

## Vietnam Aftermath

It's over. Or at least it is supposed to be tomorrow; completion and announcement of agreement between the United States and North Vietnam did not deter final, senseless acts of combat just before the cease-fire is to take effect.

The very notion of an end to the Vietnam war is hard to comprehend in the abstract, so accustomed have we all become to the outpouring of spirit, wealth and manhood which the decade past has demanded of us.

This Republic has learned much about itself, about its leaders, about the world and the meaning of power from the ordeal it suffered in mountains and rice paddies half-way around the globe. Not all the lessons are comforting—in fact few of them are.

If Vietnam is to have any meaning at all, these lessons must be defined and absorbed by a coming generation just as the problems of the war dominated the sensitivities of the generation now maturing. "No More Vietnams" has already become a sort of national battle cry. It is now the country's great task to ensure that this expression of hope will be turned into reality.

Vietnam spanned the era of American foreign policy after World War II, from the epoch when the prime objective was "containment" of international Communism, to the present day when co-existence with Communism is seen as possible, necessary and desirable—for mutual benefit and survival. The Communist world, too, has evolved. The United States might not have gone into Vietnam had the depth of schism between the Soviet Union and China been clearly perceived; it could not have come out safely if this schism had not become the dominant reality to both Moscow and Peking. Some will argue that America's firmness in Vietnam has hastened the growth of a less overtly menacing form of national Communism; it certainly did not retard this evolution, as pessimistic Americans feared it would.

When President Kennedy led the nation into what became an open-ended military commitment to a struggling small state, the United States Government was confident in its own power and skill, and it enjoyed the confidence of the American people. As President Nixon succeeds finally in extracting the nation, poorer and wiser, from the commitment, confidence is not a sentiment in surplus across the land.

Americans today have learned to distrust the notion of a war to end wars. Yet it is possible to retain a certain faith. It may not be empty rhetoric to believe that the scars of Vietnam can bring new strength as they heal, strength gathered in a clearer definition of the priorities for the use of national power. Strength can come from a more precise evaluation of the possibilities and limitations inherent in that power. And strength can spring from understanding, from tolerance and from humility.