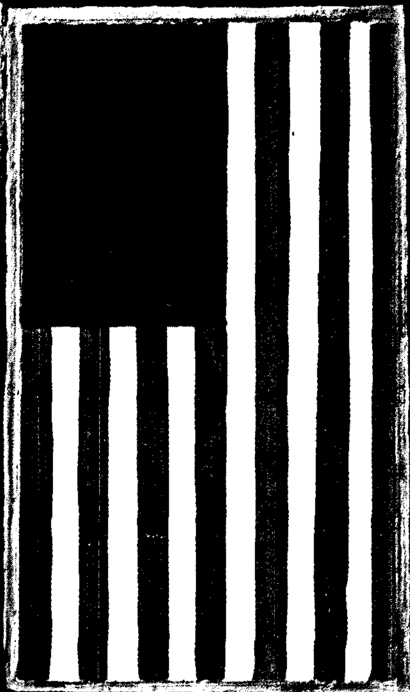
by Noam Chomsky

THE FIRE THIS TIME



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International affairs can be complex, each side having a claim to legitimacy and principles which cannot be compromised, neither of which can be lightly abandoned. The current Middle East crisis is a typical, painful example. American interference in the affairs of Vietnam is one of the rare exceptions to this general rule. The simple fact is that there is no legitimate interest or principle to justify the use of American military force in Vietnam.

Since 1954 there has been one fundamental issue in Vietnam: whether the uncertainty and conflict left unresolved at Geneva will be settled at a local level, by indigenous forces, or raised to an international level and settled through great power involvement. Alone among the great powers, the United States has insisted on the latter course. It seems clear that if the United States persists in this course then either the issue will be settled unilaterally through the exercise of American power in the manner of Nazi Germany in Poland or the Soviet Union in Hungary, or it will develop into a great power conflict, with unimaginable consequences.

This is the situation to which Howard Zinn, for one, addressed himself, in a recent compelling study, *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal*, which advocates, very simply, that the United States accept the principle adopted by the other great powers at Geneva in 1954 and agree to turn Vietnam over to the Vietnamese. "The daily toll in Vietnam of innocent people is so terrible," he says, "that the cessation of our military activity—the bombing, the burning and the shelling of villages, the search and destroy operations—has become no longer debatable or negotiable, but a matter of urgent and unilateral action." And the only action on our part that can mitigate the torture, that can avert the still greater catastrophe that lies in wait, is to remove the military force that bears the primary responsibility.

The proposal that the United States withdraw will be dismissed as "extremist." To those who like to describe themselves as "responsible" or "realistic," withdrawal is politically impossible and the analysis of the situation in Vietnam on which the proposal is based, hopelessly naive.

On the issue of domestic politics, Zinn argues that "the so-called 'realists' who urge us to speak softly and so persuade the President, are working against the reality, which is that the President responds to self-interest rather than to rational argument . . . If enough people speak for withdrawal, it can *become* politically feasible." Only a combination of factors can end the war; hence "every citizen must put his full moral weight, his *whole* argument, into the balance." In fact, the government is not a monolith. As the political and military realities in Vietnam emerge through the haze of pretense and deception, the advisability, the desperate urgency of American withdrawal may become correspondingly apparent, at least to some. Consider, for example, the reaction of Senator Young to the news that the South Vietnamese forces are unwilling to do what amounts to police work, so that so-called "pacification" must be taken over by the American Army: "If the South Vietnamese forces of Prime Minister Ky are so inadequate in numbers, intelligence, and training that they cannot handle entirely the pacification program in the villages . . . then instead of Americans trying to train, indoctrinate, and pacify an alien people, the time is long past due for us to withdraw to our coastal bases and eventually from Vietnam" (Congressional Record, June 12).

This reaction echoes that of Senator Symington after a recent trip (quoted in I. F. Stone's Weekly, April 3): "If the South Vietnamese do not achieve this pacification, there is no point in this country continuing to pour out lives and treasure in order to protect a government that can neither consolidate nor control what has been taken from them by their own citizens and the North Vietnamese. If the United States decides to become the major factor in this pacification program [as it has since become] as well as in the fighting of the war [as it became long ago], it can only become an extended war of the white man against the Asians, on the mainland of Asia."

Symington's remarks are no doubt accurate, and if past history is any guide, they will soon be forgotten, as Americans become habituated to the new reality.

Far from being naive, the analysis of the situation which leads to the call for withdrawal—not eventual, but immediate—seems to me entirely realistic; and the dimensions of the Vietnamese tragedy are so awesome that whatever the prospects for success may be, the responsible citizen must spare no effort to create the political climate, and the background of insight and understanding, in which this call will become powerful. The urgency of this matter can hardly be exaggerated. It seems unlikely that the Johnson administration will be willing to face the 1968 elections with an unwinnable war on its hands. The prospects are therefore for sharp escalation, perhaps a forced confrontation with China. With this prospect, attempts to predict what may happen next are as irrational as our Vietnamese policy itself.

The American military takeover of "pacification" is a testimony to the failure, thus far, of the effort to impose a political solution by force on an unwilling population. Its true significance is tersely indicated by an unnamed American official in Saigon who commented: "We've been playing the be-nice-to-the-Asian game for ten years, and it's been a flop. We can't afford it any longer" (N.Y. Times, May 13). The American chief of civil operations in the northernmost provinces attributes the failure of the "revolutionary development teams" to the "overwhelming corruption" of Vietnamese official life, to the failure to understand that "until there is a contented peasantry there is no room for the opulent society of the government of Vietnam" (N.Y. Times, May 24). The same report in the Times goes on to give a dramatic example of the results of this corruption. It comments on the successful attack by a guerrilla force on the province capital of Quang Tri on April 6, and continues: "A few days later, in a series of events that were not fully reported at the time, [the guerrillas] moved virtually unmolested into Hue while the army and the national police fled"—a remarkable event, its significance indicated by the fact that it was kept from the American people at the time, and still has not been frankly discussed.

Recent reports confirm, once again, that "every program to win the allegiance of the countryside for the South Vietnamese government has so far failed, in the opinion of most observers. To this day, 80 per cent of the peasantry . . . falls under Vietcong influence if not outright control" (Christian Science Monitor, May 26). The very terminology of this report gives some insight into the reasons for the recurrent failure; it has yet to be demonstrated that the Americans are correct in their unquestioned assumption that the peasants of Vietnam

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are objects, incapable of political expression or allegiance, to be "controlled" by one side or the other. The report continues: "If the South Vietnamese themselves cannot achieve support for the government among their own people, it is unlikely that 'giant white foreigners' will be able to do this for them." Yet it is just this attempt to which we are now reduced, with the military takeover. And we can be fairly sure that this latest step will lead to new and glorious reports of success, before the next rude awakening.

The Saigon government has few illusions as to its legitimacy and status. Saigon officials have pointed out repeatedly that they cannot survive in an open political arena, and that therefore the Americans must destroy not only the Viet Cong's military units, but also its political and administrative structure, by such devices as the "pacification" program. The most recent expression of this analysis appears in an interview with "one of the top generals in the junta, a man regarded by U.S. officials as politically the most sophisticated of the group," reported by George M. Kahin in a memorandum to a group of senators (Congressional Record, April 13). The general points out that "we are very weak politically and without the strong political support of the population which the NLF have," and that therefore "even if we defeat them militarily, they can come to power because of their greater political strength." Thus there can be no talk of cease-fire or military disengagement. Rather, American force must provide a shield, for a generation, until "we have built up our political strength to a point where we can compete with communists successfully." He goes on to say that the war must be carried to North Vietnam and to China, and that it might be necessary to move on to World War III so as to insure that communist power be fully removed from Vietnam.

American authorities have repeatedly indicated that they share this assessment of the Saigon government and its popular base. Both the present assistant secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs and his predecessor have expressed their belief that neutralization of South Vietnam would lead to a communist takeover, and it is widely admitted that the American Expeditionary Force was introduced to stave off what was in essence a political defeat. In his revealing study of the Viet Cong, American Foreign Service Officer Douglas Pike concludes, with ample evidence, that the NLF victory in the now long-forgotten civil war was essentially a political and organizational victory, achieved by building a mass movement. The NLF, he states, is the only "truly mass-based political party in South Vietnam." General Richard Stillwell, at the time second in command in the Southeast Asian theatre, informed Senator Young that we are putting down "an insurrection," and even General Westmoreland, who now asserts that he has seen no signs of insurrection, admitted to Senator Young that the bulk of the Viet Cong fighting in the Mekong Delta were born and reared there (Congressional Record, May 3, 1967)—thus indicating that he may not know the meaning of the word "insurrection."

THE BASIS FOR THE SUCCESS of the insurrection is not very obscure. Denis Warner, as anti-communist as any newsman who has worked in Southeast Asia, pointed out years ago that "in hundreds of villages all over South-East Asia the only people working at the grass roots *for an uplift in people's living standards are the Communists.*" And to the communist agit-prop successes, the Americans have contributed mightily, for example with the terroristic bombing policy. American sources indicate that in the first year of American bombing of the South, 1965, local recruitment for the Viet Cong tripled. The head of the Saigon office of *Asahi Shimbun* concludes that "it is certain that the escalation and spread of the war, even though its results may be advantageous to the Saigon Government itself, only serves to heighten still further opposition to the war among the general population," adding that "the number of draft-dodgers and deserters among young South Vietnamese is a sign of the failure of the war, by and large, to win the support of young people, who tend to view it as an American war" (Japan Quarterly, January 1967).

And the situation can only worsen. Saigon authorities indicate that there are now some two million refugees, most of them, according to the reports of war correspondents, victims of American bombardment or forced resettlement. An AP report from Saigon (Monitor, April 24) gives the following shattering forecast: "The United States high command, preoccupied for two years with hunting down North Vietnamese regulars, now is looking more toward the populated valleys and lowlands where the enemy wields potent political influence and gets his sustenance. Quick gains are hoped for by forced resettlement of chronically Communist areas, followed up with scorched-earth operations that deny enemy troops all food, shelter, and material support. Central highlands valleys are being denuded of all living things; people ringing the Communist war zones in the South have been moved. Some American observers recently in the Mekong Delta say that the Vietnamese Army, long hated and feared, now is regarded as less of a threat to the countryside than the Americans."

Dozens of such reports can be cited. Those who advocate withdrawal are simply proposing that we eliminate this threat, as only we can do.

It is hardly surprising that the peasantry refuses allegiance to a constituent assembly that could muster three votes out of 117 for the one land reform measure that was introduced, or that the residents of Saigon are less than enthusiastic about a government so unbelievably corrupt that the secretary of Industry in Ky's cabinet seems to be the major supplier of drugs to the Viet Cong—naturally, after receiving a third of a million dollars in kickbacks from the American and West German suppliers (Carl Rowan, March 26). Nor is it obscure why the American government continues to use its military force to impose on the people of Vietnam the regime of the most corrupt, most reactionary elements in Vietnamese society. There is simply no one else who will do its bidding, and resist the overwhelming popular sentiment for peace and, no doubt, neutralism. The U.S. government has on occasion indicated that it would not leave if asked to do so "by a left-wing or even neutralist government that, in the U.S. view, did not reflect the true feelings of the South Vietnamese people or military leaders" (a "high official" in Washington, explaining a statement to this effect by Ambassador Lodge, N.Y. Times, August 13, 1965). Furthermore, it will see to it that no such government will arise, and that no such opinions will be publicly expressed. Thus in the last few months, reports from South Vietnam indicate that once again a Buddhist attempt to establish a legal political organization was frustrated and the leaders arrested (Kahin memorandum, cited above).

Jean Raffaelli, the one Western correspondent who has re-

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mained in North Vietnam, has observed that quite apart from any question of politics, there is a human element of grandeur in the resistance of the Vietnamese to the assault launched against them by the world's most advanced technology. In Le Monde, a North Vietnamese doctor "of international reputation" is quoted: "The Americans have demolished everything. All that we have built since 1954 is in ruins: hospitals, schools, factories, new dwellings. We have nothing more to lose, except independence and liberty. But to safeguard these, believe me, we are ready to endure anything."

In South Vietnam, the American attack has been far more severe, and direct report from its victims is lacking. But some statistics tell the story well enough. According to American sources, the Viet Cong are "able to enlist an estimated 7000 recruits a month" (John Oakes, N.Y. Times, April 3). Recently, an extensive propaganda barrage has enthusiastically proclaimed that in March there were 5557 defectors from the Viet Cong, almost twice as many as in any previous month. Only the careful reader would have noted that of these "defectors," 630 were identified as military men and 301 as political cadres, the rest being peasants, probably coming for a free meal (N.Y. Times, April 6). Seven thousand new recruits and 630 defectors—these figures indicate graphically by what means the American war in Vietnam must be won.

THE DISCUSSION OF THE VIETNAM CATASTROPHE tends to focus far too much on Southeast Asia. It would be more to the point to emphasize the ideological commitments on which American initiatives are based, and the national self-image that permits them to be tolerated with such equanimity; in particular, the unshakable belief in American goodwill that persists through each calamity, notably, among the self-styled "hard-headed and pragmatic liberals," and that stultifies political thinking and debases political discourse.

We can, for example, learn a great deal about the sources of American Vietnamese policy by observing how American scholarship comes to terms with the suppression of the Philippine struggle for independence—in which, incidentally, there were well over 100,000 Filipino casualties. Thus Louis Halle (New Republic, June 10) argues that "we could not hand the Philippines back to the Spanish tyranny, and they were in no condition to govern themselves or encompass their own defense. If we simply got out and came home we would leave chaos behind," with the Germans and Japanese lurking in wait. Therefore the United States, "having inadvertently become responsible for the Philippines, had no alternative to assuming, itself, the obligation of governing and defending what consequently became the first item of an American overseas empire."

It need hardly be pointed out that it was the American expeditionary force from whom the Filipinos needed "defense." Nor will I discuss the kind of society that we bequeathed them, except to remark that for reasons that are perhaps obvious, the Huk guerrillas are once again in control of large areas of central Luzon, setting the stage for what may be a bloody reenactment of the tragedy of Vietnam.

It is remarkable to see how easily perceptive and informed commentators succeed in deluding themselves as to the character of American actions and policies. For example, Roger Hilsman, in his recently published study of policy-making under the Kennedy administration, discusses the attempt to concentrate the peasantry in "strategic hamlets" in the early 1960's, maintaining that "the primary role of the strategic hamlet was to provide [the peasants] . . . a free choice between the Vietcong and the government." As he makes very clear, this "free choice" was to be provided by careful police work inside the hamlets ("for it seemed obvious that putting up defenses around a village would do no good if the defenses enclosed Vietcong agents"); the failure of the program he attributes to the fact that "there had been no real effort to isolate the population from the Vietcong by eliminating Vietcong agents and supporters inside the strategic hamlets and by imposing controls on the movement of people and supplies . . . the Vietcong supporters and agents . . . had no difficulty repenetrating the hamlet and continuing subversion." Thus the program failed "to provide the villager with physical security, so that he has a choice of refusing to cooperate with the Vietcong," a "free choice" which is denied him as long as Viet Cong supporters are permitted to exist in his village.

There is no doubt an important difference between this level of self-deception and that of Marshal Ky, who describes the philosophy of his government as "100 per cent social revolutionary," or CIA analyst George Carver, who tells us of "the genuine social revolution now taking place in the urban areas of South Vietnam." The natural reaction to such pronouncements is one of ridicule, but amusement fades when one begins to calculate the human cost.

Again, Howard Zinn has some apt remarks about the moral blindness that permits America to remain insensitive to the agony of Vietnam. "We listen with the languor of a people who have never been bombed, who have only been the bombardiers." "We have no Hiroshima, no city of the blind and maimed, no professors haggard from long terms in jail . . . we have never been forced . . . to recognize our deeds, to bow, to apologize, to promise a life of peace." Thus protest is muted and diffuse, as "Uncle Sam, the white-gloved financier of counterrevolution has removed his gloves, taken gun in hand, and moved into the jungle," and has slowly composed "an enormous pattern of devastation which, if seen in its entirety, would have to be described as one of the most evil acts committed by any nation in modern times."

Zinn disposes effectively of the claim that our prestige as a nation would be diminished by withdrawal, noting that this would satisfy a range of opinion that extends from Adenauer to the Japanese left. But there is also the matter of internal prestige—the factor to which Eric Hobsbawm referred, when he pointed out that American policy-making often seems less concerned with red areas on the map than with red faces in the Pentagon. Furthermore, it may be that in some respects Zinn underestimates the subtlety of those whose arguments he counters. For example, he remarks that "we see every rebellion as the result of some plot concocted in Moscow or Peking," and that the Russians make the same mistake, attributing revolts "in Hungary or Poznan . . . to bourgeois influence or to American scheming." Although one can, to be sure, become a prisoner of one's own propaganda, it is difficult to believe that the Russian leaders so misunderstood the events of 1956; more likely, they were unwilling to tolerate an erosion of their power in a sensitive buffer area and found in "bourgeois influence" and "American scheming" a useful propaganda cover.

Similarly, it strains credulity to suppose that our present secretary of State was simply deluded when he described "the Peiping regime," in 1951, as "a colonial Russian government—

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a Slavic Manchukuo on a larger scale." Ample evidence was available to him to show the absurdity of this evaluation, for example, in the State Department White Paper on China published not long before. More likely, as with the Hungarian revolution, it was necessary to find a way to justify a variety of long-range policies: strengthening the Western alliance and rearming Germany, expanding the nuclear arsenal, stemming popular revolution in the Third World and subverting or strangling those that had taken place. Similarly, it is not easy to convince oneself that Allen Dulles really believed that Mossadegh was willfully "creating a communist state," or that Thomas Mann was so ignorant of world affairs as to suppose that the Dominican revolution in 1965 resulted from the machinations of the "Sino-Soviet military bloc." Rather one must adapt to current styles of acceptable international behavior.

It would not do to use today the phraseology of Secretary of State Knox who sent Marines into Cuba in 1908 saying that "the United States does not undertake first to consult the Cuban Government if a crisis arises requiring a temporary landing somewhere." And in general, the "international communist conspiracy" is a perfect propaganda device to justify actions that reinforce and extend American hegemony, serving our aims just as "bourgeois influence and American scheming" serve those of Russian imperialism.

This leads directly to the justification for the war given by the dissatisfied liberals, a very important matter if one hopes to construct a domestic political base for a policy of disengagement. Richard Goodwin, for example, argues that the war is ultimately justified by the "almost idealistic, compelling conviction that the one nation with the power to prevent it should not stand aside while nations unwillingly submit to foreign domination." Thus we must not "undermine the central world purpose of the United States—the creation of an international order of independent states." It does not occur to him that by suppressing a victorious insurrection, we are precisely undermining this "central world purpose" and forcing a nation to "submit to foreign domination." Nor does he take note of the fact that we are unable to form a puppet government with even the legitimacy of those set up by Germany or Japan—we have not, for example, been able to find a national figure of the stature of Petain or Wang Ching-Wei to mask our aggression. This sentimental faith in American benevolence, with its various corollaries ("the politics of inadvertence," "the inscrutability of history"), is a major factor that stands in the way of realistic proposals for withdrawal.

The by-now worn analogy between Munich and Vietnam could also be usefully extended by a consideration of the views of the Kennedy liberals. Goodwin, for example, is too sophisticated to accept the Munich analogy, but he goes on to offer a revealing counter-thesis. He argues, first of all, that in Vietnam we are combatting not aggression but "internal aggression" by a revolutionary movement against a government maintained in power by foreign arms. And he concludes that what we face is not Munich, but rather "another episode . . . in a long, continuing conflict." Other episodes include our "success" in Greece and Turkey, Soviet intervention in Cuba, the invasion of Korea, the bombing of Quemoy and Matsu, subversion in the Congo and the Central African Republic, fighting in Malaya and the Philippines and on the Indian border. And now, he adds, "they are beginning in Thailand."

But with whom are we engaged in this "long, continuing conflict?" Certainly not the Soviet Union, which had little to do with the Sino-Indian border dispute; nor China, which did not start the civil war in Greece; nor Ho Chi Minh, who, for all his sins, is not responsible for subversion in the Congo. Nor is "international communism" a very convincing devil in the wake of the Sino-Soviet split, gestures of independence in Eastern Europe and North Korea and the admitted refusal of North Vietnam, even in its present straits, to kowtow to its powerful allies. In fact, there is no identifiable adversary. We are confronted with a mysterious but dangerous force, which cannot be located or specified in any concrete terms, but which is there, threatening us. While rejecting the Munich analogy, Goodwin, the liberal critic, tacitly accepts the assumption on which it is based and which gives it great plausibility.

The unpleasant fact is that if one wishes to pursue the Munich analogy there is only one plausible contender for the role of Hitler. And if China and Russia do involve themselves in World War III over Vietnam, we can be sure that the memory of Munich will play an important role in their calculations. Arnold Toynbee has put the matter quite succinctly: "The President manifestly feels that he is speaking with Churchill's voice—the Churchill of 1940—but to the ears of peoples who have suffered from Western domination in the past, his voice sounds like the Kaiser's and like Hitler's."

There is surely no greater irony than the demand that to insure world peace, the United States must develop a strategy for the containment of China. China is surrounded by American missiles and huge military bases supporting an army 8000 miles from home. It is subject to daily bombardment from an island that is barely off the mainland, not to speak of overflights and commando raids, all under the protection of the Seventh Fleet, admittedly intervening in a civil war. For over a year, U.S. planes have been bombing the only railroad connecting southwestern China, with its industrial center of Kunming, to the rest of the country —it happens to pass near Hanoi. Yet even Roger Hilsman, one of the sanest voices commenting on Asian affairs, can speak of the "formidable threat" posed by Communist China, and can conclude that "it certainly served no useful purpose for the U.S. to reward aggression by recognizing Communist China or by encouraging their being seated in the U.N."

It is illuminating to examine in detail Hilsman's demonstration of "Chinese belligerence." The primary example of "Chinese aggression" (apart from "aggression" in Korea) is the support for the "crude and unsophisticated" insurrections in "Burma, Thailand, Malaya, the Philippines, and French Indochina," while the Chinese succeeded in putting "on a more effective, politically sophisticated course." The history of "Chinese belligerence," of the aggression which we must not reward, is completed with these instances: 1. the cancellation of trade contacts with Japan when the Kishi government would not allow the Chinese flag to be flown over its mission in Tokyo; 2. various unrealized threats to Hong Kong, including an appeal "to Nationalist leaders to make a deal"; 3. the suppression of the Tibetan revolt; 4. the Sino-Indian border crisis; 5. "encouraging the local communists in a direct use of military force, first in Laos and then in South Vietnam."

It is not easy to decide which of these is the most telling example of Chinese aggression; perhaps Burma, in which, according to U Thant, "there has not been a single instance of

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outside help to the Burmese communists," during a period when Chinese nationalist forces roamed northern Burma, at great cost to the Burmese. It would also be interesting to discover what evidence was available to the director of intelligence for the State Department regarding Chinese control, or even material assistance, in the case of Thailand, Malaya and the Philippines—and also to discover why this evidence has never been made public. "Chinese aggression" in Indochina, in contrast to the responsible and purely defensive posture of the Western powers, is of course well-documented. As to Laos, Hilsman himself repeats much of the well-known story of the American attempt to subvert the legitimate government, replacing it by "pro-Western neutralists" and then a right-wing military dictatorship—an attempt which continued until 1962 when Kennedy, in a dramatic and sensible reversal of policy, agreed finally to support the neutralist elements that had previously been backed only by the communist powers. Quite revealing in this connection is Hilsman's judgment that the real communist "threat" in Laos "seems more likely to have been an expansion of political control based on winning peasant support in the villages"—a threat rather like that posed by the 1954 Geneva agreements, which, the Viet Minh thought, "would give them half of Vietnam for sure and an excellent opportunity to win the other half through political subversion," i.e., an electoral victory.

Hilsman also has relevant comments on the Sino-Indian border dispute. He observes that "the Indians unwisely provided the Chinese ample provocation by adopting a "forward strategy"—establishing isolated outposts *behind* the Chinese outposts that India felt had encroached on what they considered their rightful territory—and Prime Minister Nehru, in the early fall of 1962, announced publicly that "the Indian Army had been ordered to clear India's territory of the Chinese aggressors." He points out that the unilateral Chinese pullback of their victorious armies showed that we face "not only a powerful enemy but a politically skillful one." He does not, unfortunately, go into the background of the conflict, but excellent Western sources exist, thoroughly refuting the simplistic view—advanced, to my knowledge, by not a single Western scholar—that the border dispute was merely, or even primarily, a matter of "Chinese aggression." The issue of Tibet we need not discuss, since whatever the facts may be—and if Western scholarship is to be trusted, they are not simply what is claimed by American propaganda—Tibet is internationally recognized as a region of China; one might with equal logic accuse the United States of aggression in Watts, or in the Mississippi delta, where, reports indicate, thousands are starving while Washington plays politics.

While sympathizing with China's problems, one may still react with dismay, perhaps even outrage to the authoritarian and repressive character of the Chinese state, as one may have varying reactions to the society that is developing. But there is nothing to justify our shameful treatment of China in the post-war years.

WITH ALL THE CYNICISM of the mid-20th century, it is nevertheless startling to see how easily the rhetoric of imperialism comes to American lips, sometimes muted, sometimes entirely overt. Arthur Schlesinger writes that if our killing machine achieves a victory in Vietnam, we will all "be saluting the wisdom and statesmanship of the American government." That an American military victory might be a tragedy—this is unthinkable. Roger Hilsman speaks of "the Korean War, Dienbienphu, the two Laos crises, and Vietnam [as] only the opening guns of what might well be a century-long struggle for Asia." What kind of struggle it will be is clear, if Laos and Vietnam are precedents. The foreign editor of Look magazine writes (May 30): "The Far East is now our Far West. The Western frontier of American power today stands on the far side of the Pacific Ocean . . . It stretches through the island chain off the Asian mainland with three toeholds on the continent, Korea, Vietnam and Thailand . . . We are a Pacific power—the only Pacific power. We are there to stay . . . This is where we have markets and, except for Japan, no rival producers."

And the natural counterpart to this doctrine is neatly expressed in the 1967 Prize Essay of the U.S. Naval Institute, by Professor Harold Rood of Claremont College, who argues as follows: "The U.S. position in the Pacific is no longer what it was in 1941. The territory which came under direct Japanese attack early in the war, the Hawaiian islands and the Aleutians, are each sovereign states today . . . Yet Hawaii is closer to Peking than it is to Washington, D.C. The Aleutian islands at their westernmost tip are closer to China than they are to Seattle, Washington. Where once the security of the United States could conveniently, it seemed, rest on Alaska and Hawaii in the Pacific, these two states now have the right to demand the same kind of security which each of them once helped furnish to the continental United States."

Consider the implications. Our allies and our bases in Taiwan, Camranh Bay, Thailand, also have the right to demand the same kind of security which each of them now helps furnish to Alaska and Hawaii. And so on, indefinitely. Of course, we have heard all of this before. Japan once needed Manchuria for survival—without Manchuria, it was a "potted plant," without roots. And to secure Manchuria it was obviously necessary to ensure that North China was "friendly," and then all of China, and Southeast Asia, and on to the Pacific war. Our claim to special rights in Asia is, on grounds of security or economic interest, far weaker than that of Japan. Japan, however, was dwarfed in wealth and power by a colossus across the seas, and we are not.

What would be the consequences of a withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam? If past events are any guide, the cessation of aggressive military action by the United States will lead to a disengagement of North Vietnamese units, as happened, apparently, during the bombing pause in January 1966. It is noteworthy that no group in South Vietnam has advocated North Vietnamese involvement in an immediate political solution, and the same North Vietnamese leadership that was willing, a decade ago, to arrange a *modus vivendi* with Diem, would very likely agree to negotiate the problems of Vietnam with a government that would at least respond to its diplomatic notes. Just what might emerge from the shattered debris of South Vietnamese society, no one can predict with any confidence. It is clear, however, that under the American occupation, there can be only unending tragedy. A few years ago, the premier of Ceylon commented that "the best form of foreign aid the United States can give to small countries is to abstain from interfering in their affairs." As applied to Vietnam, at least, this grim appraisal is no longer an arguable matter.

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ROMIOSSINI or OF THINGS GREEK

translated from the poem of Iannis Ritsos by Richelle Dassin

Writers and artists are usually among the first victims when democracy dies. Since the recent military coup in Greece thousands of intellectuals have been jailed, for no reason except that their country's new Army rulers don't like their political opinions. Most of the political prisoners are being held without trial on the barren island of Youra. Many have had no contact with the outside world, and their families do not know what has happened to them. One of the few men known for certain to be on Youra is the poet Iannis Ritsos.

Ritsos has long been one of Greece's leading poets, and is one of the very few read at all outside his country. He has been influential in creating a more popular form of poetry in Greece—the poem that follows, for instance, is widely known because it has been set to music by the man who wrote the score for "Zorba the Greek." Ritsos is no stranger to political prisons. He spent several years in one during the Greek Civil War, when he was also judged to have the "wrong" political opinions. This poem was written in jail at that time.

These trees do not fit beneath a
  narrow sky
These stones do not fit beneath a
  foreign footstep
These faces fit only in the sun
These hearts fit only with justice
This land is hard like the silence
It hugs to its body the smoldering stones
It hugs in the light its orphaned
  vineyards and olive groves
There is no water—only light
Into which the road vanishes
And the shadow of the fence is iron.

They are thirsty
For so many years now they are hungry
Their eyes are red from lack of sleep
Carved between their eyebrows is a
  deep furrow
Like, between two mountains, a cypress,
  at twilight
Their hand is glued to the gun
The gun prolongs their hand
Their hand prolongs their soul
Anger is seated on their lips
In the depths of their eyes
  there is sorrow
As, in a salt pool on the beach,
  a star reflected.

When they clasp together their hands
The sun is certain of the earth
When they smile
A bird flies from their wild beards
When they are killed
Life's ascension proceeds with flags
  and drums.

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