

Memo

Implications of an Unfavorable  
Outcome in Vietnam

11 September 1967

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**IMPLICATIONS OF AN UNFAVORABLE OUTCOME IN VIETNAM**

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**IMPLICATIONS OF AN UNFAVORABLE OUTCOME IN VIETNAM**

**PROBLEM AND ASSUMPTIONS**

1. At some stage in most debates about the Vietnam war, questions like the following emerge: What would it actually mean for the US if it failed to achieve its stated objectives in Vietnam? Are our vital interests in fact involved? Would abandonment of the effort really generate other serious dangers? Naturally, those who oppose the war tend to minimize the costs of failures, while those who support the war point ominously to far-reaching negative effects which they allege would follow such a setback. This aspect of the Vietnam argument has lacked clear and detailed definition on both sides, even though it is crucial to the Why and Wherefore of our whole involvement there.

2. What we are attempting in this paper is to provide some greater precision about the probable costs, for American policy and interests as a whole, of an unfavorable outcome in Vietnam. It is not assumed in this inquiry that such an outcome is now likely; it has been demonstrated, in fact, that the Communists

cannot win if the US is determined to prevent it. But the question of what it would mean for the US if its own objectives are not achieved is relevant and fair. The debate itself shows the need for a sounder basis by which to measure the costs of an unfavorable outcome against the exertions which would presumably still be required to achieve a favorable one.

3. What we mean by an "unfavorable outcome" needs to be defined with some realism. We are not discussing the entirely implausible hypothesis of a political-military collapse, say, the precipitate withdrawal of American forces or sweeping political concessions tantamount to granting Hanoi outright achievement of its aims in the South. It seems realistic to believe, given the present scale of US involvement and the sacrifices already made, that this government would approach a settlement short of its aims only by a series of steps involving gradual adjustment of our present political-military posture. Apart from the domestic political pressures that would cause this to be so, the very concern to minimize unfavorable effects on other relationships and on the American world position would argue strongly for such a course.

4. We assume, therefore, that an outcome favorable to the Communists would come about as the result of a process of negotiation,

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probably fairly prolonged. A resulting political settlement, whether or not it looked at first like a "compromise," would in the end lead to the establishment of Communist power in South Vietnam. Insofar as the broader repercussions of this development are concerned, a critical variable would be the time the process took. If it took 10 years, obviously the significance of US acceptance of such a settlement would tend to be lost in the new context produced by interim events. We are assuming for purposes of this discussion that the period would be short enough to make it impossible to blur the fact that American policy had met with a serious reverse; it would appear in fact that the US had deliberately accepted a faulty settlement rather than pay the price of trying longer to avert it. This seems a realistic assumption for two reasons: the Communists would probably try to turn a shaky settlement to early advantage and would be little concerned to delay their triumph for a long period in order to save face for the US; and, the divided non-Communist political forces in South Vietnam, if left to their own devices under such a settlement, would probably not be able to put up effective political resistance for very long.

5. If all this went off peacefully, it would constitute the best rather than the worst case, or rather a successful US effort

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to achieve the best case, given a decision to place priority on ending hostilities rather than on achievement of the aims we have so far pursued. It is possible, however, that events would be precipitated in such a manner that the outcome -- the taking of power by the Communists -- would emerge very rapidly and in conditions of breakdown and disorder on the non-Communist side. There could be a spectacle of panic flight from the country, suicidal resistance by isolated groups, and Communist terror and vengeance. Clearly, if this worst case came about, the discredit the US would earn, which would be seen by many as not merely political but also as moral discredit, would be far greater. The following discussion assumes a negotiated settlement applied in reasonably orderly circumstances, but which nevertheless works out to Communist advantage within a relatively brief period, say, a year or so.

#### SOME GENERAL PROPOSITIONS

6. Viewed purely as an intellectual problem, the question posed can have no complete and wholly satisfactory answer. One is asked to assume a single event, the scenario and context for which cannot be described in detail, and to project its consequences for subsequent developments on the world scene as a whole. In fact,

no single event, even one as important as this one, can be determining for all subsequent developments. In any case, it is impossible to disentangle the effects of a single event from the whole continuum of interacting forces; compensatory motions of unforeseeable magnitude, or even quite unrelated developments, would come into play to alter the sum of interactions. Only historians, after the fact, can have the satisfaction of tracing back orderly chains of causation. The view forward is always both hazy and kaleidoscopic; those who have to act on such a view can have no certainties but must make choices on what appears at the moment to be the margin of advantage.

7. If it is impossible to list and measure all the forces which would be brought into play by the event assumed, it may nevertheless be possible to state some general propositions which would tend to govern the directions in which events might move. Such propositions can at least suggest how to think about the issues posed. Those stated in the immediately following paragraphs will be applied later in the paper in attempting to forecast developments affecting some concrete situations and relationships.

8. The failure of American policy in Vietnam would have repercussions worldwide; it cannot be thought of merely as a local or even as a regional event. This is so, not only because world



attention has been so intensively focussed on the drama of Vietnam for so long, but even more importantly, because the US is involved and it is a primary power factor on a world scale.

9. There would inevitably be a reappraisal in many quarters of the real weight and reach of US power. In a sense, international politics is the sum of calculations made by all the actors concerning the power and intentions of all others. Since the US has been viewed as the most powerful actor in the game, all parties would feel obliged to reconsider their views of US power, as well as of the will and wisdom of those who wield it.

10. That this should happen at all is a measure of the importance of the event which occasions it. The respect of others for US power and the uses to which it is put is one of the key building blocks for such order and security as obtain in the world. If it were removed from this inherently fragile structure, many unsettling and perhaps dangerous consequences would follow. Those who are responsible for the conduct of American policy cannot in prudence afford to treat this consideration lightly.

11. The contingency we are discussing in this paper would constitute a rather dramatic demonstration that there are certain limits on US power, a discovery which would be unexpected for many,

disconcerting for some, and encouraging to others. To be sure, no one doubts that the US could utterly destroy North Vietnam with nuclear weapons, if it chose to do so. Most would probably agree that the US could achieve its objectives by less drastic methods, if it persisted long enough and paid the cost. But the compelling proposition emerging from the situation would be that the US, acting within the constraints imposed by its traditions and public attitudes, cannot crush a revolutionary movement which is sufficiently large, dedicated, competent, and well-supported. In a narrow sense, this means more simply that the structure of US military power is ill-suited to cope with guerrilla warfare waged by a determined, resourceful, and politically astute opponent. This is not a novel discovery. It has long been suspected. What our postulated situation would do is to reveal it dramatically.

12. On the other hand, the contingency we are discussing in this paper does not involve a reversal of power relations, of the sort that occurred for example, with the defeat of Germany in World War II. The case in question is rather one of a setback for a very great power whose essential strength would remain unimpaired. Historically, great powers have repeatedly absorbed setbacks without permanent diminution of the role which they subsequently played.

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Everyone acknowledges that the USSR has suffered a number of major setbacks in the last 20 years, but few would argue that its power bulks any the less formidable today. Similarly, the view held by others of US power would probably be affected relatively and temporarily, though it is not possible to say with certainty whether new complications and dangers might not be set in train by such a setback.

13. Moreover, the reappraisals of the US made by others would not be uniform; they would be heavily conditioned by the particular perspectives, expectations, and interests of different countries. The fears of some would rise because they would conclude that US power was a less reliable support to their security than they had supposed. Others would be reassured because they would believe that US power was being used with greater responsibility and concern for the general peace than they had thought. Some would fear a tendency for the US to withdraw generally from involvement with the security and development of other areas. Others would rejoice because they would expect the US to reveal a better-balanced concern for other parts of the world than southeast Asia, and still others because they would hope that US resources saved by peace in Vietnam would be applied elsewhere.

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14. The reappraisals would also be tentative. Few would conclude that the Vietnam episode gave a firm fix for the future on the content and direction of US policy. Almost all would recognize that, while Vietnam indicated something about the limits of US power and especially about its relevance to that particular situation, the power of the US would remain the weightiest single factor in world politics. The indications that the US gave in subsequent pronouncement and action of how it intended to use its power would increasingly over time efface the impact of the Vietnamese affair. It would not have permanent effect on how others viewed this country since the reappraisal of power relations is a continuing process.

15. A similar tentativeness would affect the attitudes of states which have a particular interest because of US security commitments to them. We think there is none which would withdraw forthwith from its security relationship with the US because of an unfavorable outcome in Vietnam. Some might consider whether they ought not to allow such ties to dissolve and move to a more neutral stance. Some might even draw the lesson that the US would in future be more exacting of reciprocal performance from its alliance partners. Probably all would decide to await further evidence before making a definitive reading of US intentions,

evidence in the form of reassurances or actions bearing directly on themselves. But a trend toward degeneration of some alliance relationships is one of the risks that would be involved.

16. Finally one general proposition towers over all the above in importance; it concerns a factor which probably would have more decisive effect on the net result than any other. This is the appraisal made by the US itself -- its leaders and general opinion -- of the meaning of the Vietnam experience for the future course of US policy. A traumatic reaction, perhaps revealed by a deeply divisive national debate or by a feverish search for "guilty" parties, could greatly compound the damage done. An apparent confusion of counsels, with one set of extremists demanding a more ruthless use of American power and another the renunciation of any world power role, would have similar effect. More than other nations, and far more than any great power known to history, the Americans live with open windows. Especially in the immediate aftermath of the event, a clamor of domestic quarreling and disarray might go far to fix the views of friends and foes abroad in a mistaken and ultimately dangerous mold. Conversely, if American opinion seemed in the main to take a steady and sober line, foreign echoes would tend to be similarly moderated. In fact, American domestic interpretations of a setback in Vietnam, and the

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impression others consequently formed of the likely subsequent course of American policy, might finally prove as important as the event itself.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR ASIA

17. Turning to some more concrete implications, the most direct and immediate would be evident in the region of Southeast Asia itself. But what happens in this area bears in turn on Chinese policy and the future of Chinese-American relations, and also on the role which the US is to play in the affairs of Asia over the long term.

##### Southeast Asia

18. In considering Southeast Asia, the first questions are: Does Hanoi have ambitions beyond the extension of Communist power to the whole of Vietnam? Having won that, how would it conduct itself toward other states of the area? There does not seem much doubt that it would aim to establish its ascendancy over Laos and Cambodia; the Vietnamese Communists, partly because they had an organized existence for several decades under the colonial regime, apparently regard themselves as the successors to the French in all of Indo-China. But this does not mean that Hanoi would proceed

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at once to wage subversive-guerrilla war against these two countries in order to establish outright Communist regimes. For some period at least, the Communists would be preoccupied with the consolidation of their rule in South Vietnam. Probably Hanoi would be satisfied initially to have well-disposed governments responsive to its influence in Laos and Cambodia. Its primary requirement would be that they not have a military association with the US. If they did, they would become the object of subversive attack, though probably not of formal invasion. Sooner or later, of course, Hanoi would expect these two countries to be governed by subordinate branches of the Vietnamese Communist Party.

19. The situation of Thailand would be perilous and complicated. Sooner or later, both Hanoi and Peking would bring pressure in an attempt to force Bangkok into a "cooperative" relationship. The test would be the latter's willingness to dissociate itself from the US, and, presumably, new political leadership would be required as an earnest of this change. We have no sound basis for estimating how the Thais would respond to such pressure. Our best guess is that, despite the discredit the US would suffer because of the outcome in Vietnam, the present Thai leadership would continue to seek US support. The Communist powers would then press the subversive effort already in being in northeast Thailand,

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using it as a lever on the Bangkok government. Its dilemma would be whether to try to buy off Communist pressure by realigning its policies, or whether to give resistance with US aid, assuming this was offered. With such aid, the Thais' chances of beating off a subversive campaign would probably be good, though the pressures for accommodation generated by leftist political forces, which would no doubt gain strength in the wake of a Communist success in Vietnam, might be great. We see no way of anticipating how the internal political struggle generated in Thailand by these events would fall out. Obviously, the stance adopted by the US, and Thai appraisal of it, would be crucial.

20. Similarly, in other countries of the region, judgments made about the further intentions of the US in the area would decisively affect the balance of internal political forces and, therefore, the policies adopted toward the Communist powers. In Malaysia, Burma, the Philippines, and Indonesia, non-Communist political forces now have a clear ascendancy. The will of the present ruling groups to maintain themselves in power, to assert full national independence, and to resist internal subversion would persist despite Communist success in Vietnam. None of these four states would be destined inevitably to fall under Communist control or to be pressured into a vassal relationship with China.



But clearly their will and capacity to resist internal and external pressures would be greatly strengthened if the US demonstrated convincingly that its backing would continue to be available to them. What the US did about supporting the Thais, who would be most immediately exposed to Communist pressures, would greatly affect judgments of political leaders in the other states about US intentions.

21. The outlook would be very much darker if leaders in these countries concluded that they had to write off the US as a power factor in the region. A strong regime in China determined to press a campaign of subversion against the mainland states has considerable assets with which to work. Burma is vulnerable because of its long border and its dissident minorities; its political weakness and stagnation may make it a target for the Communists regardless of the outcome in Vietnam. In Malaysia and Singapore, the Communist parties, largely Chinese, are responsive to Peking's direction and have a demonstrated capacity for terrorist activity. With new pressures on these governments, leftist fronts agitating for accommodation with the Communist powers would gain in strength. Even if not inevitable, it is possible, especially assuming the absence of effective US support, that political realignments would occur in one or another of these countries.

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At a minimum, internal instability and a setback to economic development would be a danger.

22. Indonesia and the Philippines would be very much less vulnerable, in part because their island situations make external support to guerrilla forces far more difficult. It seems unlikely that the present Indonesian leaders would, because of Communist success in Vietnam, falter in their determination to cope with their own internal Communist problem. Given continuation of the economic aid programs in which the US, Japan, and others are involved, their will to move ahead with orderly development would remain. If, however, Communist gains eventually took place in Thailand and other mainland states, leftist nationalist forces, which have been repressed along with the Communists in the last two years, might revive; the result could be a new phase of severe instability. In the Philippines, the outlook for stability and sound development is not good in any case. US failure in Vietnam would give encouragement to Communist and anti-American forces, but the problem of subversion would probably still be manageable. As in Indonesia, of course, if Communist gains were extended beyond Vietnam, there would probably be a tendency for the internal situation of the Philippines to deteriorate also.

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23. Thus the eventual repercussions of failure in Vietnam are potentially serious in Southeast Asia as a whole, but that failure alone would not necessarily unhinge the entire area. Other factors which would come into play subsequently would be far more important. The primary one is the role the US would decide to play in the area, and its success in convincing leaders there of its will and capacity to continue backing them. Next in importance would be the outcome in Thailand. If the Thais, with US backing, successfully held off the pressures which would be brought to bear against them, the whole region would probably remain reasonably stable. If they did not, deteriorating situations in Burma and Malaysia would probably develop, and the political balance in Indonesia and the Philippines could eventually be affected also. Finally, much in all this hangs on the situation in China; restored unity there, if combined with a reinvigoration of expansionist policies, would obviously worsen the odds against stability in Southeast Asia.

China

24. In view of the present internal turmoil in China, it is impossible to say whether and in what degree it will be a significant factor in Asian power alignments during the next few years. The discussion here assumes that order will ultimately be restored

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under the authority of a central government, and that such a government will aspire to great-power dominance in the Asian region. This means that it will strive to limit or displace US influence and to bring lesser states of the area into a dependent or at least reliable relationship with itself. This will be true whatever faction wins the internal power struggle, though the manner in which a future Chinese regime pursues such aims clearly depends on its political complexion and on its strength. In any case, we would not think that Communist success in Vietnam would make overt Chinese aggression in Southeast Asia any more likely. Like Hanoi, Peking would try to follow up by increasing pressure on states of that area to dissociate themselves from the US. Probably on the political plane, though surely not in power terms, a unified Communist Vietnam could become something of a competitor to China in that region.

25. It seems unlikely that Communist success in Vietnam would itself have any important bearing on the internal struggle in China. No doubt the Maoists would claim the event as a triumph of the leader's doctrines, but the Vietnamese war is apparently not at issue between the Chinese factions; other contentions over internal power and policy are dominating. Whether in the long run

the fact that the US was no longer militarily present in a border country would improve the prospects of Chinese-American relations seems doubtful. These relations will depend far more fundamentally on other issues, notably Taiwan, and on the general political disposition of the leadership in China which succeeds Mao.

The US Role in Asia

26. Not only the states of Southeast Asia, but all the non-Communist states in the Far East would feel obliged to ask themselves what the failure of US policy in Vietnam meant for the future role of the US in that part of the world. There would surely be a shock to all these states, and a period of some uncertainty while they re-examined their relations with the US and made frantic efforts to get a new reading on US intentions.

27. Eventual reactions would vary with the particular situations of individual states. Those which feel themselves most immediately threatened by Communist forces -- Thailand, South Korea, Taiwan -- would be the most alarmed. The latter two would demand concrete reassurance, recognizing that they had no possibility of accommodation with their enemies. As indicated above, Thailand's case would be more complex. And, also as argued above, other states in Southeast Asia would be very much affected

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eventually by whether Vietnam seemed to set a limit to Communist advance, by the fate of Thailand, and by what the US demonstrated there that it was prepared to do in future. Broadly speaking, we think that all these states would want the US to continue to play a major role in support of Asian security and development, but they would expect it to demonstrate anew that it had the will to do so. For some, the lesson of Vietnam might be that US support could not be effective without greater effort by them on their own behalf. The outcome in Vietnam might also give some impulse to regional association in Asia, though this would be unlikely to be significant from a security point of view.

28. In Japan, one would not expect any sudden retreat from the security relationship with the US, but stronger neutralist opinion would be heard and the future of the US-Japanese security treaty would be more uncertain. For the Japanese, however, the relationship with the US would be weighed primarily against the long-term threat posed by a nuclear China, and if developments in China did not seem likely to promise a diminution of this threat, Japan would probably want to preserve its present ties with the US. But the alternative of seeking security by becoming a nuclear power herself would probably also gain wider support.

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29. The way in which US leadership defined the future American role in Asia, and the extent to which such utterances appeared to command political support in this country, would be by all odds the most important determinants for Asian attitudes. This means that if the US persuasively conveyed the intention to continue to be present in the Far East as a security factor, and also to continue supporting the moves toward regional institutional development which have begun there, then it seems unlikely that in the end an unfavorable outcome in Vietnam would greatly alter the present pattern of relationships. There would no doubt be a troubled and uncertain phase in the immediate aftermath of the event, but it should not be beyond the capacity of our leadership and diplomacy to negotiate this passage, provided again that our domestic politics did not give such a picture of confusion and disarray that Asians felt it necessary to discount the US as a power factor in that area.

30. Thus we do not conclude that other states in Asia would inevitably fall under Communist control in the wake of Communist success in Vietnam. The ensuing period would be marked by increased political instability, especially in Southeast Asia, and the slow process of political-economic development and regional association which we have sought to promote would surely be set

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back. If one or more states in Southeast Asia did in fact fall under Communist control, the outlook for these goals would be even dimmer; the region could be in a turbulent and regressive condition for a long time. This would mean a major frustration of US policy aims, but we think would not bring any major threats to US security.

#### SOVIET-AMERICAN RELATIONS

31. We turn next to Soviet-American relations because these constitute the central power conflict in the world, because only the USSR can seriously threaten US security, and because the conclusions the Soviets might draw from a US failure in Vietnam could affect American policy problems in many areas other than Asia.

32. The Soviets did not stimulate Hanoi's aggression; had their influence been dominant, the Vietnamese Communists would probably have pursued a more cautious and less costly course toward their goal of winning power in all of Vietnam. Since 1964, however, Moscow has given full political and material support, partly to counter Chinese influence in Vietnam and in the Communist movement generally, and partly because the Soviet leadership came to believe Hanoi had a good chance for success. The USSR's interests as leader of the Communist world and as a great power demanded that it be associated with this success. The anticipated setback for US arms and policy would serve both kinds of interests.



33. How would Soviet conduct be affected by the outcome in Vietnam that we are assuming? One hypothesis that can be dismissed, the one promoted currently by Soviet propaganda, is that the way would be opened toward a number of constructive developments which would greatly advance Soviet-American detente. Surely the so-called "American aggression in Vietnam" has contributed to the hardening of Soviet-American relations over the last several years, but Vietnam has been as much pretext as cause. The Soviets have not tried seriously to promote a settlement there, among other reasons, because they wanted to use the political liabilities the war has imposed on the US to undermine American influence in other areas and to advance their own. They would use a setback for US policy in Vietnam to the same end, pointing out to others the limitations and unreliability of US power, and the dangers of being aligned with it against "progressive" forces. Against this background, no very significant progress in bilateral relations would be likely, though the Soviets might initially favor an improvement in atmospherics in order to push settlement of some issues on what they would call "a more realistic basis." In sum, the Soviet-American conflict is too broad and basic, involving a power contention in other areas far more crucial than Southeast Asia, to be turned around toward detente merely by the end of the war in Vietnam.

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34. A more challenging question is whether the Soviets might not make a reappraisal of American power and will which would tempt them into rashly aggressive moves. We know their preoccupation with the psychology of power. While they would realize that objectively American capabilities were undiminished, they might speculate on the disorientation of American leadership and on a loss of nerve. We think there is some chance that the Soviets would wish to try on some such hypothesis. It is impossible to say where and how they might move to test American will. If they did so, it would probably be in a tentative manner; any really dangerous probe would be ended as soon as they were satisfied that the US did not accept that any general change in the relations of power had occurred. Moreover, they would be conscious that particularly strong American reactions were possible precisely in order to demonstrate that the outcome in Vietnam had no general significance. They would also be aware that a reversion by them to aggressive behavior would prejudice political tendencies they have been trying to nourish, notably in Europe. We think, therefore, that while the Soviets would certainly entertain moves toward policies of pressure, they would actually undertake these only with their usual caution, and would draw back when they were satisfied that the results were likely to be counterproductive.

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This adds up to saying that Soviet conduct in the wake of an unfavorable outcome in Vietnam might present problems, but that these would probably be manageable if the US played a steady hand and conveyed to others that it was doing so.

#### THE INSURGENCY PROBLEM

35. Since the beginning of this decade "national liberation warfare" has been celebrated by Soviet doctrine and policy as the key to overcoming "imperialism," advancing "socialism," and thus, impliedly, to extending the Soviet imperium. Would the Soviets see a Communist success in South Vietnam as validating their theses about national liberation struggle, and thus be disposed to sponsor similar tactics more widely? There is reason to doubt this. Surely Soviet propaganda would in a general way make much of the heroic exploits of the liberation fighters in Vietnam, and might in selected areas urge that their example be followed. But Moscow would be unlikely to advocate their methods as a general prescription for Communist parties and "progressive" forces, or pledge Soviet support indiscriminately to such ventures. The Soviets probably realize that the case of Vietnam is sui generis, that the Communists there had the luck to capture a broadly-based nationalist movement directed genuinely against foreign colonial rule. They know that

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almost everywhere else in the Third World the colonial oppressors have been long gone, and that the conditions for armed action by Communists are more complicated and less favorable. Accordingly, they would continue to weigh the balance of forces obtaining in each national arena separately, counseling their clients to avoid "adventurism," and to resort to armed violence only when the prospects for success were good. One of the criteria for judging this would still be the likelihood of external aid to the regime being attacked, especially US aid. Therefore, any change in this aspect of Soviet policy would reflect Moscow's judgment that US counterinsurgency intervention had become less likely.

36. Moscow is not in a position to orchestrate all insurgency activity, however, and nowadays even in the Communist movement its advice may go unheeded. It seems likely that, in some Communist parties and in some other leftist groups, armed violence as the way to power would acquire greater appeal. Some, stirred by the romantic revolutionary aura which might seem to surround the Vietnamese in victory, might actually try to imitate them. Manifestations of this sort would be most likely to occur in Southeast Asia itself, and perhaps in Latin America. In certain of the Latin American Communist movements there are minority factions which are

now, under Castro's influence, wholly committed to armed violence. Such groups would see the failure of US counterinsurgency actions in Vietnam as a particularly favorable omen for them, and would be encouraged to enlarge their efforts.

37. We doubt, however, that such impulses would result in a much more widespread and serious Communist insurgency problem than would obtain in any case, either in Latin America or elsewhere. If Communists in some countries temporarily acquired more will to fight, the odds for or against success for such ventures in any particular national setting would remain essentially the same. It is possible, in fact, that threatened governments would draw the lesson that more vigorous efforts on their own behalf were indicated, a result which would contain insurgency far more effectively than aid by the US could ever do.

38. The effect on organized international Communism of more reckless resort to insurgency by some parties would probably be divisive. The great majority of the Communist parties would continue to adhere to the traditional Soviet view that impetuous resort to armed violence heedless of local circumstances manifests the deviation of "petit bourgeois adventurism." Those who defied this view would find themselves isolated and without effective support

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from the main body of the movement. Thus, there would almost certainly not be a tendency for the Communist movement to regain its unity by coalescing around a general line of greater reliance on armed violence. The divisions fomented by Chinese, Castroites, or others who believe that "the primary duty of revolutionaries is to make revolution" might even be intensified. Moreover, there will continue to be numerous other grounds for splits within international communism.

39. Wherever a fresh impulse might in fact be given to revolutionary insurgency in certain less developed countries, there would be a setback to political stability and economic development. This, rather than the likelihood of new Vietnams, is the cost to measure. Even in these terms, the cost seems likely to be limited. Perhaps it could be argued that US capacity to give leadership to Third World development would be compromised, but such an effect is not measurable and would be temporary, especially if the US continued to make significant resources available for military and development aid.

#### THE US AND THE THIRD WORLD

40. By and large, the US involvement in Vietnam has had little sympathy in the Third World. The reactions to US failure

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would probably be as varied and conflicting as the political colorations and interests which obtain there. For many states, preoccupied with their own national and regional concerns, the Vietnam outcome would be a matter of indifference. Some would be pleased because of a general commitment to "anti-imperialism" as a cause. Others would hope for a more generous outpouring of US aid with the drain of the war stopped. A few might revise their view of the account that had to be taken of US power, and this might be damaging in international forums like the UN.

41. Certain states which, formally or informally, have linked their security to reliance on US power would be the most troubled. Some have done so in the belief that ties with the US were necessary to deter aggression by the USSR or, just as often, for support against their regional adversaries. This applies especially in the Middle East among the moderate Arab states and among states on the southern borders of the USSR. There might be some tendency among these to believe that US power had been overrated or was on the wane, so that accommodation to a new shape of things to come was indicated. On the whole, it seems unlikely that the Vietnam affair alone would cause any radical changes of alignment. There would probably be time and opportunity for US policy to offset

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such tendencies, though there would be a price to pay in reassurances and aid.

42. Nevertheless, allowance should be made for special uncertainties in the Third World. Many governments there have an unstable view of power relations in the world, and are faced by equally excitable oppositions. For some, a setback for US power, which may have seemed more imposing and invulnerable to them than to us, will come as a severe shock. Thus, there is the possibility that one or another government, or its opposition, would over-interpret the significance of what happened in Vietnam, with unpredictable effects on its stability and alignment.

#### THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE

43. Allied governments and general opinion in Europe have had mixed views of the American involvement in Vietnam, but on the whole there has been a tepid reception of the American rationale for the effort made there. Some opinion has been actively opposed, seeing Vietnam as an American aberration owing to a continuing addiction to cold war. Most governments have thought the US mistaken, but have recognized that once the Americans were committed, it was best to give some passive support, provided there was no



European involvement. These attitudes reflect a current European mood of reluctance to be involved in affairs entailing cost or risk which do not seem to have a direct bearing on national interests.

44. Concern about an unfavorable outcome in Vietnam would not, therefore, be related so much to the event itself or to what it might mean for that part of the world, as it would to possible effects on American policy and attitudes. Of course, those who hearken to Gaullist doctrine would consider such a setback for American power to be a desirable development, but these would be few. Some, especially in Germany, would ask questions about the reliability of American commitments to Europe's security, but it is unlikely that mistrust on this score would be widespread or take on a morbid character. Most would understand that the American stake in Europe's security is of a far different order of importance, and would not be disposed to make false analogies. However, the output of opinion-makers, especially that of journalistic intellectuals given to sensational and pseudo-sociological interpretations, ricochets with exceptional velocity within the Atlantic world. There would thus be some danger, and especially if there were serious political ructions here, that European opinion would be led to doubt American capacity to lead the Alliance. But on the whole, despite some alarms and excursions, the basic security relationship with Europe would survive.

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45. Of course, there is more to the Atlantic relationship than the security tie. The US has thought of it also as a coalition of the advanced Western nations committed to certain constructive enterprises, especially in the struggle for order and development in the Third World. The credibility of American leadership for such purposes might be adversely affected, despite the fact that most European governments have wanted us to shed the Vietnam involvement and would not mind very much the manner of our doing so. This would be a cost to be borne, in the hope that time would efface it, as it probably would.

#### CONCLUSION

46. The foregoing discussion has roamed widely over many areas and possibilities. Any very precise or confident conclusions would misrepresent what has been said and exceed what sober judgment would allow. The following are the broad and essential impressions which this paper has intended to convey:

a. An unfavorable outcome in Vietnam would be a major setback to the reputation of US power which would limit US influence and prejudice our other interests in some degree which cannot be reliably foreseen.

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b. Probably the net effects would not be permanently damaging to this country's capacity to play its part as a world power working for order and security in many areas.

c. The worst potential damage would be of the self-inflicted kind: internal dissension which would limit our future ability to use our power and resources wisely and to full effect, and lead to a loss of confidence by others in the American capacity for leadership.

d. The destabilizing effects would be greatest in the immediate area of Southeast Asia where some states would probably face internal turmoil and heightened external pressures, and where some realignments might occur; similar effects would be unlikely elsewhere or could be more easily contained.

47. As indicated at the outset of this paper, no single analysis of this subject can be entirely adequate. The uncertainties and imponderables involved in projecting the consequences of the contingency discussed are so great that other implications can legitimately be drawn. If they were either more comforting or more ominous, they could not be disproved.

48. But any honest and dispassionate analysis must conclude that, if the US accepts failure in Vietnam, it will pay some

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price in the form of new risks which success there would preclude. The frustration of a world power, once it has committed vast resources and much prestige to a military enterprise, must be in some degree damaging to the general security system it upholds. In the case of Vietnam, there does not seem to be a common denominator which permits such eventual risks to be measured reliably against the obvious and immediate costs of continuing war. Presumably those who have to make the agonizing choices were aware of that already. If the analysis here advances the discussion at all, it is in the direction of suggesting that such risks are probably more limited and controllable than most previous argument has indicated.