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Questions About The War Protests

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One of the difficulties with campus strikes and other demonstrations is that they tend to focus attention on the behavior of the protesters instead of the substance of the protest.

Below is a compilation of the kind of questions that the administration and its supporters are posing to their critics, at least rhetorically, and an effort to distill from congressional debates and other discussions the responses of those critics.



Q.—Why do you always criticize American escalation and minimize the attacks and policies of the North Vietnamese?

A.—Because the conflict is essentially a war among the Vietnamese; because we are intruders in a situation with only peripheral geopolitical rather than local interest; because the death and destruction by both sides have been increased by our intervention and our super-weapons; because we are at war with a country that does not threaten us and against which very few Americans feel any grievance.

Q.—Why do you excuse Soviet intervention in the same war and why would Communist conquest of South Vietnam represent a more moral form of destruction than our defensive effort?

A.—The Russians have helped Hanoi only to the extent of offsetting the advantages of American power on the side of the Saigon gov-

ernment; and nothing that the Vietnamese might do to each other would match the havoc caused by American intervention over more than a decade.

Q.—But was not the United States well on the way toward complete withdrawal from the war and before Hanoi's offensive, showing great restraint in the use of its power?

A.—The United States was sparing itself the heavy casualties of ground combat, but it was doing everything possible to perpetuate the war itself with massive equipping of the South Vietnamese and the retention of formidable American air and sea power, as we can now see.

Q.—Don't you think our various offers in secret talks in Paris, including a cease-fire and new elections under a mixed election commission were genuine efforts to reach a settlement?

A.—The central issue has always been the distribution of political power in Saigon. After our involvement and commitments to the government of President Nguyen

Van Thieu, the other side has no basis for confidence in an American - style, Saigon - run election. And since the United States refuses to trust their proposals for coalition, there has been no real negotiation of the main question.

Q.—Why should we help them topple the Thieu government and give them at the conference table the power they have never been able to acquire on the battlefield?

A.—Because as long as Hanoi is willing to continue its war of more than 20 years, our side can never

win, the South Vietnamese will never manage without our help and we have neither motive nor means for an indefinite involvement.

Q.—Does not the United States bear a heavy obligation to its dead and wounded in this war, to its prisoners of war and its honor and sense of commitment to the South Vietnamese, even if

the obligations were too lightly assumed?

A.—Further bloodshed that fails to serve the recognized interests of the American people can never redeem the sacrifices already made. The continuing demonstration of American impotence or stubbornness is no way of demonstrating honor.

Q.—Would you simply walk away from the war, let the Communists take over South Vietnam and leave our allies to an almost certainly bloody and painful fate?

A.—Given the mood of the American people and the resources at our command, the only remaining power we have in Indochina is the power to negotiate for some conditions of our total withdrawal. That power has been diminishing during the years of the Nixon administration and may be virtually exhausted, too. But presumably we could still extract some guarantees against massive reprisals and some political influence for the many South Vietnamese who do not wish to be swallowed

Q.—What would be the reaction of the South Koreans and West Germans, to cite two other divided nations, if the United States proved unreliable in its commitments, or of dependent nations like Israel?

A.—It is the Vietnam war, not the absence of it, that has sapped American energy and will and caused other nations to doubt the value of our support. Prolonging the war will not restore that trust, especially if our support tends to spread destruction among the people whom we set out to defend. It is not just American power but its wise use that would impress allies.

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