

Morris K. Udall -- Selected Articles:

The United States and Vietnam -What Lies Ahead?

by Morris K. Udall

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A PERSONAL NOTE TO MY READERS: One reason for the long lapse in publication of my newsletters has been the attention I have been giving in recent months to this nation's involvement in Vietnam. Because I see this as the overriding issue facing our nation I consented to address the Sunday Evening Forum in Tucson on October 22, sharing with the people of Arizona my best judgment of what this war is accomplishing and what future course we should follow in Vietnam. For the benefit of my newsletter readers I am reproducing the complete text of that speech in this special report. I will welcome any comments or reactions you may have to my proposals.

Tonight I come to talk about war and peace, about Presidents, dominoes, commitments and mistakes. I want to start with some of my own commitments and at least one of my own mistakes.

When I went to Congress six years ago I made some commitments to myself: to make the tough and unpleasant decisions as they came; to speak out at times when remaining silent might be easier; to admit my own mistakes; and to advocate new policies when old ones; no matter how dearly held, had failed.

Two years ago, when this country had fewer than 50,000 men in Vietnam, I wrote a newsletter defending the President's Vietnam policy and pleading patience and understanding for what he was trying to do. I have thought about that newsletter many times with increasing dismay and doubt as the limited involvement I supported has grown into a very large Asian land war with half-a-million American troops scattered in jungles and hamlets, fighting an enemy who is everywhere and nowhere, seeking to save a country which apparently doesn't want to be saved, with casualties mounting and no end in sight, with more and more troops being asked for and sent, and with the dangers of World War III looming ever larger.

In the past two or three years I have attended many Vietnam briefings of the White House and State Department. Every time I've been told things are starting to look up. The "crossover point" may be just around the corner. The "kill- rate" is usually up. The pacification program, despite difficulties, is showing "real progress." Enemy morale is always down; in fact, each report brings new evidence of gloom for the enemy's forces. And the South Vietnamese army is always beginning to be ready to fight instead of run.

To be fair about it, I presume some progress has resulted from our enormous expenditures in lives and resources. I would hate to think otherwise. But each American escalation has been matched by escalation on the other side. And the grim probability as I speak tonight is that new and bigger escalations lie ahead. Unless we change our policy I predict we will have 750,000 troops committed to Vietnam within the next 18 months. There will be more bombing, more civilian deaths in South and North Vietnam, more American casualties, and great new demands of the American taxpayers to pay for all this.

I have listened to all the arguments of the Administration, read all the reports available to me, attended all the briefings, heard all the predictions of an eventual end to hostilities, and I still conclude that we're on a mistaken and dangerous road. In my judgment continuing our present policy will require that we send several hundred thousand more American troops to thresh around almost aimlessly in the jungles of Vietnam, thousands more of them dying and many more losing arms and legs and eyes without ever achieving what we know as "victory," all the while the material cost of this war is climbing from the present thirty billion dollars a year to forty or fifty or more.

What's even worse, I increasingly fear that the inevitable result of this policy will be a wider war. Already the major battles along the Demilitarized Zone are bringing talk of an invasion of the North, and as our bombers get ever closer to the Chinese border and Russian ships in Haiphong, one can see the stakes in this contest rising. I know there are those who say Russia and China would be foolish to come in with all the advantages they are enjoying from the present stalemate. But these people and this line of thinking were wrong in Korea, and they may well be wrong again.

Many of the wise old heads in Congress say privately that the best politics in this situation is to remain silent, to fuff your views on this great issue, and to await developments. I hear few dovish noises in Arizona, and I suspect that silence would be the best personal politics for me. This would be especially true if it should turn out that we are at last starting to "win" this war.

THE OVERRIDING ISSUE

Then why am I here tonight? Vietnam is the overriding issue of this troubled year, and the people of my state are as entitled to my honest views as I am to theirs. I have come here tonight to say as plainly and simply as I can that I was wrong two years ago, and I firmly believe President Johnson's advisors are wrong today. Victory may indeed lie ahead; nothing is certain in this life. But life goes on, and men must make decisions based on the best information available to them at the time. Waiting for things to happen is not leadership, and steering a safe political course is not the highest order of public service.

This speech is not an easy or pleasant task for me. I am of the President's party; I admire him and the great things he has done for America. I have defended him on a great many occasions, including a visit I made to Cambridge University in England last February when my questioners were highly critical of our role in Vietnam. I know from history and from observing two Presidents firsthand what a man-killing job the Presidency is. So I take no satisfaction in disagreeing with a policy he feels he must pursue. I respect President Johnson for doing what he firmly believes is right, and it grieves me to add to his burdens. But I would be serving neither the President nor the country to pretend to agree when I feel we must modify our national course. As I look back over the last two years I see the United States mounting a treadmill that goes ever faster - so fast it seems almost impossible now to get off. Yet I am convinced that we must get off that treadmill and that we can. The hour is late, but I believe this nation of ours has the brains, the know-how, the courage, the imagination to begin to extricate itself from a war we should never have blundered into.

Now, I don't want to fool you or myself. The steps I will propose in a moment will cost something, too, and, if taken, may have convulsive effects for a time in our own national life. But, in my judgment, the costs of staying with a mistaken policy will be far greater.

The great rationalization for our involvement in Vietnam is that we are there to stop the march of communism, to demonstrate that the United States honors its commitments, to strengthen the free world. We are failing, and I believe we will continue to fail as long as we maintain our present policy of military escalation. Indeed, I believe this policy is strengthening the Communist cause, weakening the free world, and raising grave doubts about the capacity of the United States to back up its commitments elsewhere.

I am advocating a change, not out of any fear or love for communism or admiration of Ho Chi Minh, but out of love for America and for its national aspirations. I am convinced our present policy in Vietnam does not serve our interests, and in a way it is as though we had designed it to serve our enemies. This may seem too utterly ironic, but let's think about it for a minute.

Let's suppose there had been a world Communist meeting in, say, July 1964. Everything was in disarray. The once-monolithic Communist movement was in a shambles. The two major Red powers, the Soviet Union and China, were at each others' throats. The Russians had suffered humiliating reverses in Berlin, Cuba, Africa and elsewhere. I recall *U.S. News and World Report* the previous fall had published an article entitled, "Is Russia Losing the Cold War?", and concluded that it was.

Suppose that at this imaginary meeting a brilliant young theorist had come forward with a dramatic plan to reverse the unhappy trend. Let me recite what he might have said.

"Comrades, I have a plan. By means of it we can enmesh the United States in the Asian land war its leaders have always warned against. Within three years I promise you 500,000 American soldiers will be hopelessly bogged down in jungle fighting, consuming huge amounts of supplies and vast quantities of ammunition while gaining essentially nothing. They will be seen as white men fighting Asiatics, colonialists, burning villages, destroying rice crops, killing and maiming women and children. Their casualties will be heavy -- perhaps 100,000 by late 1967. They will have to boost their draft quotas and raise taxes. The war will cost them \$30 billion or more a year. And this will upset their economy, cause inflation, threaten their balance of payments, and play hob with all their domestic programs. There will be great internal dissension and even riots in their cities. And, comrades, in spite of our differences, this is one cause that will bring us together, fighting on the same side. Furthermore, we can achieve all these wonderful results without committing a single Russian or Chinese soldier, sailor or airman, and at a total cost of perhaps one or two billion a year."

This is sheer invention, of course. There was no such meeting and no such plan. But the fact is that a dedicated President, surrounded by advisors with the highest patriotism and aided by a well-meaning but pliant Congress - - all with the best of intentions -- has achieved essentially these results. We have handed our enemies all of this on a platter, and today many sincere Americans are ready to hand them a lot more of the same.

What we are doing today, as I see it, is essentially engaging in an act of national rationalization. We talk about having no alternatives, but if you boil that down to its essence, what it means is that we're too big and powerful to admit we made a mistake. I refuse any longer to accept a tortured logic which allows little mistakes to be admitted, but requires big ones to be pursued to the bitter end, regardless of their cost in lives and money. As a nation let's not adopt the senseless psychology of the compulsive gambler at the race track. If he's lost a whole week's wages on some unfortunate nag, he ought to quit and go home, sadder but wiser. But no, he'll go to the bank, draw out his savings, mortgage his house, and wipe out his children's chances for a college education, all in the vain hope that he can recoup his losses. I think this is the direction we're headed in Vietnam.

WHY PEOPLE ARE TROUBLED

When I talk to people about this war, I find them most troubled by this fundamental question:

Why is it that the United States, the most powerful, efficient and successful nation on earth, can't defeat a little, miserable, backward country like North Vietnam and do it overnight -- or at least in six days like the Israelis?

On the face of it it *is* ridiculous. But there is logic and reason behind every event if we will only search for it. There are answers to this tough question -- and they make sense if we'll only look the truth in the face. Those answers as I see them come down to four fundamental propositions:

* You cannot win a political and guerilla war in South Vietnam by any amount of bombing in North Vietnam. President Johnson knows this, but I don't think the people do. Too many, I suspect, think that more bombs can win the war.

* You cannot win this kind of war when the government you are backing is largely run by wealthy landowners and a military elite who have no real interest in the poor, illiterate peasants over whom the war is being fought. Unless they will give their support to that government, any military victory will be short-lived, if it can be achieved at all.

* You cannot save a people who do not want to be saved and will not fight for the government which runs their lives.

* You cannot win in this deadly poker game when any escalation "bet" on your part can be matched by a much smaller escalation on the part of the enemy. We cannot continue to assume that when we increase our forces

the other side will stand still giving us a clear margin of superiority. Every time the result has been the same: stalemate, at an even higher and more dangerous and costly level.

These are the grim truths about Vietnam, as I see them; before I go on I want to discuss them just a little further.

Our policy seems to assume you can win this kind of war in South Vietnam with a bombing sideshow in North Vietnam. In my judgment there simply isn't a cheap, easy, sanitary way you can convert the people of South Vietnam into supporting the kind of government we've seen in Saigon, and that is what the war is all about.

It should be starkly clear to everyone by now that our bombing policy has failed. It began with **two** objectives - to stop or restrict the flow of men and materials to the south, **and** to bring Hanoi to the conference table. It has done neither.

In January 1965, the enemy strength overall was about 120,000. Today, despite huge casualties, it's estimated at 296,000. If we could believe all these Pentagon body counts, the North Vietnamese and Vietcong lost 149,000 men in 1966 alone. And yet their forces have doubled in size. By the math of guerilla warfare which requires that we outnumber them at least 4 to 1, the Communists have more than matched our build-up to 500,000 men.

As far as the other objective is concerned, President Johnson tells us he hasn't heard from Hanoi. So apparently the bombing hasn't accomplished anything on that score either. Indeed, the strange fact is that stopping the bombing might bring talks; continuing it almost surely won't.

You know, when I hear people say we aren't bombing enough -- and that is their explanation for our failures -- I wonder what kind of scale they're using. I presume most of you were living during World War II, and you recall the merciless, intense bombing raids the Germans made upon England and the far greater devastation we rained upon the major cities of Europe in 1944-45. The peak was about 80,000 tons of bombs a month, yet we're dropping more than that now on a little country half the size of Arizona.

The fact is, we've substantially destroyed the production facilities of North Vietnam. Since their war materials are now coming from factories in China and Russia which we aren't able to bomb, it is argued that we must destroy the goods in transit, no matter what risks are involved.

I wonder how many people really believe the issues in Vietnam are worth the risk of a larger war. Vietnam is a nation whose history has been marked by turmoil, and by sporadic warring between North and South, for a thousand years. It is a nation that has known oppression at the hands of the Chinese, Japanese and French. It has never been able to develop a strong national government. The only government the people ever see is the tax collector. Some of the areas we are trying to liberate today haven't paid allegiance to Saigon for years. In fact, the whole history of Vietnam is one of local autonomy and great hostility to any central government, and one of the reasons so many local officials have been murdered by the Vietcong is that they were imposed on the villages by the Saigon government. This is where the struggle lies. We are fighting to preserve the residue of French colonialism in Indochina -- an oligarchy of well-to-do, landed beneficiaries of a century of French rule. And when I read that absentee landlords often follow our troops into former Vietcong areas -- to collect back rent as high as 60 per cent of the total rice production -- I wonder how much chance we have of ever winning this struggle.

I sincerely hope that the recent election represents a turn toward popular government and attention to the needs of the people. And I recognize the problem of trying to build a nation in the midst of a civil war. But thus far there has been little to give one a feeling of encouragement.

A DISCOURAGING SITUATION

I wonder if you realize just how discouraging the situation is. Officer commissions in South Vietnam can be bought. Military supplies are stolen constantly. For many, bribery is a way of life. And in three years of

fighting, out of 600,000 South Vietnamese, I understand only one officer of the rank of major or above has been wounded, and none has been killed. Can ordinary men be expected to follow leaders like this?

I might mention that through February of this year the United States lost, not one or two, but 109 of its officers of the rank of major or above in this military action. The number is even higher today.

As an American I also feel considerable resentment that our young men are required to risk their lives in Vietnam while that nation permits perhaps 200,000 of its own young men to dodge the draft and another 100,000 or more to desert the army every year. And it is shocking to me to realize that young Vietnamese can be deferred from the draft to go to college even if they never show up in class.

I suppose the average American imagines that our soldiers over there are spending their time fighting North Vietnamese who have infiltrated to the South. Let's not fool ourselves about who is fighting whom. Eighty per cent of the troops opposing us are South Vietnamese. Recently along the Demilitarized Zone we have been fighting some North Vietnamese main force units, but these constitute only a small portion of what we call "the enemy." The truth is that in most battles **Americans** are fighting **South Vietnamese**, I ask you: what are we doing? What are Arizona boys doing fighting South Vietnamese on behalf of other South Vietnamese whose leaders lack the will to fight?

I said earlier that we are fighting this war on the enemy's terms and with the odds stacked against us. Let me give you an example.

An American lieutenant recently talked to a news correspondent as he viewed the battle in a valley. Three helicopters were fluttering over a jungle area and shots were ringing out. The officer observed, "Look at this. I have three million dollars worth of equipment and twelve or fifteen highly-trained, well-educated men. Opposed to them over in that clearing is one peasant with a fifty-dollar gun. If the peasant is lucky, he wins the whole ball game."

Or think about this. We may gamble a \$2 million airplane, \$10,000 worth of bombs and the priceless life of an American pilot against a \$25 rope bridge which will be rebuilt tomorrow even if we're lucky enough to make a direct hit. These are the odds we're playing over there. Where does all this end? Already it has cost us close to \$100 billion and over 100,000 casualties. And what have we gained for our country, for Vietnam, or for the cause of freedom? The time has come, I believe, to look at this war to see what we stand to gain by continuing our present policy -- or to lose by trying some other policy.

THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION

The fundamental question is: How important is Vietnam in the scheme of things? Is this Armageddon? Is this the ultimate test of strength between government by consent and government by coercion, between capitalism and communism? Is the government of South Vietnam the one whose existence will determine the future course of civilization? Is this the showdown for the concept of "wars of national liberation?" Will this really determine whether our grandchildren live under communism? Does it really mean that we'll only have to fight later in Hawaii, Oregon or Arizona? If the answers to these questions are "yes," then we must proceed at all cost to win this war and insulate the government of South Vietnam from all future attack, subversion or rebellion.

But suppose, as I believe, that this is not Armageddon. Suppose this is just one of many episodes of revolution and turmoil occurring, and about to occur, in a world that is seething with the forces of change. Suppose that our extremely costly and exhausting response to this episode reveals to our enemies that we obviously can't afford to go through this process again soon. Suppose that a very possible result of this fantastically expensive enterprise will be a delay of just a few years in the ultimate success of the National Liberation Front. If this is the case, then I believe we must put greater emphasis upon our goals as a nation and less on the immediate military goals proposed for the conduct of this war.

I have reflected long and hard on what this war is, what significance it holds, and what effects various courses of action would have on our future role in world affairs. And I will tell you frankly I no longer see the war in Vietnam as Munich or Valley Forge. And I'm no longer very interested in hearing how we can capture one more hamlet or rocky hill. I'm interested in hearing how we can cut our losses, reduce our future expenditures in lives and resources, and bring this venture down to scale. I'm convinced our national interest not Russia's, not China's, not North Vietnam's -- demands that we sharply modify our present policy and that we start doing so now.

A great fallacy of our present policy, as I see it, lies in the assumption that stopping this "war of national liberation" will prevent any and all future wars of this type. Such wars were beaten back in Malaysia and Korea, yet this did not stop Vietnam or Cuba or the Congo. We are only due for more frustration and anger in the years ahead if we spend more blood and treasure to get some kind of significant "victory" in Vietnam.

This brings me to the hard question the President's advisors always put to their critics: "All right, you don't like what we're doing. Precisely what would you do, and what are the likely results of your policy?"

This is a fair question that demands an answer. I'll tell you what I propose, but first let me make clear what I do **not** propose.

We are in South Vietnam. It was a mistake to get there, but we're there. I am not suggesting any "cut and run" policy or proposing that the United States now withdraw from this war at once. I am not suggesting that we surrender to Ho Chi Minh. I am not suggesting that we turn our backs on those in South Vietnam who have come to rely on our commitments -- people who, if we departed, might be victims in a blood bath of the kind we saw in Indonesia. I am not suggesting that this country violate the limited commitments we originally made. I do not propose that our investment in American blood and money be abandoned without giving the South Vietnamese every reasonable chance to save themselves.

And let me make clear there is another thing I am not doing. I am not breaking with President Johnson, either as Chief Executive or as leader of my party. Nor am I joining that group of anarchists who are marching on Washington, attempting to block the entrances of the Pentagon, counseling defiance of Selective Service, or sending money to the Vietcong.

Furthermore, I am not proposing anything particularly new. I don't pretend to have all the classified information necessary to formulate detailed alternatives. Rather, like Senators Mansfield, Church, Cooper, Morton, Percy and others who appreciate the President's sincerity and his anguish over the progress of this war, I feel I must try to convince him that our present policy is wrong and should be changed or modified.

Now, what do I propose? I propose that the United States halt all further escalation and Americanization of this war and that it discontinue sending any more Americans to do a job that ought to be done and can only be done by Vietnamese. I am suggesting that we de-escalate and de-Americanize this war and that we begin the slow, deliberate and painful job of extricating ourselves from a hopeless, open-ended "commitment" we never made. I am suggesting that we start bringing American boys home and start turning this war back to the Vietnamese. I am suggesting that we offer the people of Southeast Asia something better than the prospect of Vietnam-type wars as an answer to threats of subversion or aggression.

I would say to President Johnson: facing this decision will take the courage and greatness of which you are capable. People will vilify you, or accuse you of appeasement. Countless armchair generals will tell you victory was just around the corner. But in the end I believe the American people will rally behind you when they realize that this decision will strengthen our country and advance its interests.

THE PRESIDENT SPEAKS

Major policy changes are tough to explain and defend, but I would propose that the President go on television and speak plainly to the American people, to the people of South Vietnam, to the leaders of North Vietnam, to

the Soviets and the Chinese, and to our allies and friends around the world. I would propose that he tell them something like this:

"I didn't start this war but I enlarged it. I did this in the honest belief it could be won at moderate cost. My best advice in 1964 was that fewer than 100,000 troops would do the job. This didn't work. I was told that 300,000 would do the job. This didn't work either. Then I was told 500,000 was enough. It isn't. Now I'm hearing that another 100,000 or 200,000 will be the magic number. I was told that bombing extensively in the North would stop infiltration and bring Hanoi to the peace table. Instead, infiltration has increased as we have increased the bombing, and we're farther from the peace table than when we began. On the basis of all this advice we're dropping more bombs on this small, miserable country than the allies dropped on Europe at the peak of World War II, and yet our objectives elude us. So far I've seen 700 of our most costly aircraft destroyed and 1500 of our best pilots downed. I've seen 15,000 of our young men killed and 85,000 wounded, and countless others confined under unspeakable conditions in Communist prisons.

"I tell you frankly, my fellow citizens, that my advice was wrong and the decisions I made were wrong. As your President I now refuse to compound these mistakes, to follow this advice any longer, or to subject you and your sons and your tax dollars anymore to a course which is defeating this country's interests and dividing its people. I happen to believe that the pacification of Detroit and Newark is at least as important as the pacification of jungle hamlets in South Vietnam -- and we can't do both.

"Accordingly, I am ordering a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam. I am ordering a gradual de-escalation of our entire war effort and I am directing our military men to prepare plans to back our troops off within a reasonable time to those areas of South Vietnam which can be defended most readily and to turn over the remaining defense job to the South Vietnamese themselves. Within a reasonable time after that we will turn over the balance of this war effort to the South Vietnamese and bring virtually all our troops back home. In keeping with our commitments, we will continue to supply whatever is needed to maintain the South Vietnamese forces while this threat continues and as long as we are convinced the government of South Vietnam is working in the interest of its own people."

The President having done this, I would suggest that he call upon our allies in the free world to assist this country in formulating a program of land reform, economic development, health and education throughout Southeast Asia, and that he ask the Congress to authorize a small part of the money saved through reduction of our war effort for a fund to begin this program.

Finally, I would suggest that the President send a message to the eight nations which participated with us in the Geneva Convention of 1954. It is in the breakdown of that convention -- and the United States carries a large share of responsibility for that breakdown -- that one finds the seeds of the conflict in Vietnam today. I would have him propose that the nations which were a party to that convention reconvene at the earliest possible date to set up procedures for a cessation of hostilities and for a return to the principles of that convention.

A WORD TO SAIGON

Now, what about our allies -- and our enemies? To the elected leaders of South Vietnam I would think the President might say something like this:

"Our commitment to you was to assist you in repelling external aggression, not in defending your central government from your own people. We promised to help you build a free and non-Communist government, not to perpetuate a military or unrepresentative regime. Insofar as we have seen this war in terms of invasion from the North we have felt obligated to honor these commitments, and we have done so at tremendous cost in lives and in dollars. Wherever we have met main force units of the North Vietnamese, we have defeated them decisively. We

are not leaving just yet, but we're cutting back because we think it is time for you to do your own fighting. This is your country and your war, not ours. And if your own people need pacifying, only you can pacify them; we can't begin to do a job like that. You must now build an army which can win this war; we can't win it for you. We will provide you with supplies and ammunition, but we are tired of cheating and blackmarketing and stealing while your people laugh at us. And a condition for our support will be stern measures by your government to bring these practices to an end.

"You have had your elections now, and it is up to you to begin immediately to build a government which will root out corruption and nepotism, and that will be concerned about the health and education and safety of ordinary people. If you will do this, we will help you finance a new program of public health, education, economic development and land reform that can provide a stable base for peace in Vietnam and Southeast Asia.

"I think it is time that you give more than lip service to the principles you espoused in Geneva -- a unified Vietnam and free and open elections, both North and South. This war is more than a conflict between abstract ideologies, more than a chess game between the Communist and non-Communist worlds. This war is mainly a product of real forces at work in your own country. No matter how difficult these problems are, you the people of Vietnam ought to be working at them. We Americans cannot settle these differences, but perhaps you can."

A WORD TO HANOI

To Ho Chi Minh and the other leaders in Hanoi I would suggest the President say something like this:

"We have beaten your main force units in every engagement, and we can continue to do so indefinitely. But we don't choose to do so because this is your kind of war, not ours. No longer will American troops contest you for every ridge, hill or patch of jungle. You will now be fighting your fellow countrymen. If you choose to fight our forces while they remain in Vietnam, you're going to have to attack us in strongly fortified areas where we have all the advantages. And this is going to be the new fact of life for you in Vietnam. No longer are we basing our plans on forcing you to the conference table in a hurry with one escalation after another. We're settling down now and building a firm base for the government of South Vietnam -- but we're ready, too, to return to Geneva and to the principle of a unified Vietnam.

"Furthermore, if you want to continue fighting, you should understand that you can take absolutely nothing for granted. While we will confine ourselves principally to certain areas of South Vietnam, the South Vietnamese will be everywhere, and we will not hesitate to come out and spoil offensive preparations directed against those areas we control when we feel so inclined. And whatever happens, American air power and naval power will remain in the Pacific. "You have said a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam might persuade you to negotiate. Note that I am ordering a halt to the bombing. I suggest you now have an obligation to meet your part of the bargain."

A WORD TO OUR ALLIES

To our allies and those nations of the world which have complained of our bombing and escalation policies I think the President might say this:

"These policies you objected to have ended. Now let's see what you can do to find an avenue to peace in Vietnam.

To Secretary U Thant of the United Nations he might say:

"You talked a lot about our bombing operations block any hope for peace. Now here is your chance. If the Russians really want peace, as you have suggested, if an end to the bombing can bring an end to the war, let us now see results. Let both sides de-escalate. Let the Russians now de-escalate their supply operation. Let them show good faith in their statements about bringing this matter to the conference table either that or stop talking peace while making war."

There you have it -- a plan I believe might start to get us off the Vietnam treadmill. I frankly admit there is nothing very heroic about it. It's a far cry from "damn the torpedoes", "surrender, hell, we've just begun to fight", and other such stirring phrases from our history. But I think it is a prudent and humane proposal which will advance our country's interests. I'm just enough of an optimist to believe that a dramatic change of this kind would command support from a large majority of American mothers and fathers and sons and taxpayers and people who are concerned about the problems of our cities and our environment. I'm optimist enough to believe that a majority of our citizens regard the welfare of this country and the peace of the world as more important than "saving face," whatever that means. This country wants leadership, and it has always wanted to be told the truth -- even the unpleasant truth.

I don't know how the ornithologists ever got involved in this war, and I have little hope that this speech won't get me labeled as some variety of dove, chicken hawk, pigeon, owl or ostrich. However, if it should happen that I dropped dead leaving this meeting tonight, I would hope that my tombstone might read: "Here lies a realist." Not a hawk, not a dove, but a man who was willing to face painful and unpleasant realities. It is my judgment that both the so-called "hawks" and "doves" have erred in our recent debate over Vietnam and that both have been unrealistic, in part, in what they have advocated. I will return to this in a moment, and I'll have some critical things to say to each.

In this life every choice has its consequences. It isn't enough to complain of a policy one doesn't like; one must have alternatives and be prepared to face their consequences. I realize that my proposals, too, will have some pretty distasteful ramifications. But I'm willing to face them, as I expect I will have to do in the question period tonight.

FIVE STERN REALITIES

Because I think so much of our debate on Vietnam has been up in the clouds, I'd like to take a moment here to face up to five hard, stern realities which limit our options over there. Two of them the "hawks" refuse to face; three of them tend to be ignored by the "doves."

The **first** of these is that no amount of bombing is going to stop transportation of enough supplies to keep the Communist effort going in the South. The supplies aren't made in North Vietnam. They are made in Russia and China. If we permanently destroyed every railroad track and every bridge in the North, enough supplies would go through to keep this war at the present level indefinitely, and we have this on the word of Secretary McNamara in sworn testimony before the Senate. In 1966 the North Vietnamese were sending about 100 tons a day into the South. Today, following a year of the most intensive bombing in the history of the world, they're not sending 100 tons -- they're sending 300 tons a day. And yet we are told that 100,000 tons of bombs a month, instead of 80,000 will change the result,

The **second** of these stern realities is directed to those who write me saying, "Let's pull out the stops." I wonder if they have thought about where this will lead. As you know, the United States got into this mess through certain commitments made by a succession of Presidents. Other nations have made commitments, too. When commitments like this come into direct conflict, wars get started. Political scientists still like to play games with the combination of treaties and ententes and obligations of various kinds existing among the nations of Europe prior to World War I.

My second reality, then, is this: No living man can give us any assurance that Russia or China, or both, won't come into this war with both feet in the next week, or month, or year, if we keep on as we are. As a realist I have to agree that the odds are they will not. But what a crazy gamble. If we lose that gamble, we are talking

not of 500,000 American troops and \$30 billion a year but perhaps five million troops and \$300 billion a year -- and maybe nuclear warheads on Tucson and every other important city.

Let's not forget Korea. Recall that President Truman met with General MacArthur on Wake Island on October 15, 1950, and in that conference MacArthur told Truman the war was all but won and assured him neither the Russians nor Chinese would intervene in spite of our invading North Korea. With Truman's acquiescence MacArthur proceeded to launch a "final" offensive on November 25, followed one day later by Chinese intervention and one of the most costly retreats in American history. We ignored reality then; let's not repeat it.

I gather that among the "birds" here tonight are some "doves." I have some hard counsel for you, too. Many of you have written saying that if we will but stop the bombing, Ho Chi Minh will join us in sincere talks. I hope I'm wrong, but I have to tell you of my **third** stern reality -- the improbability that Hanoi will pull our chestnuts out of the fire, or help us find some easy way to save face. I've studied the arguments about past peace efforts and the charges that we resumed bombing just as negotiations were about to begin. Our peace efforts have been clumsy, and probably insufficient, but I don't believe that Hanoi in the past three years has really been willing to make a peace our government would have accepted. The President was encouraged last winter to make something out of the "Tet" truce, and we stopped our bombing activities for a few days. Knowing this was coming, the North Vietnamese loaded up every truck and sampan they could find, and in those four days moved really huge amounts of supplies. But they didn't move a single diplomat, or a single peace feeler.

In spite of this gloomy peace prospect I think my program makes sense because it's right for our country. I'm tired of having decisions affecting 200 million Americans being determined by what some hard-nosed Politburo in Hanoi or Peking decides to do.

And this brings me to stern reality number **four**. There are legitimate, effective, democratic means available to work a change in the policies of our government. They still work, and I'm trying to use one of them tonight. Violence and disruption and name-calling will contribute nothing to the solution of our problems or the advancement of reasonable alternatives.

If alternatives are to be regarded as more than mere posturing, they cannot start with the assumption that anyone taking a different view is ignorant of the facts, blind to truth, oblivious to history and basically wicked. Reasonable men can differ on the course to follow in Vietnam, and they're not likely to come to agreement through the shaking of fists or flinging of epithets.

Thinking about the consequences of my proposal, I feel I must face up to one **final** very harsh reality, and that is the slim prospect that the present government of South Vietnam and its army will be able to do the job I have outlined for them. On this level I am frankly pessimistic about my proposal. But if we give them a fair chance, if we assure them of all the supplies and ammunition and military hardware they need, and in spite of this they are unable to manage their own defense after a reasonable length of time, then so be it. The Lord has not assigned us the job of defending South Vietnam in perpetuity. The French withdrew from Indochina and Algeria. Britain did the same in India, Egypt and various countries of Africa. The Dutch did it in Indonesia. There were internal convulsions in each case, but those nations survived and prospered.

How ironic it is that we can live in this prosperous country and go calmly to bed at night while governments which call themselves "Communist" rule in Warsaw or Budapest, or indeed Havana. But we must accept tens of thousands of American casualties and put out endless billions of dollars to assure, at all cost, that there is never such a government in Saigon. I'd far prefer to see friendly governments in all of Asia; but there are limits to what this country can do and to the costs I'm willing to pay.

U.S. CAN 'DO NO WRONG'

I have always wondered why it is that every other country can lose wars, admit mistakes and retreat once in a while, all without permanent injury, but the United States can do none of these things without loss of honor.

I say let's continue to supply South Vietnam. Let's make clear we will withdraw our forces gradually. But in the end let's put the destiny of Vietnam in the hands of the Vietnamese, and let's get back to our own serious problems in this country.

As I speak tonight we're about a year from our next Presidential election. Nearly everyone, I suppose, has been speculating about the choices that will face us in that contest. If the Republicans reveal more judgment than I tend to credit them with, they might present us with an option such as I have outlined tonight. If they do that, there might well be a Republican President in the White House in 1969. But I don't think they will give us this kind of option. I expect their candidate will be a Nixon or a Reagan who promises us even more bombing and more escalation and more likelihood of blundering into World War III. And the end result, after more years of bloodshed, bombs and war bonds -- if we're lucky -- will be some kind of cessation of hostilities without victory. And then a few years later some Asian Charles de Gaulle will boot us out, and we will have gained nothing but bitterness and debt.

I might say that, if President Johnson could work some miracle and get a cease-fire tomorrow, I would expect this same result a few years hence. Charles de Gaulle may be a unique personage but he has no monopoly on ingratitude.

As I spoke of the consequences of my proposal, I'm sure some were saying, "Yes, but how about the Domino Theory?" My answer is that countries aren't dominoes, and wars aren't games. What's going on in Vietnam can't be explained simply in terms of a world ideological struggle. There are real issues involved in Vietnam and the other countries of Southeast Asia. A country that ignores these real problems is headed for trouble. A country that works at solving its problems probably is going to make out all right.

If you want my best judgment regarding the Domino Theory, it is that our military operations in Laos and Thailand have made those countries far more likely to topple, like dominoes, than if we had never fought in Southeast Asia at all.

That brings me to the subject of commitments. Last spring in a House speech I quoted Historian Henry Steele Commager as saying that the succession of commitments we have made in Vietnam were essentially "mindless." I agreed with this and said it was as though at each of the crucial moments when world-shaking decisions were to be made we had our minds on other matters and regarded these decisions as of little consequence. I still believe this, and as a Member of Congress I regret that our Presidents in the last twenty years have committed this nation to assume certain obligations without fully consulting the Congress or initiating any dialogue that could produce a clear mandate for such commitments.

Each of these commitments were made, I believe, with the assumption that this was all that was needed to carry out U.S. objectives in Vietnam. Now we are told that with just another 45,000 troops, and perhaps bombing of the last remaining targets in North Vietnam, we can do the job. Who really believes this?

COMMITMENT TO BANKRUPTCY

Some years ago, when I was practicing law here, a troubled businessman of modest means came to me as an old friend. His closest friend during a terminal illness had asked him to help the sick man's son, who was just starting in business. He readily agreed; in other words, he made a solemn commitment. Subsequently he loaned the boy \$5,000 after his friend's death. It soon became apparent the boy didn't have any business sense, but the agreement was a solemn one. Soon he had \$25,000 of his own money and half his working hours invested in a clearly losing venture, and he was neglecting his own business affairs. When he came to see me, he had just talked with his banker about mortgaging his home. It was apparent to me he was on a course that would lead eventually to bankruptcy.

I believe the "war hawks" in this country are following a similar sort of logic. They say it was a mistake to commit ourselves, but we did, and therefore we have no alternative but to carry it on at any cost, no matter how great or for how long, until we can conclude it on terms which we consider satisfactory.

I told my Tucson friend that he had kept the spirit and word of any commitment he had made to his dead friend and that now he should tell the boy frankly that he could go no further. I told him, as I tell my countrymen now, that your first commitment is to your own people and your own future. Beyond this you do what you reasonably can for your friends, but no more.

Finally, I'd like to talk about that magic national attribute called "face." As I recall, this is something we used to say the Orientals were terribly concerned about. Now apparently it's become vital to us.

I don't accept this. In the long run a nation's prestige and greatness and "face" depend on doing what is right for its own people and taking the consequences. There is no dignity greater than that of a strong man, or strong nation, admitting a mistake, correcting it, and taking the consequences. There is no course more likely in the long run to destroy one's dignity or "face" than to become a prisoner of past mistakes.

I'm against Communist aggression and for building up the strength of the free world, and this is why I propose that we quit playing a Communist game on Communist terms. I propose that we put greater emphasis on America's self-interest.

Perhaps this sounds isolationist. Well, I'm no isolationist. I don't think America can or should turn its back on the world. With the population explosion, technological development and all the rest, it's vital that we play a role in world affairs. But I do not believe the Lord ever put his foot on Plymouth Rock and assigned us the mission to settle every controversy in every corner of the world. In the past quarter-century we seem to have taken on such a role.

What we must do is put Vietnam in perspective. If we could but read the history of the coming century, I think we would see that the struggle in Vietnam was but one of dozens of struggles in the underdeveloped, formerly colonial areas of Asia and Africa and Latin America. There are great forces of change at work in the world, and I'm not talking about communism. I'm talking about the aspirations of two-thirds of the human race to enjoy the good life now enjoyed by the other third. We can't prevent change from occurring, even if we wanted to do so. And we can't police the world and right every wrong.

By policing Vietnam we hope to make our commitments credible, yet increasingly we are making them less credible. To illustrate, earlier this year the President dispatched three lonely transports to the Congo to aid in quelling the latest eruption there. It provoked a violent storm of congressional criticism on the grounds that it represented the first step toward another Vietnam involvement. I'm not saying the criticism was right or wrong, but this episode reveals the hard truth that, precisely because of Vietnam, the United States is far less likely ever again to intervene in places where intervention is favorable, is called for, or might be successful.

MANY REVOLUTIONS TO COME

There are some 125 nations in this world. In the years ahead many of them are going to be involved in civil wars, revolutions and clashes with their neighbors. In most cases our best policy will be to stand back, as we did in Indonesia, the fifth largest nation in the world, a rich source of many raw materials, an area far more important in any power struggle than Vietnam. For years this nation had what amounted to a Communist government under Sukarno. He broke relations with the United States, burned our libraries, denounced us at every turn. Surely here was a situation touching our interests. Yet we committed not a single soldier nor for many months a single dollar of aid. What was the result? Because we stood back and waited, the people of that country took matters into their own hands and threw Sukarno and his Communist friends out. While many problems still beset it, Indonesia has started on a better course.

In Vietnam the task has been made infinitely more difficult by our actions of the past two decades, but we can still help the Vietnamese people to do the same thing for themselves. And, in any case, we should know by now that we can't do it for them.

The world has always been full of evil, suffering and injustice. I wish it were not so. But I agree with President Kennedy who said not so many years ago:

"We must face the fact that the United States is neither omnipotent or omniscient -- that we are only 6 per cent of the world's population -- that we cannot impose our will on the other 94 per cent of mankind that we cannot right every wrong or reverse each adversity -- and therefore there cannot be an American solution to every world problem."

I agree with these words of President Kennedy, yet I am also aware that he shares with Presidents Truman, Eisenhower and Johnson a partial responsibility for the fix we are in today in Vietnam. To me, this contradiction illustrates the dilemma of America's post-war role as a world leader. We have no territorial designs. We believe in the free determination of people to choose their own form of government. Yet we also seem to feel we have a missionary duty to stop anything labeled "Communist" wherever it appears. With such conflicting, if not contradictory, policies it's no wonder our country gets itself into trouble.

Sydney Smith, a British theologian of the last century, stated our predicament very well in one sentence when he said, "Errors to be dangerous must have a great deal of truth mingled with them." We have allowed ourselves to be convinced of the "rightness" of incompatible ideas because there was so much truth mingled with them. I think the time has come to re-examine those ideas to see that they don't lead us to even more serious trouble.

And as I fly back to Washington tonight I'm going to be thinking of the prayer which that wonderful organization, Alcoholics Anonymous, teaches to its members; it might teach this nation something too:

*Oh Lord, give us the strength to change the things which can be changed;
The courage to accept the things which cannot be changed,
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

Second Printing, November 1967

Third Printing, January 1968

Fourth Printing, February 1968

Last update: June 3, 1996.

URL: <http://dizzy.library.arizona.edu/branches/spc/udall/vietnam2.pdf>