

# Our Push-Pull Dilemma in Vietnam

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# Our Push-Pull Dilemma in Vietnam

## A Disquieted Washington Awaits LBJ's Decision on Suspending Bombing or Plunging Ahead

By Chalmers M. Roberts

Washington Post Staff Writer

ONE OF HISTORY'S undated moments for great decisions is at hand. President Johnson must decide where to lead the Nation in the war in Vietnam.

Events have conspired to make necessary decisions on new military actions, on the war's effect on the new budget, on how much of the Great Society it is possible to have along with the war, on how to buttress his case with the American public and the noncommunist world.

Mr. Johnson will be back in Washington this week for the first of three important diplomatic conferences. In other words, the relative calm of this Capital in recent weeks is about to end.

### One Last Possibility

IT HARDLY takes Dean Rusk's celebrated antennae to discern the mood of disquiet in Washington today. The stores may be decked for Christmas but the Yule spirit is missing among those who deal with the war and its ramifications.

The word in Washington is that, diplomacy having failed to produce any sign of negotiations, the war inevitably will further escalate—and on both sides. The critical question now actively before Mr. Johnson is this: Before granting approval of a new American escalation, shall he make the only possible dramatic effort that conceivably could produce a break in the diplomatic impasse? That effort would be a considerable pause in the bombing of North Vietnam.

Hanoi's posture is now so hard that the probability is that even a month's pause would not produce such a diplomatic break. But a pause long enough to be taken as reasonable both here at home and elsewhere in the noncommunist world would greatly buttress Mr. Johnson's case for further escalation should it produce no results.

Last winter, the pressure on the President was to offer to negotiate. It finally brought him on April 7 to

offer "unconditional negotiations" in his Johns Hopkins speech. That quieted dissent both here and abroad, and when it produced no acceptable response from the other side, it helped his case for sending in more American troops. Whether or not he passed up any real chance for talks is now not material.

This winter, the pressure on the President is for a pause in the bombing, one considerably longer than the five-day halt last May. Few dissenters today are saying that we should get out of Vietnam, so far in is the United States and so determined to fight it out does the President seem. But from all sides, including the Communists, come varying cries for a halt in the bombing.

The possibility of a pause is under discussion by the President and his top advisers. The length which at the moment seems to find the most favor—if there is any pause at all—is about two weeks.

Assuming, however, that such a pause, or even a considerably longer one, would not deflect Hanoi from its current course, the second session of the 89th Congress which opens Jan. 10 will be dominated by one issue, the war.

### Butter Is Slipping

ALREADY, WORD is seeping through the Federal bureaucracy that both guns and butter will not be possible much longer, that the Great Society programs will have less new money than might otherwise have been available, that fewer new programs can be launched than the President would like to see launched. The President doubtless will fight to keep both guns and butter, but a rising chorus against that course can already be heard in the background.

If there is no diplomatic break, pause or no pause, if Hanoi is determined to fight on indefinitely, pouring into the South more of its regular army from the North, then the United States will have no alternative but to pour in

more and more American manpower, to widen the bombing in the North and to intensify the military struggle in the South.

This is increasingly the main thrust of American opinion, as one measures it from the Harris and Gallup Polls and from what a number of Senators and Representatives have said out loud. But against this dominant tide there is a strong undertow of deeply disturbed Americans whose only point of agreement seems to be that before the Nation plunges deeper, it ought to pause in bombing the North for one last try at diplomacy.

### A Formal Declaration

ONE POINT being made increasingly is that the United States ought to declare war formally if it intends to push on. Some argue that Mr. Johnson is exceeding the shadowy line of his authority as Commander-in-Chief by going as far as he has without a constitutional declaration of war by Congress. Some feel that debate over such a declaration would be useful in itself.

But the reasons for not making such a declaration are impressive. To do so, it is argued in the Administration, would reduce the chances of a negotiated settlement. It would force Hanoi's allies, Peking and Moscow, to act more openly in support of North Vietnam. In short, it would increase the chances of a world war.

Hanoi has not declared war in a formal sense. Indeed, formal declarations are something of an anachronism. Hitler neglected that nicety when he invaded Poland in 1939 and the Japanese did the same when they struck Pearl Harbor in 1941. In 1950, we did not declare war in Korea, where we acted under a United Nations resolution, though somewhat ex post facto.

### Congress on Record

PRESIDENT TRUMAN did make a tactical political mistake by not asking Congress for a formal vote of support on Korea. Mr. Johnson thus far has avoided that trap by the device of obtaining an overwhelming congressional vote on a resolution approving "the determination of the President, as Commander-in-Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States . . ."

Surely sometime in the new session See DECISION, Page E4, Column 3

## An Authority on Communism Says We're Letting This One Area Disbalance Whole Policy

By George F. Kennan

Former Ambassador to the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, Kennan is an authority on world communism.

THERE ARE, I am sure, many besides myself who would have preferred to remain silent in the face of a discussion so shrill and so confused as that which has revolved around the Vietnam problem in recent months. But the challenge advanced by the recent Freedom House statement "placing the onus on those who remain silent and fail to make clear the American consensus" is a fair one, and its authors can have no complaints if it is responded to, in this instance, by one whose voice not all of them always hear with sympathy.

Our adversaries in Vietnam are people for whose predilections and purposes no one in this country need have the faintest sympathy. Allowed to have their way, they would impose a ruthless dictatorship in any area under their control, and the experience of other Communist countries (leaving aside, for the moment, Yugoslavia) does not suggest that this would be followed by economic or social benefits remotely commensurate with the loss of liberty and the isolation from the world community this tyranny would involve. The young Americans who march around with Vietcong flags or profess to favor a Vietcong victory are choosing a very strange way to demonstrate an attachment to the cause of either independence or freedom, if this is indeed what they are interested in.

On the other hand, to recognize that this is so does not mean that it is necessarily the duty of the United States to set all this to rights. Understanding for democratic ideals is not widely spread among the human race. There are more instances of oppression and of the abuse of power in this world than the United States alone can ever hope to remedy, and some of them are closer to home than what transpires in Vietnam.

Nor is it clear to many of us that such Vietnamese as we might find to

install in power in the unlikely event of a sweeping military success (or surely we would not wish to hold the country indefinitely under direct colonial administration) would be inclined, or even able, to rule with any markedly greater liberality.

### A Question of Hegemony

THE QUESTIONS we have really to ask ourselves when we think of the future of Vietnam are primarily two: first, to what extent a future Vietnamese regime would be likely to accept a status of subordination to one of the two great Communist powers and to represent an extension of its political and strategic power; and secondly, what would be the effect of the settlement on neighboring areas.

As to the first of these questions, it is unlikely, in the face of the Chinese-Soviet conflict, that even a Communist regime in any part of Vietnam would find it necessary or desirable, in normal circumstances, to subordinate itself entirely to either of the two great Communist powers. If Hanoi has today come into a one-sided and unhealthy relationship of dependence on Peking, this is surely primarily the effect of the discipline exerted by the war itself.

In the event of a termination of hostilities, there would be neither necessity nor advantage from the North Vietnamese standpoint in retaining this one-sided alignment. But for a smaller Communist country to attempt to preserve a balance in the relationship to the two great ones means, as we see from other examples, to exercise a high degree of independence in external relations generally. Thus, even in the event of a complete Vietcong victory (and I am not suggesting we settle for anything of this sort), the result would probably be something less than the automatic extension of Chinese power that many of us fear.

As to the second question, that of the reaction of other countries: this is of course a very serious consideration. Our Government is justified in citing it

as a main reason why we could not contemplate any precipitate and disorderly withdrawal. But the elements of this "third country" problem have undergone important alteration as a result of recent events in Indonesia and probably in India and Pakistan as well. Our latitude of action would seem to be greater than it was when we first committed our forces in Vietnam on a serious scale.

### Our Greater Problems

THE MOST disturbing aspect of our involvement in Vietnam is its relationship to our interests and responsibilities in other areas of world affairs. Whatever justification this involvement might have had if Vietnam had been the only important problem, or even the outstanding problem, we faced in this world today, this not being the case, its present dimensions can only be said to represent a grievous disbalance of American policy.

For nearly a year now, we have sacrificed to this effort all serious possibility for improvement of our relations with the Soviet Union, with all this implies from the standpoint of the ultimate danger of nuclear war, and this we have done at a time when prospects for such improvement were otherwise not unfavorable. We have placed a great and deeply regrettable strain on the friendship and confidence of the Japanese people.

A pall of discouragement has been cast over those responsible for the conduct of the work of the United Nations. Constructive treatment of the great problems of Germany, of nuclear disarmament, of the future of the United Nations and of China in the wider sense has everywhere been placed largely in abeyance in deference to this one remote involvement.

All of these problems are more important, for the long term, than what happens in Vietnam, and there is none of them that will be usefully met even by such further military successes as we may have in the Vietnam area—rather the contrary.

### Loss of Initiative

THE EFFECTS of this unbalanced concentration of resources and attention on a single area of world affairs are unfortunate enough even as things stand today. They could be much more unfortunate if we were to be suddenly faced, as we easily could be,

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## Fighting Men's Faces Mirror the War Below the 17th Parallel

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# A Push-Pull Crisis in Vietnam

## A Disquieted Washington Awaits Decision Of President Whether to Suspend Our Bombing or Plunge Deeper Into War

**DECISION, From Page E1**  
of Congress, he will want another vote of support. It would be most surprising, however, if it were on a formal declaration of war.

It has been demonstrated, as a majority of experts inside the Administration predicted, that bombing North Vietnam would not bring China into the war. They now believe that the bombing can be extended while still avoiding that risk.

Current American military discussions center on the bombing of defense-related petroleum installations around the port of Haiphong and of the infiltration route through Laos known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. A number of diplomatic moves are under way to provide justification for the latter. Mining of the Haiphong harbor approaches is another possibility.

Such steps would, of course, constitute a major escalation of the war.

Hanoi seems prepared to escalate in return to the physical limit of its ability to move its regular army into the South.

### Close-Mouthed Presidents

**B**UT IS THE United States simply to slide into the next phase of war? Looking back, it is evident that both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson upped the ante bit by bit without really telling the American public where it was heading. That process continues today as Mr. Johnson merely says, as he did last week, that the United States "will supply whatever men are needed" to "help the people of South Vietnam resist aggression."

Lack of Government candor, the refusal to state frankly each new decision and the denial of information on current American activities in neighboring Thailand and Laos all have confused the public mind and

made more difficult any rational national debate.

Much of the confusion, much of the inability of proponents and opponents of Administration policy even to agree on how they disagree, springs from the nature of the war itself. Even the word "war" was long avoided by official Washington until the President rather casually introduced it authoritatively last July 28.

The basic problem is the inability, or the refusal, of many Americans to accept what is going on in Vietnam as simply another form of warfare. It is difficult, because there is no front line and no clear division of forces to show on a daily newspaper map, and because of the still widespread contention that this is a civil war.

### Generals Under Wraps

**F**URTHERMORE, this war is being fought with restrictions on the field commanders. The same thing was true in Korea, but there, at least, there was a clear battle line.

This time, the demands are likely to be more insistent for taking off the wraps, at least up to the Chinese border. The chairmen of both the Senate and House Military Affairs Committees are advocating such measures.

There also is confusion over the aims of this war. Mr. Johnson speaks of helping South Vietnam "resist aggression," a common Administration phrase. But on occasion, the President

and his chief aides have painted the conflict on a far larger canvas.

The President has talked of Hitler and Munich, of standing up to Chinese expansionism, of the value of America's word around the world. And he has coined his own aphorism: "We did not choose to be the guardians at the gate, but there is no one else."

### Ever the Bomb

**D**EEP IN THE American mind, it is evident from much of what so far has passed for debate both on and off the campus, is a fear that the Bomb may yet be used. It has been 20 years since nuclear weapons were employed in warfare. Then two of the three in existence were used; today, their number is in the tens of thousands. To employ them in this or any war would be to cross a psychological barrier of immense proportions.

Thus, as an increasingly bloody year draws to a close, as mounting casualty lists appear, as diplomacy appears stalemated, the President faces momentous decisions.

What should he do? What should he tell his fellow Americans? How can he prevent the loss of the consensus he so far has had on the war? How can he restrain the increasingly vocal warhawks? How can he channel the vocal storm when Congress returns soon to articulate the mood of the Nation?

The last hours for quiet contemplation along the Pedernales are melting away. A critical moment lies ahead.

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Robinson in the Indianapolis News

So far, so good.

## Is War Disbalancing Our Policy?

### VIET, From Page E1

with a simultaneous crisis in another area where our interests are importantly engaged.

This being so, if we can now find nothing better to do than to embark upon a further open-ended increase in the level of our commitment simply because the alternatives seem humiliating and frustrating, one will have to ask whether we have not become enslaved to the dynamics of a single unmanageable situation—to the point where we have lost much of the power of initiative and control over our own policy, not just locally but on a world scale.

None of this should be taken as inferring that our Government has been guilty of obvious stupidities. At no time in the history of this whole unhappy affair have its choices been easy or obvious ones and the worst feature of the many violent demonstrations of opinion, pro and con, has been that they have so vehemently suggested that they have been. Questions about past decisions, furthermore, are not answers to the problem we face at this particular moment.

On the other hand, it will not do for the Administration simply to turn to its critics outside government and say: "What would you suggest?" No one who is not privy to all the available information and who cannot give a large proportion of his time to the study of public questions could make useful suggestions for specific action in a situation so vastly complicated as this.

The Administration could perhaps get more help from public discussion if it could find less exalted and more meaningful terms in which to describe

its own predicament. Public understanding is not aided by the demands that the North Vietnamese "cease their aggression" which fall so regularly from the lips of senior State Department officials.

We are not dealing here with established sovereign states, wholly separate and independent and accepted in the Western sense. The situation does not lend itself to classification under established concepts of international law.

Nor does it help us much to be told that our Government is determined "to live up to our commitments." Commitments to whom? To some South Vietnamese government? If so, to which one?

When and where did we assume the obligation to sacrifice to its defense the whole balance of our policy and the wider interests of world peace? And is this commitment conceived as something unrelated to its own performance, to its ability to command the confidence of its people?

### Balance of Power

**O**R IS IT THE people of Vietnam themselves to whom this commitment is conceived to relate? Obviously, their feelings cannot today be consulted in any orderly way. But can we be sure, on the basis of what we now know of their reactions, that to have this conflict continue to be fought out on their backs is really preferable in their eyes to the consequences of even the most unfortunate political settlement?

If, in short, what we are actually fighting over is the preservation of some balance of power in that part of the world, which is something about which we have every right to be con-

cerned, let us then discuss the problem in those terms and not try to drape our action in legalisms and moralisms.

No one can question the thesis that a precipitate withdrawal representing the total capitulation of our entire position in that region, would be one of the worst of the alternatives before us. No one will deny that the other side is today wholly unresponsive to any and all suggestions for negotiation—particularly negotiation with us. I wonder, however, whether negotiation—particularly early negotiation between Hanoi and ourselves—is the only, or even the most promising, way out of this situation.

Prospects were never good, at any time, for agreement between the North Vietnamese and ourselves on any sort of publicly negotiated formal contract defining what political conditions should henceforth prevail in the disputed area. Hanoi cannot join us, the "imperialists," in publicly instructing the Vietcong, partially a South Vietnamese force, to be politically unsuccessful.

There would be a better chance of this situation's simmering down, through a series of reciprocal unilateral actions on the part of the main protagonists, to a point where it became somehow manageable, as so many other tense situations have done in recent years, than of its being resolved by contractual agreement between ourselves and one portion of the other side.

If we wish to develop this possibility of a simmering-down (and it is, unhappily, the most promising of all the possibilities we face), then we must be prepared, it would seem, to let the talking be done for us, quite privately

and without elbow-jogging on our part, by our friends and others who have an interest in the termination of the conflict. And then we must be prepared, depending on such advice as we receive from them, to place limited restraints at some point on our military efforts, and to do so quietly and without published time limits or ultimatums, where we have reason to hope that such restraints will meet with adequate reciprocation from the other side.

### Unlikeliest Outcome

**N**O ONE CAN guarantee the success of even this approach, and there are many who, in the light of the pretentious terms in which our objectives have often been cast, would consider it inadequate even if successful. But it is hard to imagine anything better.

I would not know what "victory" means in these conditions. In this sort of a war, one controls what one can take and hold and police with ground forces; one does not control what one bombs. And it seems to me the most unlikely of all contingencies that anyone should come to us on his knees and inquire our terms, whatever the escalation of our effort.

If it be once accepted that in the present difficult situation the security of our own forces is the cardinal consideration, that it is better to hold smaller areas securely than to hold larger ones insecurely and that the immediate objective is not to bring the adversary to the negotiating table but to bring about a mutual lowering of the intensity of hostilities, then perhaps the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach will appear in a different light.

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Sanders in the Kansas City Star