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IMAGE AND REALITY IN INDOCHINA

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REEXAMINING the 30 and more years since Indochina entered the agenda of world problems one is struck constantly by the curious mirages, the discordance between image and reality which seem to persist not only in American perceptions of Indochina but in the evaluations by other great powers and the Indochinese themselves of the actual nature and goals of U.S. policy.

We are all familiar with the "mirror image" phenomenon in which two rival powers tend to see each other in somewhat similar turns of threat, each mirroring the other's fears and expectations, thus often giving rise to self-fulfilling prophecies. The Indochina phenomenon is different. It lies in a distortion of perception in which one, two or more powers see a different sequence of events as being in progress, each one of these images having little or no resemblance to reality or to the image in the consciousness of the other powers. It strikingly reminds one of the classic Japanese story of Rashomon. An event, a series of events takes place. But exactly what were these events? To each participant it seems that a different thing has happened. We see the tragedy through the eyes of one participant after the other. Each vision is so different, so contradictory, that in the end we can never be certain of what it is that has actually transpired.

So it is with Indochina. I think that it is this diverse interplay of myth and reality, this inability at almost any given moment to find common understanding not only of motivation but of the nature of current evolutions which has placed resolution of the Indochina problem almost beyond the reach of even the most skillful diplomats.

For the United States this process began long, long ago. Even before our entry into World War II, President Roosevelt was

expressing to Admiral Leahy, our ambassador to Vichy, the essence of what came to be an *idée fixe*—that French colonial policy in Indochina (and to a lesser extent that of the Dutch in the East Indies and the British in Southeast Asia) was “responsible” for the aggressions of the Japanese. Indeed, later, FDR went so far as to blame the whole war in the Pacific on the colonial powers and, specifically, on the French. He advised Leahy on July 29, 1941, that “if Japan wins Japan gets Indochina—if the Allies win *we* would” take it over. It is not likely that he contemplated an actual “U.S. takeover.” More probably, he had in mind some kind of international supervision in which the United States would play a leading role.

It was the President's confused view that France and French policy in Indochina were “responsible” for Japan's aggression and that France must therefore be penalized, and specifically, that for this reason Indochina must never go back to the French. The President's position hardened with the years. He advanced it at the wartime meetings with Churchill and Stalin, winning mild, pro forma support from Stalin (who never displayed the slightest interest in this portion of the world) and indignation on the part of Churchill, who was always aroused by Roosevelt's stubborn desire to liquidate colonial empires.

Probably the acme of Rooseveltian schemes for Indochina (of course, by this time under the vicious occupation of the Japanese) was a proposal conveyed to Chiang Kai-shek through Vice President Wallace during his 1944 mission to Chungking in which he offered China a “trusteeship” over Indochina on the grounds that, after all, the Indochinese and the Chinese were “the same kind of people.”

If Mr. Roosevelt's thesis that French conduct in Indochina put the Japanese on the road to Pearl Harbor was dubious, his assumption of communality between the peoples of Indochina and those of China displayed an even more profound distortion of reality, both ethnic and historic. Probably the most striking fact about the Indochinese (be they Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians or Montagnards) is their ethnic differentiation from the Han Chinese, the two thousand years of intermittent war and struggle between the Indochinese and the Chinese and the implacable hostility and fear with which most Indochinese regard the Chinese. It is no accident that the first visit of every foreigner coming to Hanoi is to the Museum of the Revolution where

he is shown the historic record of the endless wars with the Chinese, combat that started at a time when the Vietnamese occupied areas of what is now South China, and is made acquainted with the national and folk heroes of Vietnam, all of them winning their fame in victories over the hated Chinese.

Fortunately, Chiang Kai-shek possessed a keener grasp of reality than FDR. He rejected Roosevelt's offer. There is no record as to what he thought the American motive might be but it would have been natural for him to think that the President was trying to stir up trouble for China in Southeast Asia.

Thus the situation stood at the time of FDR's death in April 1945. Because of his repeated insistence, the French were not permitted to participate in the liberation of Indochina. Under plans made before the President's death the Chinese accepted the Japanese surrender in the north and the British in the south.

This early episode makes plain that major illusions as to the nature of Indochina lay largely on the American side, that is, specifically, in President Roosevelt's mind. But another small yet significant episode involving Indochina and the United States was in the process of taking shape. A close and increasingly warm and friendly liaison had been established in Indochina between special U.S. forces (specifically, OSS teams) and the Vietminh, the nationalist Vietnamese movement, then led by Ho Chi Minh. These relations have sometimes been characterized in recent years in a rather sentimental way, as if they were compounded simply of goodwill and good feeling between the OSS team, on the one hand, and Ho, on the other. That genuine mutual regard existed on both sides there can be no doubt. When Ho in September 1945 proclaimed the new Republic of Vietnam he modelled his declaration on the U.S. Declaration of Independence, actually requesting of the OSS men a copy of the Declaration in order to copy its language in his draft. None of the OSS officers possessed a copy. None the less, the Vietnamese declaration begins: "All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. . . ." At about the same time a delegation of Vietminh ladies called at the OSS Mission in Hanoi, asking to be put in touch with their sister American organization, the Daughters of the American Revolution. There is no record as to what, if anything, resulted from this bizarre effort.

The Americans saw in these relations a "natural" affinity between themselves and Ho's Vietminh. What did Ho see? Did he and his associates feel a kinship between their movement, their independence, their revolution and that of America? There was some such feeling, and even in his last years when deeply engaged in warfare with the United States Ho occasionally spoke with nostalgia of the Statue of Liberty (which he had seen as a young seaman) and of the principles of the American Constitution. But underlying this was something, of course, far more fundamental, as Ho's policy clearly revealed. In 1945 Ho had three major antagonists: the Japanese, who were being expelled from Indochina and who, presumably, would not soon again endanger the region; the French, who were only too eager to resume their colonial overlordship; and the Chinese, whom geography and history had made Indochina's traditional enemy.

What more natural, then, that Ho hoped to get a distant and presumably disinterested but important power involved as Indochina's chief protector? This would prevent the return of France and would hold the Chinese at bay. This was the classic policy of the weak power. It was the device which Turkey employed during its long years as "the sick man of Europe."

That, in fact, Ho was actually following the policy of the "lesser evil" quickly became apparent. When, after Roosevelt's death, U.S. policy changed, and the way was opened for France's return, Ho did not turn to the Chinese as a "protecting power" (as FDR might have expected). Rather, he sought to make a deal with the French and successfully concluded one which the French promptly violated. Anything, thus, rather than be thrust into the nearby Asian but dangerous arms of the Chinese. Even as the war with the French quickened Ho did not turn to China. The Vietminh fought on their own. Only after the emergence of Mao's communist régime, that is after—considerably after—1949, did Ho approach China and even then on a carefully limited and circumscribed basis.

This ancient history is useful as a benchmark in analyzing later development of great-power policy vis-à-vis Indochina. It shows the United States frequently misjudging the reality in Indochina. It shows Indochina misjudging the United States as well. It also shows marked realism—and antagonism—between Indochina and China and profound lack of interest in the whole region on the part of the Soviet Union.

Between 1945 and 1950 France was the principal outside power engaged in Indochina. U.S. interest was minimal. So was that of the Soviet Union. China, wracked by the great struggle of nationalists versus communists, had neither time nor inclination for affairs beyond its frontiers.

It was the success of the communist Chinese Revolution and the steadily deteriorating position of the French which finally brought Indochina back into American focus—but a focus which was probably more distorted than it had ever been before or was likely to be in the future.

From 1949 onward the official American perception of Indochina cannot be separated from the U.S. overview of the communist world and, specifically, of the Chinese Revolution. Mao's success was seen initially as a Chinese victory in a Chinese civil war. But this image quickly was to change. The signature of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, February 14, 1950, after a long visit to Moscow by Mao, was widely interpreted in and out of the U.S. government as primary evidence that the Kremlin had "put over" the Chinese Revolution and now dominated Peking.

As Senator McCarthy said on March 30, 1950: "It was not Chinese democracy under Mao that conquered China as Acheson, Lattimore and Jessup contended. Soviet Russia conquered China, and an important ally of this conqueror was the small left-wing element in our Department of State."

Or as Dean Rusk put it a year later, May 18, 1951: "We do not recognize the authorities in Peiping for what they pretend to be. The Peiping régime may be a colonial Russian government—a Slavic Manchukuo on a larger scale. It is not the Government of China. It does not pass the first test. It is not Chinese."

It was not necessary for Dean Acheson and President Truman to share this view in toto (although they may have moved very far in this direction by mid-spring 1950) for them to agree on May 8, 1950, to advance \$10,000,000 in credits to France for the support of the Bao Dai régime which was opposing Ho's Vietminh. By this time Acheson had been persuaded that the Kremlin was directing the Vietminh operations in Indochina.

The date of May 8, 1950, is an important one. Ordinarily it is assumed that the U.S. involvement in Vietnam occurred *after* Korea, that is in June 1950. In reality we had already begun to edge into Indochina *before* Korea under the perceived image of a united, powerful communist challenge, directed in Moscow

and remarkably reinforced by the "puppet" régime in Peking.

What was the reality of China and the communist world at that moment?

II

We now know it was far, far different. Mao Tse-tung arrived in Moscow in early December 1949, having officially proclaimed his régime on October 1, 1949. The treaty with Stalin was signed nearly two months later, February 14, 1950. There was much evidence at that time (and even earlier) suggesting that Sino-Soviet relations were neither so close nor so warm as each party sought to indicate. But it was only after the open breach of the two powers and the polemics beginning in 1961 that Nikita Khrushchev revealed the reality—that China and Russia almost came to a parting of the ways in the very period when the world, and America in particular, concluded they were almost one and the same thing. Mao was so outraged by Stalin's "great power chauvinism," his insistence upon quasi-colonial agreements for the exploitation of China's natural resources, his determination to regain Russia's traditional economic and military posture in North China and Manchuria (and especially, the Dairen and Port Arthur bases) that Mao almost broke off talks. The two powers were held together only by their perception of the overwhelming danger of U.S. aggression.

The inference is clear that had President Truman and Secretary Acheson persisted in the policy which was almost surely their intention in the autumn of 1941, after Mao's October 1 proclamation and before his arrival in Moscow in December—that is, to move toward the recognition of the new Peking régime—this act alone would have been sufficient to derail the alliance of the two communist states and set China on the path of a far different course in world affairs.

Thus, by mid-spring 1950 America perceived a singular unity and direction of a Muscovite communist menace in Asia (which, in fact, did not exist) and the two communist powers perceived a unified aggressive U.S. policy (which, in fact, did not exist). What of the perceptions in Peking of Russia and in Moscow of Peking?

There is substantial evidence to indicate that Stalin, at least, envisaged Mao as much more of an immediate and direct threat than, perhaps, Mao saw Stalin. I support that conclusion with

what I readily confess is a somewhat unorthodox hypothesis concerning the cause and origin of the Korean War. I believe the war was instigated by Stalin but that his target was not, as is supposed, the United States but actually communist China.

In general terms, we know that Stalin placed very little confidence in any foreign communist leaders, including those he had named himself. The long record of hostile relations between the Chinese Party and Stalin and the emergence of Mao with a program and a strategy almost diametrically opposed to Stalin's (Mao, of course, was repeatedly reprimanded and even expelled from the Central Committee and the party for his deviations) in itself would be strong evidence for Stalinist hostility. The years 1949 and 1950 were those of extreme paranoia on Stalin's part, so far as foreign parties were concerned, touched off by Tito's defiant break. These were the years when Stalin and his secret police put in motion the purges of the East European parties, eliminating the old wheelhorses and replacing them with even more handpicked police nominees. There was nothing in the emergence and success of Mao and his movement calculated to quiet Stalin's nerves. In Moscow he purged at least two suspected Maoists, Mikhail Borodin and Anna Louise Strong.

Moreover, there is compelling evidence that even before Mao proclaimed his régime Stalin had secretly begun to construct an apparatus in China, to be used for his own purposes when the time came. His vehicle was a Chinese party official named Kao Kang who emerged in early 1949 as the leader of the special Northeastern Autonomous region. As early as June and July of 1949 Kao Kang had been to Moscow and had signed special direct economic and other agreements. His relations with Moscow were extremely close, quite independent of Peking, and he was the virtual master of the most important industrial area of China. After Stalin's death convincing evidence came to light that Kao Kang was, in fact, Stalin's agent. He committed suicide and was charged by the Chinese with having been a traitor and with having plotted to turn Manchuria into a separate "kingdom." No public mention of whom he may have plotted with. The only plausible partner, of course, was Stalin, with whom he had so often conferred.

Premier Tsendenbal of Outer Mongolia has told me that one of Mao's first acts on coming to power was a request to Stalin for the return to Chinese suzerainty of Outer Mongolia. Stalin re-

fused this request and tightened his control of this strategic area with its 1,500-mile frontier on China under his most reliable ally, the then party chief Choibalsan. He also improved Soviet military positions in Manchuria and North China by the terms of the 1950 treaty.

In the reality of the Soviet position vis-à-vis China the Korean venture assumes a radically new light. Acheson on January 12, 1950, speaking to the National Press Club in Washington, had drawn the U.S. defense line in the Pacific from Alaska and the Aleutians to Japan to the Ryukyus (Okinawa) and south to the Philippines. He did not mention Korea in this context. There were other similar statements (including one the year before by MacArthur), but the Acheson declaration was the most important. It was specific, detailed, calculated. There could be no reason for the omission of Korea (although Acheson continues to argue otherwise), except that it was not, in fact, on the U.S. defense perimeter.

The United States and Russia had withdrawn their occupation forces from South and North Korea respectively. I think it is reasonable to assume that Stalin felt he could take Washington's word—that we did not feel obligated to rise to the defense of South Korea.

This, then, unexpectedly presented him with a tempting possibility: if he could overrun all of Korea he would, in fact, (although Mao, ignorant of the secret Stalin-Kao Kang relationship, could not be aware of this) be able to dominate Peking from positions in Mongolia, Manchuria and Korea. He would possess the power to deal with Mao as he once said he would with Tito ("I'll shake my little finger and Tito will fall").

Khrushchev in his new volume of reminiscences depicts Kim Il-sung as coming to Moscow and asking permission to attack the South—permission which Stalin gave. If this hypothesis is correct, Stalin triggered the Korean War on the basis of a mistaken image of the U.S. position. He anticipated noninterference. He got, instead, massive intervention under the auspices of the United Nations.

But if Stalin's image of the U.S. position was distorted, the U.S. image of Korea, Russia and China was equally distorted. Whatever the inner convictions of President Truman and Secretary Acheson may have been regarding the instigator of the conflict they treated it as one, basically, of Chinese aggression. Mos-

cow was asked to use its good offices in Pyongyang and Peking to persuade Kim Il-sung to withdraw. The U.S. response, outside of Korea, was entirely directed against the image of imminent Chinese aggression. The President not only ordered General MacArthur to take up Korea's defense. He gave Chiang Kai-shek the pledge specifically denied him in October 1949, an immediate defense blanket. He sent the Seventh Fleet into the Formosa Straits to bar an attack by communist China. He rushed military aid to the Philippines and sent (fateful move!) a military mission to aid the beleaguered French in Indochina.

Now, as can quite readily be determined today, there was no Chinese connection whatever with the Korean attack. There is every indication that Peking was as startled as Washington. The North Korean forces were armed and trained by the Russians. The Chinese had no part in that whatever. Kim Il-sung was a chosen Soviet agent for North Korea, trained by and devoted to Moscow. While the Soviet armed forces had left Korea in January 1949, Soviet specialists remained in all branches of the Korean military and government. The Chinese did not even send a diplomatic mission to North Korea until August 1950, two months after the attack occurred.

Of course, the hypothesis may be mistaken. Stalin may have given Mao some warning. But Mao's attention was deeply occupied at that time with the consolidation of his régime. He was busy with the absorption of Tibet and myriad other problems. His principal forward objective was Formosa, not Korea, and the Korean attack effectively put Formosa beyond his reach by the interposition of the U.S. fleet.

It is likely that Mao regarded the Korean move as a reckless Soviet gamble which confronted China with critical problems and serious dangers. If so, his analysis would have been fairly accurate, as the events of September and October 1950, the threat to the Yalu and the massive Chinese intervention, were to show. By this time, Stalin could see that his perception of U.S. policy had been grossly distorted and was probably quite willing to settle for as deep and complex an entanglement between the United States and China as could be produced. If his gambit for getting a stranglehold around Peking had failed, at least he had succeeded in embroiling two of his major antagonists.

However the Chinese may have perceived Soviet motivations in 1950, they have in recent years on several occasions informally

cited the Korean War as a deliberate Soviet provocation, designed to embroil them with the United States. Certainly by the time that MacArthur approached the Yalu the Chinese had concluded that the American operations in Korea were only a springboard for an assault upon China and a reopening of the U.S. intervention which had come to a close with the departure of Chiang Kai-shek from the mainland.

Here, to be sure, the Chinese deluded themselves. While there clearly was MacArthurian enthusiasm for going into China, President Truman dramatically demonstrated a bit later that he had absolutely no intention of broadening the Korean engagement into a continental war with China.

III

What of events in Indochina?

Here again reality was quite different from the perceptions of most of the participants. Ho had appealed for recognition of his régime on January 14, 1950. The Chinese granted recognition January 18, the Russians not until January 30. But neither of the major communist powers sent any formal missions to North Vietnam until after the 1954 ceasefire. Nor, in the opinion of the late Bernard Fall, did any direct connections exist with the Soviet Union until that time. Indeed, in his opinion Hanoi's principal communist party link up to 1954 was with the French Communist Party, not the Russian, not the Chinese, further evidence of the cautious effort of the Vietnamese to avoid falling under domination of a force which might control them.

In contrast to this reality there is abundant evidence that Secretary of State Dulles fully shared the perception of President Truman and Secretary Acheson (from June 1950 onwards) that Indochina was, in essence, merely the southern sector of a common front against China which extended from North Korea southward in a long curving arc. The truce in Korea did not shake the Dulles concept nor, in fact, did the Geneva agreement of 1954 which was designed to end the Indochina fighting. It is true that by this time, and particularly in the preparations of the Dien Bien Phu trap sprung against the French, Ho and General Giap were receiving a measure of coöperation from the Chinese, particularly in the form of rice to feed the besieging forces and the arms which were transported, broken down into loads carried by men and mules, some 1,500 miles from China.

But neither then nor later was it true, as Dulles and many U.S. policy-makers supposed, that Ho was a "puppet" of Peking or that Peking was a "puppet" of Moscow. Khrushchev's remembrances cast some, not necessarily clarifying, light on this relationship. He asserts that the Chinese believed that Ho's jig was up at the time of Dien Bien Phu, that the Vietminh had come to the end of the road—an analysis which would indicate that the Chinese were not in close touch with the real situation and the Russians in even less touch. He also recalls telling his colleagues on his return from his first visit with Mao in Peking in November 1954 that "conflict is inevitable" with the Chinese.

Perhaps at no time did distortion and misperception over Indochina rise higher than in the 1965-66 period when U.S. air and ground action was constantly escalating to heights undreamed of earlier. By this time, to be sure, Hanoi had established close relationships with both Moscow and Peking. An estimated one billion dollars in aid had flowed into North Vietnam by the time of the Sino-Soviet break, roughly two-thirds Chinese and one-third Russian. In the subsequent years the totals were carefully balanced and probably the net contribution of the Soviet Union plus that of her East European allies more than equalled that of China. None the less, as anyone in a position to observe Hanoi closely could testify, North Vietnam had in no sense fallen under the domination of either of the great communist powers. In fact, Hanoi's role was one of constant, careful balancing between the two because hostility between Russia and China was so intense that the slightest act of favoritism was magnified and could—indeed, often did—result in reprisals by the affronted power, usually China.

It is not possible to reconstruct a unified American image of Vietnam at that time. Sometimes, Washington seemed to regard Hanoi as an instrument of Chinese policy, sometimes (particularly when trying to get Moscow to intercede in our behalf) as an instrument of Soviet policy, sometimes—ignoring the obvious evidence of Sino-Soviet hostility—as an instrument of the "international communist conspiracy" and even, occasionally, as an intransigent native communist movement seeking to "humiliate" the United States.

The view of the United States held in Hanoi at this time, as I was able to establish in conversations with Hanoi officials in December 1966 and January 1967, was much more in the

image of the French than of the American reality. It was generally asserted and assumed that the United States simply wished to replace France as the exploiting colonial power in Indochina and that we had mounted the huge war effort for the benefit of capitalists who wished to exploit the enormous natural resources of Vietnam. When I rejoined that there was really nothing in the way of assets or resources in Vietnam which the United States coveted, my comment was regarded as both unfriendly and naïve.

The Chinese image of the United States at that time was entirely different. The Chinese (as they told me) saw the U.S. escalation as the opening move in preparation for an all-out assault on China itself, an operation in which the United States was said to be collaborating closely with Moscow. Indochina was merely needed as a *place d'armes*, a springboard for the U.S. attack. It was expected that we would use nuclear arms, and a frequent justification given for the Red Guard and cultural revolution movement which was launched in mid-1966 was that it was designed to prepare, harden and "blood" the youth of China for the tremendous hardships of war with the United States which lay just ahead.

Peking's fear that Moscow was conniving with the United States in Vietnam was matched by fears expressed in Moscow that the Chinese, in some manner, would turn the Vietnamese war in a direction which would embroil the United States and the Soviet Union. It was fear of such possibilities which spurred Moscow, occasionally, to lend some assistance to the United States in exploring possible ways toward peace in Vietnam.

By 1969, it should be noted, the Chinese had moved away from their image of Vietnam as an American springboard for attack on China and, indeed, gradually were tending to abandon the theory of U.S.-U.S.S.R. collaboration against Peking. By this time both China and the Soviet Union tended to view Vietnam not so much in terms of U.S.-Vietnamese confrontation but as a "front" in their own ever-widening confrontation. Thus, China had opposed negotiations between the United States and Hanoi which finally opened in Paris in January 1969, to a substantial extent because of fear that this might move the United States and the U.S.S.R. closer to détente. Moscow generally favored negotiations because the end of the war in Indochina would be a blow to the Chinese communist propaganda line, directed toward Asian communist movements, of a continuous and constantly

widening revolutionary movement of backward countries against more advanced ones.

The wide difference between the image of Indochina as viewed by Peking and by Moscow was spectacularly demonstrated in the Cambodian events of 1970. Peking seized upon the coup against Sihanouk to sponsor a summit meeting of Indochinese movements—Sihanouk for Cambodia, Prince Souphanouvong for Laos, Premier Pham Van Dong of North Vietnam and representatives of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam. With Chinese sponsorship, all the forces opposed to the United States in Indochina formed a "united front," dedicated to the principle of a common struggle and unified peace negotiation. The Russians, excluded from the China-sponsored meeting, studiously snubbed Sihanouk, maintained relations with the Lon Nol government (and insisted that their satellites do the same) and blamed the Chinese for the U.S. action in Cambodia (and in Vietnam) on the grounds that China had refused to form a "united front" against U.S. aggression.

I think enough instances have been presented (although there are many more which might be noted) to establish the thesis that the image of Indochina not only varies widely from one power to another but also from one period to another. The same is true of the images which the involved powers have of each other's actions and motivations. Rarely at any time do these perceptions coincide; almost equally rarely do they coincide with what, in retrospect, the objective truth is seen to be.

IV

What does this imply for the future? I fear the distortion between image and reality has by no means run its course. We are far advanced in a program of "Vietnamization" which envisages a day when the Saigon government will be able to undertake virtually full military and diplomatic responsibility, supported only by some minimum technical presence of the U.S. forces—air, communications, supplies. This implies a belief in a more or less permanent shift in the balance of force so pervasive, so striking that the North and its southern allies will be dissuaded from an effective military or political challenge to the Saigon régime. On the other hand, by widening the war into Laos, the American-supported South Vietnamese forces may have enlarged the field of battle in a manner which General

Giap has always claimed would serve the revolutionary interest.

Let us leave to one side the question (which I believe is arguable) as to whether such an image of a competent, secure and confident Saigon government is realistic. Does the concept of a subdued, resigned, low-posture Hanoi and National Liberation Front forces, or Provisional Revolutionary Government as it now calls itself, seem likely to be borne out in real life? It does not fit the pattern of policy and conduct characteristic of the communist side, going all the way back to its Vietminh origins. The pattern, rather, has been one of struggle, struggle, struggle, regardless of odds, of the changing enemy and his tactics. Hanoi has always matched its tactics and strategy to the image it perceives of the enemy, holding back until a moment of opposition weakness, a development which tips the advantage to its side.

Is it not more realistic to assume that Hanoi will deliberately lie low as the American pullout continues, concentrating on recuperation of strength at home and rebuilding the infrastructure in the South? Then, when U.S. force levels are really low and when, perhaps, a moment of internal political crisis arises in Saigon, suddenly striking with utmost force in the belief (which may or may not be realistic) that once American forces are drawn down to a minimum no U.S. government will reëscalate—or indeed have time for such reëscalation unless it is prepared to employ air power on a more massive scale than ever before or even invoke nuclear power. The image which Hanoi may develop of U.S. options may be distorted. The image we may be in the process of drawing for ourselves may also be distorted. But this is in the grand pattern of Indochina, the pattern which has been marked from the very beginning.

If we are to avoid such a critical turn as is here suggested it would seem that an initial requisite must be a persistent and stubborn effort by all concerned parties—and particularly by ourselves—to arrive at some common approximation of both our own role and goal and those of Hanoi—and the great communist powers which back Hanoi. Without such understanding the future is likely to be as illusory as the past. And perhaps one of the greatest of illusions is the American belief that Hanoi, having been, as it feels, cheated both in the French settlement of 1945 and the Geneva settlement of 1954, is likely to put much credence in any end of the war which is not achieved by tilting the military balance in its favor.