equipment behind. South Vietnam is, after all, their sovereign territory, and they can nationalize anything on it. They could even, if they wished, charge a head tax for departing American soldiers. And if they really wanted to cause trouble, they could charge individual Americans with all kinds of crimes, which many soldiers have no doubt committed. All of this is completely legal, and I fail to see how the Americans could prevent it, short of shooting up our allies and turning a withdrawal into an escape.

As for the Thais, in the event of a hasty American withdrawal it would be important for them to make some kind of a deal with Hanoi as fast as possible. After all, the North Vietnamese have been furious with them for allowing us to use their bases so freely during the war. Hanoi's minimum requirement would probably be the installation of a *pro forma* Communist regime in Thailand—the Thais have done this kind of thing in the past—and our immediate expulsion.

At that point we would have no hold at all on the North Vietnamese. Now, it is quite clear that the North Vietnamese have suffered severely during the war. My own conjecture is that something like one out of every

four young men between the ages of seventeen and twenty-four have died. What would encourage them to send back American prisoners when the mere announcement of our unilateral withdrawal is a sign that they have won everything that they could have hoped for? In the past the North Vietnamese have indicated that they would insist on trying certain Americans for war crimes. Even if they released some of our prisoners, they would keep others for these show trials. They would presumably want indemnities as well, especially since by our mode of withdrawal—and the rhetoric that would accompany it—we would have clearly admitted our guilt. In other words, we can't pull out this way. It would leave us defenseless against our enemy's worst accusations.

Besides being damaging to our own self-interest, a hasty withdrawal would be cruelly unfair to our South Vietnamese allies, many of whose lives would be in great peril. To understand the so-called "bloodbath" theory of reprisals, it is important to realize that the killing which occurs through legal government channels is far worse than the random killing due to war or other circumstances. As an American, ask yourself which you would prefer—the current situation in which some 50,-000 people a year are killed in automobile accidents or a situation in which only 5,000 were killed at the selection of government officials for political purposes. And reprisals by the North Vietnamese would be bound to follow an American withdrawal. For if the North Vietnamese controlled South Vietnam, it would only be a matter of time before they took Laos and most probably Cambodia. They will then be forced to incorporate into a single Communist society diverse populations that share little but their hatred of the North Vietnameseand to do this, they will have to impose strict Communist discipline on a society in which social cohesion has been greatly disrupted. In other words, they will be forced to impose some sort of terror. Many revolutions have faced this kind of imperative—and the successful ones have accepted the need for terror.

Nor would there be a lack of high government officials and military commanders against whom the North Vietnamese have very serious grievances. In addition, almost everybody in recent vears—city people, prosperous farmers, landlords, villagers in South Vietnam's Popular Forces, and millions of the anti-Communist ethnic minorities have registered their opposition to the Vietcong by accepting rifles from the Saigon government and lending it their support in various ways. Directly or through their immediate families, at least half the population is now in more or less active opposition to the Vietcong; indeed, some member of one out of every three families is on the government payroll. Although the number of people who would be killed in a North Vietnamese purge is strictly conjectural, informed estimates have ranged from tens of thousands to several hundred thousand—and my guess would lie somewhere in the middle. Certainly, if they were forced to choose between convicting all the guilty at the cost of convicting many who are innocent and saving the innocent at the cost of missing many who are guilty, the North Vietnamese would be acting entirely out of character if they did not opt for the former.

Nor would a precipitous American withdrawal do damage only to the fabric of South Vietnamese society. It is unreasonable to assume that a country such as the United States can lose this kind of war—particularly at a moment when its professional military think they are close to victory—and not pay a heavy price. While I would not expect a revolt in the U.S. armed forces similar to the French military revolt in Algeria, I would not be surprised if many of the officers who were deeply involved in Vietnam resigned their commissions and entered the political arena in some capacity. Certainly, a large number of Americans would share their resentment, feeling that to abandon South Vietnam at the present moment would be to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. I myself would have nothing but contempt for the government that did it.

I can imagine a deeply conservative trend sweeping the United States in the wake of such a withdrawal. In 1976 we might see Gov. Ronald Reagan and Gen. Creighton Abrams running on the Republican ticket. Abrams could talk about what a stab in the back the American people received by our withdrawal—a perfectly legitimate view. Reagan could talk about pornography and the need for going back to basic American values. I could even imagine a semiauthoritarian government being elected to sort out the mess, a situation similar to what happened in France when it pulled out of Algeria. Fortunately for France, de Gaulle was able to put the pieces together. We may not have a man of his caliber available.

What are the likely consequences of a cease-fire?

The outcome of the cease-fire will hinge on innumerable details, so I shall not try to cover all possibilities. The following scenarios, one optimistic and one pessimistic, suggest the main features.

Optimistic Scenario:

There is a cease-fire and partial political settlement with the North Vietnamese that results in their exclusion from power in South Vietnam—that is, it results in the defeat of their attempt to unify the country under their leadership. This defeat is, of course, only a temporary one; yet it could become permanent. But why should the North Vietnamese enter into an agreement that results in their defeat? The answer is a combination of two factors. The first is that they overestimate their chances of political take-over under the terms of the cease-fire. Such an overestimate is by no means an unreasonable possibility. In the Tet offensive in 1968, for example, it became clear that the North Vietnamese expected a great deal more support from the South Vietnamese population than they, in fact, received, and in the attacks of last May they greatly underestimated popular resistance. While they may have learned their lesson, it is also possible that they may make the same mistake, or a variant of it, once again. The second factor that might lead the North Vietnamese to accept a settlement resulting in their defeat would be the realization on Hanoi's part that its current situation and immediate prospects are very unfavorable. Worried about the genuine threat of betrayal by their Chinese and Russian allies—as well as the possibility that the American public and government might be in a more escalatory mood after the election—Hanoi might be anxious to negotiate a settlement.

After the settlement, this optimistic scenario continues, the South Vietnamese Army holds together and remains the dominant power in the area of the country in which most of the population lives. All of the various political groups in Saigon realize that it is the army that protects them from Communist execution and makes possible the preservation of non-violent politics in much of the country. Therefore, everyone supports the army. The army, in turn, holds together and gains in morale, perceiving that it has the backing of the population.

In this situation, though in some ways the government will be partly paralyzed by internal disagreement, it is able to act. As long as such a government is assured of adequate external support and as long as it is not painted, rightly or wrongly, as a facade behind which a Communist take-over could proceed, it might well survive.

Pessimistic Scenario:

In this scenario there is a cease-fire and a temporary coalition government. At the time the agreement is reached, the South Vietnamese government controls the great bulk of the populated territory, and the great majority of the people oppose a Communist take-over. Communist forces are left in control of a minority of the population. In addition, they occupy the border areas of Cambodia and the Ho Chi Minh Trail area of Laos. As soon as the cease-fire begins, the North Vietnamese start executing all political opposition in territories reachable by their own forces, and they move military supplies into forward positions in order to attack in case the cease-fire ends. These military supplies include tanks, artillery, and a large volume of stored supplies of fuel and ammunition. The South Vietnamese, of course, are not unaware of what is going on, and, accordingly, the army comes to believe that it has been betrayed by the United States and that President Thieu is helpless to protect himself and to protect them. On top of all this the North Vietnamese make it clear that the agreement, which made possible the cease-fire, represents a surrender by the United States, that they do not have to comply with the terms of the agreement in the long run because U.S. forces will never return, that they intend to win control over the entire country, and that the "enemies of the people" will then be punished. At this point each group in the South-the religious sects, the labor unions, the political parties, and the army officers-begins to wonder how it can ensure its individual survival. Each citizen, in fact, attempts to predict the winner of the political-military contest that will continue under the guise of the cease-fire. It becomes clear that, if one supports the government and the government falls, then that person will be killed. On the other hand, the Communists offer safety and protection to leaders who are willing to support the "neutralist" faction. In these circumstances most groups and most individuals, naturally enough, try to hedge their bets.

Shortly after the cease-fire Vietcong cadres seize control of a village in the Mekong Delta. The local South Vietnamese popular forces are warned by the Communists not to interfere and are told that the South Vietnamese Army will not attempt to restore the official government of the village. The local army commander, although ordered by the government in Saigon to restore the village government, decides that obeying the order would be imprudent and delays moving in. During this delay the Vietcong try, "convict," and execute local officials and call for an election to select new ones. The Communists win, of course, and declare themselves the village government. When the South Vietnamese Army unit finally decides to take control of the village, the new government refuses to allow it to enter and orders the local popular-force unit to oppose the army if necessary. This is sufficient basis for the army commander to question his orders and stand aside. At that point the neutralist faction in the Saigon government moves to prevent the army from trying to restore the former government, especially since its officials are now all dead.

Word of this event travels throughout the country and makes similar efforts by Vietcong cadres more and more easy. The impression that the Communists are the ultimate victors in the war gains momentum, resulting in increased political support for the neutralist faction. That faction is thus able to gain a significant voice in controlling the army's movements and seriously hampers its ability to ensure the safety of political leaders. It is easy to see by now that this scenario can have only one ending: the complete Communist domination of Vietnam.

The interesting point about this pessimistic scenario is the light it sheds on a dilemma that both President Thieu and President Nixon must wrestle with now. The outcome of peace negotiations depends not only on the terms of the settlement but also on the way in which they are perceived by all sides. If the Saigon government remains unified, it is likely to be able to survive almost any agreement. The government's ability to remain unified depends, in turn, upon its confidence that South Vietnam's interests are reflected in the settlement and that reasonable American support will continue to be forthcoming. Thus, President Thieu has a great interest in making it look as though any agreement with Hanoi is completely satisfactory to him and does not represent an American betrayal. But if the issue it at all in doubt, he would try to convince the United States not to sign the agreement or at least to alter it to South Vietnam's benefit. He would claim that the proposed agreement is

totally unsatisfactory to him and, if adopted, would doom his regime, for he can have no other argument against peace. If it becomes known that we have forced Thieu to accept an unsatisfactory agreement by threatening to remove our support for his government (for example, by slowing down the flow of funds and letting the ammunition supply of the South Vietnamese Army become depleted), then South Vietnam will feel betrayed by us and might feel compelled to surrender to a seemingly victorious North Vietnam.

What would it take to achieve "victory" in Vietnam?

I believe that we are about to win the war in Vietnam. By thus announcing our imminent victory, I do not mean to imply that we will achieve complete peace in Indochina; nor do I mean that the South will become totally independent of American support. I mean that South Vietnam will achieve a degree of "pacification" similar to Israel's. As long as two or three years after the last Israeli-Arab war, the visitor to Tel Aviv or Haifa incurred an uncomfortably high risk of being killed or injured by an Arab bomb—there being about 200 such casualties per year at that time. Even so, the chance of being killed or injured by an Israeli driver was still about four times higher. Now, in terms of population, 200 casualties per year in Israel correspond to about 2,000 deaths in South Vietnam, or 20,000 in the United States. This situation is unpleasant but not unlivable. Prior to the North Vietnamese offensive last spring about 80 to 90 per cent of the South Vietnamese population lived under conditions similar to but only slightly worse than conditions in Israel. Those conditions will return rapidly, and though they may be disrupted again, the South Vietnamese are rapidly acquiring the capability to deter large conventional attacks-as the battles of Anloc and Hué have already demonstrated.

Instead of realizing the importance of those victories, nearly all the liberal commentators in this country pointed to the North Vietnamese invasion as an indication of the failure of Vietnamization because its repulsion required American assistance. But the Vietnamization policy was not intended to enable the South Vietnamese to prevent the massive Korean-type attack that Hanoi launched, complete with 500 or so tanks and large numbers of 130 mm artillery and Strella missiles, any one of these new weapons being by itself a very major technological escalation in the war. (Indeed, this eventuality was so unexpected that we had evacuated all but 72 of our heavy tanks from the embattled area.) The American response was not large compared with the magnitude of the enemy offensive. In fact, if I myself had realized how big the North Vietnamese attack was, I would probably not have stated, as I did on a television broadcast at the time, that the South Vietnamese would hold, and hold quite well. They did hold quite well. Indeed, in the fiftyfive years since the Battle of Cambrai in 1917, no unprepared infantry anywhere has held up against a surprise attack by tanks except at two places-Anloc and Hué. (It

may yet turn out that these two battles will go down as turning points in world history. For example, suppose the current *rapprochement* between the United States and the Soviet Union has great success. I would argue that Nixon could not have gone to Moscow if Anloc and Hue had fallen.)

Almost all the liberal commentators argued that the U.S. counteroffensive was useless, irrelevant, and maybe even immoral—one rationale for this position being that American bombing could have no effect on the North Vietnamese offensive for at least three months. This argument implied either that we did not care what happened in Vietnam three months hence or that the issue would be decided in the enemy's favor by then. Of course, we did care, and the South did hold. Although I admit that, if the North Vietnamese had used their tanks properly, they would not only have taken Anloc and Hue but probably have won the war, a good deal of credit must still be given to the heroism and fighting capabilities of the South Vietnamese.

This is not to say that South Vietnam could survive without American assistance, at least as long as the North receives help from China and the Soviet Union. But neither could Israel survive without U.S. aid under similar conditions, and liberals do not ordinarly condemn Israel for failure to achieve such independence. Until about 1975 South Vietnam will require the presence of American advisers—using the term advisers in the strictest sense. Initially, 20,000 to 30,000 U.S. advisers would

remain, and this number would decline gradually in the coming years. South Vietnamese pilots would take over air operations as they become trained, and by 1975 there should be no need for American pilots.

In addition to military assistance, South Vietnam will require considerable economic aid. About \$2 billion per year should not only ensure South Vietnam's continued survival but also make possible an extraordinary economic take-off. In fact, this take-off has already begun. With the continuation of a successful pacification program, the economy should become more and more dynamic. For, as the survival of South Vietnam becomes increasingly evident to other countries, investment—particularly Japanese investment—will be attracted there and development will accelerate. Despite the current no-growth enthusiasm in some quarters, the resulting prosperity in South Vietnam will look very impressive to the world.

Moreover, such a program of military and economic development would permit the United States to carry out its long-range policy of containing Communism and preserving American credibility in the eyes of other nations, which was exactly what our intervention in Vietnam was intended to accomplish in the first place. Vietnam might then prove to be the last major battle in the Cold War, a struggle that began in another small country, Czechoslovakia, and was continued in such seemingly unimportant places as Korea and Cuba. If this is the case, then success in Vietnam is a prerequisite to the coming era of stability that all of us desire.

## WIT TWISTER NO. 298 Edited by ARTHUR SWAN

The object of the game is to complete the poem by thinking of one word whose letters, when rearranged will yield the appropriate word for each series of blanks. Each dash within a blank corresponds to a letter of the word.

————— up! Defeat is not disgrace.

— — — — remarks are out of place.

Those few who well the — — — — toss

Were not dismayed by their first loss.

Dr. Gilbert V. Plain Ridgecrest, California

Answer to Wit Twister will be found on page 88

