

# McGovern on Vietnam

Senator George McGovern's address to the nation on the Vietnam War is a strong indictment of a politically bankrupt and morally ruinous policy. The Nixon Administration's failure to "win the peace" in Vietnam — four years after it was elected on a pledge to do so — and its continuance of the war up to this moment is one of the major issues of this campaign.

Several years ago there was at least an intellectually defensible argument for the view that it was in the American interest to prevent a Communist takeover in South Vietnam, even if that interest never corresponded in size or importance to the enormous military effort which the Johnson Administration invested in its defense. But Mr. Nixon's *rapprochement* with China and Russia has destroyed whatever rationale may have existed on this ground for further American military effort in Vietnam. Mr. McGovern asks the unanswerable question:

"How can we really argue that it is good to accommodate ourselves to a billion Russian and Chinese Communists but that we must somehow fight to the bitter end against a tiny band of peasant guerrillas in the jungles of little Vietnam?"

President Thieu has destroyed the second reason for American involvement — the right of political self-determination for the people of South Vietnam. Since General Thieu has suppressed virtually all of his political opposition, the U.S. in supporting him can no longer be said to be supporting freedom or self-determination.

Senator McGovern sets forth in detail his alternative to the Nixon-Kissinger policy of secret negotiations and intensified bombing. As he has in the past, he promises to withdraw American military forces completely from Vietnam within 90 days. If the North Vietnamese reciprocate during that time by releasing American prisoners of war, he would follow their action by withdrawing U.S. forces from Thailand.

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The problem of making peace in Vietnam has always been political. The war has been fought to determine the political future of the southern half of the country. Since taking office in 1969, Mr. Nixon has tried to escape that inescapable fact by pursuing two contradictory policies. The pace of American military withdrawal has been tied to the success of "Vietnamization" which is a program of strengthening the Thieu Government. But the pace of the Paris peace talks has been tied by the Communists to the willingness of the U.S. to accept replacement of the Thieu Government. This contradiction has produced nearly four years of blood-stained stalemate, which President Nixon has been unable to break. The commitment to the Thieu Government has proved an insuperable obstacle to peace. Senator McGovern would overcome this obstacle by relinquishing any American responsibility for the political future of South Vietnam.

Senator McGovern was eloquent in his accounting of the terrible costs of a war which has been prolonged for far too long — the lives lost, the hopes blighted, the money squandered, the budget unbalanced and the price level inflated. The ultimate cost is moral. In a sense, the election turns upon the moral capacity of the American people to turn aside from the saving of face and away from misplaced appeals to national honor and to confront at last the true human costs of this war for all participants, Vietnamese and American. Senator McGovern's moving statement of the moral issue deserves an affirmative national response.