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The Turning Point

(H. Salisbury)

I strongly suspected before I arrived in Hanoi that the North Vietnamese authorities would not have taken what was for them the giant step of authorizing my visa unless they had decided that the time had come for active exploration of the possibility of peace-by-negotiation in Southeast Asia.

I departed from Hanoi with that suspicion transformed into positive conviction.

No other sensible interpretation could be placed on the conversations which I had with the Premier and other North Vietnamese officials.

It was apparent that the war was approaching one more of those crossroads which had marked its development over the years. It could proceed in one of two totally opposed directions: down the arduous but productive path of negotiation

toward settlement and peace; or it might be precipitously escalated and carried far beyond Vietnam, suddenly to embrace vast areas of Asia or the world.

This evaluation was not contained in what anyone in Hanoi was prepared to say publicly. In fact, even in private, there was a tendency to fall away from declaring explicitly what was expressed implicitly. But that North Vietnam was prepared to explore actively and seriously the possibility of bringing hostilities to an end was no longer a matter of doubt.

What had produced this attitude in Hanoi? Obviously, I had not found that our bombing had achieved this result.

I thought that a circumstance far more dangerous to Hanoi, and quite probably to the world, lay in the background of the changed thinking. That circumstance was the chaos in China.

Here in Hanoi one felt the hot breath of the Peking crisis like a fiery draft from a suddenly opened furnace. The events in China were like some terrible charade. Everyone's attention was riveted on them. Everyone knew the fateful consequences which might flow from them. But no one knew how to influence them.

A year earlier I did not believe Hanoi had been especially eager for negotiations with the United States. At least I did not think that North Vietnam was then prepared to talk in terms of a settlement which would have been acceptable to the United States. Earlier than that, I believed, negotiations would have been even less productive.

Going back over the course of events from 1945—the struggle against the French, the victory at Dienbienphu, the Geneva settlement and the gradual transition from political struggle to warfare—it seemed to me that Hanoi's ambition had undergone great changes.

In the early period, and probably as late as 1958 or 1959, I thought that Hanoi and the other Asian Communists, with Chinese encouragement, had been thinking in grandiose terms. They had dreamed of the creation of a great Asian Communist

movement which would have the sympathetic guardianship of Peking. Peking would help with ideological support, material means and possibly even the kind of logistic and tactical support which had aided General Giap to succeed at Dienbienphu. The fulcrum of the movement would be Vietnam. There was every reason for Hanoi to think that political evolution in Vietnam favored the North and specifically favored Ho Chi Minh, who then (and now) was the only national leader which the country possessed. Communism or quasi-Communism might then readily spread from Vietnam and possibly from Indonesia to Malaya and to Vietnam's companion successor states of French Indochina, Cambodia and Laos.

This had been a dream and possibly more than a dream in those years.

But with the steady rise of conflict within the Communist world this goal had begun to appear less and less realistic.

By the early nineteen-sixties, I believed, it must have seemed quite impossible. By this time the polemics between the Soviet Union and China had begun to affect the world Communist movement radically, and no Communist regime was more caught in the middle than that of North Vietnam.

During this period it was still possible for Hanoi to dream of political domination of Vietnam or at least a close working partnership with the South under Liberation Front leadership. There had not been demonstrated up to that time (nor to the present) any political vitality in the Saigon Government which was likely to last once the war ended or the United States removed its props.

The inauguration of the American bombing offensive had not changed Hanoi's evaluation of the probable outcome in Vietnam. It still seemed that Hanoi and the Front would survive long after Marshal Ky or his successors had vanished. The bombing would make it harder for Hanoi and the Front. It would prolong the struggle. It would cost North Vietnam most, if not all, of the restricted socioeconomic gains achieved since establishment of the regime. But the gains were not

essential, and the losses would not be decisive. The country was still too primitive, too poorly developed. Even if all the industries, all the improvements were destroyed, even if all the towns and cities were wiped out, the country, its essential peasant life and rice culture, would endure.

There was nothing about the bombing of the North which, in the long run, was likely to add to the political viability of Saigon. On the contrary, in the end the results would be the same except that the North Vietnamese would suffer more, the casualties would be higher, the losses greater.

On the other hand, the United States would also suffer. It would begin to cost America a great deal to maintain its war effort. Those members of the Hanoi Government who took ideological guidance from Peking did not think this was at all bad. They shared the view of the Peking Marxists, who held that the more places in the world in which the United States could be mired down in grinding, endless, expensive, frustrating conflict in formerly colonial areas, the more the United States would be bled, the more her resources would be expended, the greater the burden on her social and political structure, the more intense the strain on her relations with other nations and the greater the political defeat for the United States through loss of world support, particularly among the former colonial peoples who possessed the majority of global population, who dominated the United Nations and who, in the future, would have to be reckoned with.

China was playing the long game. It was counting on the Vietnam war as the first in a series of skirmishes in which the United States would be entrapped. When enough United States forces had been tied down in Asia, in Africa and in Latin America, Peking would come out on top.

It was an attractive theory. It would require decades to work out. But Asia had more time than anything else. It would cause considerable loss of life and destruction of property. But the Chinese were not too concerned.

Eventually this strategy might involve the United States in war with China. But that too would be endured. Indeed,

the Chinese had already worked out the tactics whereby they believed they could survive American nuclear attack.

Here the strategy of Peking and that of Hanoi showed a remarkable concordance. Ho Chi Minh talked about the inevitable escalation of the United States war effort. He and his associates noted how we had first bombed only a little way above the 17th parallel, then gradually widened out until the whole country was attacked. At first we did not hit Hanoi and Haiphong. Then gradually we moved on the two big cities. Eventually, Ho contended, the worst would happen—Hanoi and Haiphong would be attacked in a systematic and sustained fashion. But, he insisted, this would not mean the end. North Vietnam would retire to its caves and its jungles and struggle on for ten, twenty, fifty years and finally the United States would be defeated.

Long before that another thing would have happened. The volunteers would have come into the war—the manpower of China and possibly of the Soviet Union and of Eastern Europe which stood ready to come at Hanoi's call.

Did Ho really think that events would take this course? That the destruction of his country, the involvement of all the Communist world, was virtually certain? Possibly not. Quite possibly he thought that the prospect of total involvement would, in time, bring the United States to discuss terms acceptable to the Communists.

But now history had taken a turn which not even the least sanguine North Vietnamese had anticipated. The brooding quarrel between the Soviet Union and China had boiled over. The consequences already were disastrous for the orderly conduct of North Vietnam's defense. Month by month and week by week the problem grew more grave. North Vietnam was spending more effort now trying to maintain relations with its two great neighbors, trying to keep the flow of supplies coming through, than on any other aspect of the war.

And the possibility daily heightened that graver disaster lay ahead.

China could at any moment erupt into civil war, which

would mean the diminution or cutoff of the supply route. The intraparty conflict in China might reach such bitterness that one faction would halt supplies or close the roads. The Chinese already were hampering the movement of Soviet goods. They might stop them entirely. The conflict between Moscow and Peking might move into open warfare. This would make deliveries impossible.

Any one of these combinations might produce the worst of consequences for North Vietnam. The country and its leadership might be drawn into the intra-China dispute through the simple fact that so many of Ho's associates had intimate relations with the Chinese. Many in his entourage had connections as close with Peking as they had with Ho. Suppose Peking thought that Soviet influence was coming to the fore in Hanoi—might it not instruct its friends in Hanoi to intervene? Might Peking already have intervened through third parties to try to affect Hanoi's policies?

It was possible the Chinese would try to confront Ho with a *fait accompli* and subvert his government if they thought he was beginning to side with the Soviet Union. In their present hysteria almost any act of Hanoi's could be interpreted in Peking as hostile to China or pro-Soviet.

Hanoi had stated flatly that it would not receive "volunteers" from China or any other Communist state except in certain specified instances and only when it called for them. But could Ho be certain that Chinese "volunteers" might not suddenly pour over the frontier in response to a demand from a member of the North Vietnamese Government acting on the instruction of Peking?

There was not a diplomat with whom I talked in Hanoi who was not sensitive to these potentials. They had changed the whole aspect of Hanoi's attitude toward peace and negotiations. There was not a diplomat from Eastern Europe with whom I talked who did not strongly favor negotiations at the earliest possible moment. Not all of them favored this course because of fear of China. Many had strongly favored it before the Chinese crisis. But the Chinese crisis strengthened their

feeling that the war represented a grave fissure in the world political structure, that it created a situation which under the stress of events in Peking might lead the world to nuclear catastrophe.

And a nuclear war, they pointed out, was regarded with horror by all the world—except Peking, which had prepared a strategy for dealing with the nuclear devastation of China. Peking, they noted, was talking about the inevitability of American nuclear assault, the wiping out of Chinese nuclear centers, the destruction by nuclear weapons of all China's large cities. Peking thought this would merely create a trap (killing, incidentally, possibly 300 million Chinese) into which the United States would fall. Because, said Peking, after the bombs had done their work the Americans would still have to enter the nuclear-poisoned countryside and seize the land, and there they would find the Chinese, 400 million strong, emerging from caves and bunkers, ready to fight with primitive bombs and grenades at a range of two hundred yards or so—closer than America's technology could be effectively employed.

The European Communists were familiar with this Chinese thinking. They were chilled by it and by the consequences it might bring to themselves and to Southeast Asia.

I could not find many North Vietnamese who relished the idea, but they were so accustomed to talking of protracted war, of retreating into the hills, of fighting through decades while the Americans exhausted themselves, that the prospect did not fill them with so much horror.

But I did not believe that Ho wished to lead his country down that avenue. I thought that he and his leaders had taken the measure of what the next year was likely to bring. And the year after that. It must look to them that the chances for bringing more strength into a negotiation in 1968 were less than the chances in 1967. Beyond 1968 lay more and more question marks.

I did not know whether Moscow, in seeking to free its hands for the China crisis and in its hopes of uniting the West

in a common front against Peking, had sought to persuade Hanoi of the desirability of negotiation. Perhaps not. The Russians had found themselves in a delicate position vis-à-vis Hanoi and the Communist world. Every Communist knew Moscow had no deep interest in Vietnam. Everyone knew Moscow wanted the war settled. But that made it difficult for the Soviet Union to take a direct hand. Possibly, with the rapid deterioration in Peking, Moscow had finally spoken more directly.

Whatever the event, now, at this late hour, Hanoi was interested in talking terms. But even so there was a grave impediment. It could not talk openly or directly lest this provoke the very intervention and reprisals by the Chinese of which it was most fearful. At a hint that Hanoi was ready to talk peace Peking was apt to intervene forcibly—by closing the frontier and cutting off supplies, by bringing political pressure to bear within the North Vietnamese Government or by sending in the "volunteers" to shift the balance back toward war.

I had felt before going to Hanoi that the only effective method of exploring the possibilities of negotiation was by private, completely secret talks, far from the spotlight of world opinion. It was not hard to see the futility of publicized techniques. Some efforts occurred while I was in Hanoi. The British Foreign Secretary, George Brown, made a public appeal for talks, putting the weight of his stress on Hanoi. He added for good measure the suggestion that the talks be held in Hong Kong, oblivious of the fact that the Chinese two days earlier had charged that Hong Kong was a base for the aircraft carriers whose planes were bombing North Vietnam. It was incredible bumbling. Or possibly it was not intended seriously except to ease the pressure on the Labour party at home to take some action toward ending the war.

The Pope made appeals and U Thant made appeals. None of these received a very enthusiastic welcome in Hanoi. There had been suggestions that General de Gaulle might make a good mediator. There was no doubt in my mind that De Gaulle was well regarded in Hanoi. But the attitude of the

North Vietnamese officials suggested that they much preferred such a delicate business to be carried on without the intervention of third parties. They had had considerable experience in the past—a bit more than I was aware of when I was in Hanoi—of the difficulty of making and maintaining contacts with the United States. Publicity was the one thing they did not want. The intervention of a third party merely increased the possibility of a leak, with the unpleasant consequences which might follow.

The talks could not stand publicity. Of this I was certain. The North Vietnamese had to see the light at the end of the tunnel before they started down the passageway. Until they could feel, privately, that there was a real possibility of an agreement they could not afford public negotiations. Because the moment they entered public negotiations they could expect the China route to be cut and they could expect active Chinese efforts to upset the talks. This would be fatal unless they knew that they were going to be able to reach a peace agreement. If they started out on negotiations and failed, they would find themselves in a critical situation, compelled to renew the war against the United States but with their principal source of supply cut and the possibility that their government might have been severely weakened internally.

They had other fears, which paralleled the fears with which the United States approached the idea of negotiation. They feared that if they started to talk their people would be convinced that peace would inevitably follow. If the talks stalled and war was resumed, it would not be possible to restore the remarkable fighting morale which they now had and which constituted their chief resource against the powerful United States. They did not have many assets and they did not feel they could jeopardize this one. They also feared that if they entered talks without a clear notion of the agreement which lay at the end, the United States might utilize the period of negotiations to increase its force levels in the South and prepare for resumption of hostilities when the talks came to an inconclusive end. This fear paralleled two great fears of the

United States—that if bombing once halted it would not be possible (because of public opinion) to resume it and that the North might enter into talks simply to utilize the period for reinforcement and regrouping, which would then enable it to emerge from a deadlocked negotiation in a far stronger position.

These were the dangers which lay in the minds of the North Vietnamese and the Americans as they gingerly approached the idea of negotiations. The only way in which they might be removed was for each side to attempt an exploration in complete secrecy. They would have to see what each side was prepared to do; whether the ingredients of a deal existed. This was by no means certain. But the possibilities could be assessed through this process. I recommended it strongly to Hanoi, speaking as an interested observer. I had no diplomatic role. Anything I said was said just as an American newspaperman who happened to be in Hanoi. Therefore I could talk with a freedom which a diplomat would not possess. The same held true on the other side. When I returned to the United States, it was possible for me to talk to Washington with the same frankness and lack of reserve that had marked my conversations in Hanoi.

It seemed obvious both in Hanoi and in Washington that each side was aware of the critical moment which had arrived. If the turn toward negotiation was not taken, what was the alternative? On Hanoi's side, the deterioration of the situation in its rear would bring an inevitable turn toward radical expedients. On the American side, the pattern surely would follow the channel of escalation to higher and higher force levels. What specifically would we do? I was in no position to guess. But the speculation in military quarters had been fairly precise: intensification of bombing, sustained air attacks on Hanoi, blockade or bombing of Haiphong, land operations north of the 17th parallel, amphibious landings in the Gulf of Tonkin, all of the ominous developments which would produce the entry into the war of the "volunteers." Chinese volunteers.

The options were epochal. Peace or a land war, very possibly a nuclear war, with China. Possible Soviet intervention.

To say that events had arrived at a turning point was an understatement.

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A Settlement

I returned from Hanoi convinced that a settlement of the Vietnam war by negotiation lay within our grasp. I was convinced it would not be easy to negotiate, and I was by no means convinced that we were prepared to understand or undertake this difficult and complex task. But that the ingredients of a settlement, one which would be viable, enduring and relatively favorable to our objectives in Asia, at least as I understood them, now had come within reach I had no doubt.

This, I must say, came as something of a surprise to me. I had explored the ground in Southeast Asia with some care only a few months earlier, in the late spring and early summer of 1966, in a trip which led me all around the periphery of China. I had gotten the impression then that the establishment of a secure and comparatively stable Southeast Asia might be

impossible on terms which Washington would consider acceptable.

As I understood our objectives in Southeast Asia, they comprised the following:

We had no desire to overthrow the Communist regime of North Vietnam. We accepted the continuance of Ho and his successors in that country.

We had no territorial aspirations in Vietnam and none in Southeast Asia. We had no desire to remain in South Vietnam or any part of Vietnam.

We desired the establishment in South Vietnam of a viable regime which would not be Communist-dominated, Communist-oriented or Communist-threatened, but we did not insist that this regime be necessarily that which now held power in Saigon.

We desired to reduce the Communist threat to all Southeast Asia and to increase the security of the area, particularly that of Laos, but we had not spelled out specific aims so far as this point was concerned.

We were prepared, once peace and stability had been restored, to withdraw our armed forces and to offer economic and technical assistance on a massive scale, which would help to create the material foundations for a rapid advance in standards of living and development.

We were prepared to assist in cooperative multi-nation projects such as the Mekong River development.

If these were, in fact, our objectives in Southeast Asia, it seemed to me, on the basis of my conversations with representatives of the Hanoi Government and of the National Liberation Front, that with hard bargaining we could come reasonably close to fulfilling them.

So far as the public record went, the chief difficulty concerned the future status and regime of South Vietnam. The problem centered on Hanoi's support of the Front as the appropriate spokesman for the South. We did not recognize the Front, although we had said cryptically that there would be "no difficulty" about a place for the Front at the negotiating

table. The existing Saigon Government of Marshal Ky was our ally-of-record, and while we had not committed ourselves to perpetuating his regime, our inclinations naturally went toward the Saigon Government, with all its faults, rather than the Front, with which we had done mortal combat.

Was there room for maneuver on this point?

I suspected there was, although I did not expect the Front or Hanoi to put this on public record or even to agree to it in the first round of private discussion. But both sides had publicly agreed that they would back a "coalition" government. The Front had spelled this out to include members of South Vietnam's Constituent Assembly and some members of the Ky Government (but not Ky). We had not gone so far, but the Saigon Government had at least intimated that it looked toward a coalition. The sentiment for a coalition certainly was strong among members of the Constituent Assembly.

The problem here was balance. Who would have the majority? Was there some nonaligned or moderate figure around whom a coalition government might be constructed? Would a coalition government possess durability or would it, even if headed by a non-Communist, quickly fall apart or succumb to Communist intrigue? We did not wish to see repeated in Southeast Asia the history of Eastern Europe's postwar coalition governments, which quickly fell under Communist pressure.

I believed that the vital ingredients of the Liberation Front program (at least as described in Hanoi)—a mixed economy, free rights for all parties, neutral foreign policy, no alliances—would permit construction of such a government. Its stability could be insured by United States economic aid, guarantees by Asian powers and the Great Powers, guarantees by Hanoi. There was an armory of factors which could be utilized to give the structure strength if it possessed the vital ingredient of political virility.

What about the North? It seemed clear that the moment was appropriate to restore the North to the situation which had been envisaged by the Geneva agreements, to try to cut its

military links to Peking and to Moscow. The divisions within the Communist world favored such neutrality. It would ease the pressures on Hanoi enormously. Of course, Hanoi, even more than Saigon, would require guarantees. Not only of support (against Chinese intervention) but of economic aid and assistance in rehabilitation. The situation had developed in an appropriate manner for the achievement of aims which had lain far beyond the horizon of possible diplomacy a year earlier.

It was an unequalled opportunity for the United States, one which might not recur and which might slip away in certain eventualities, such as the reduction of political tensions in Peking or a *rapprochement* between Peking and Moscow, both of which might occur.

But establishment of neutralized regimes in Saigon and Hanoi would only be the start. It seemed to me that Laos represented an equally dangerous problem. Laos had become a mere fiction—a land which was in the hands of an uncertain number of guerrilla operations, some sponsored by the United States, some by the Communists, some of purely Laotian origin.

Unless Laos could be quieted and sanitized, the whole theater of struggle might simply shift westward from Vietnam, with the warriors of the C.I.A. and the Chinese International going at it hammer and tongs (or hammer and sickle). This would undermine the area dangerously. Cambodia had managed to stay out of the war, but it needed economic and probably political support as well. Thailand would be in trouble if it lost its burgeoning war-boom prosperity. Many considerations dictated the creation of a strengthened International Control Commission with a broader mandate and genuine powers not merely to police these countries but to aid and guide development. What political form this might take I did not know, but it should not lie beyond the competence of American diplomacy to establish a structure in Southeast Asia which would make the region a going concern.

This would create what the United States had so long

hoped for—a strong and viable Southeast Asia, resistant to the spread of Chinese influence and Chinese Communism. Certainly China was going to be a power in the area. It always had been. It was unrealistic to suppose it could be shut out. But if we built on the strong factors of nationalist sentiment such as had been invoked in North Vietnam, such as would surely develop in South Vietnam, the same force which had caused Indonesia to throw off the Chinese and the Communists, we would see emerging not a series of poor, weak client countries, not a region dependent into infinity upon a huge American military garrison and the expenditure of United States funds, but a progressive group of countries, internally strong, resolutely independent. Independent of us. Independent of China. A healthy Asia, it seemed to me, must be an independent Asia.

This was the chance which had been created by the unexpected developments in Peking and their repercussions in Hanoi. It might well be the chance of a century.

But I was not certain that Washington could grasp the opportunity. Washington was tired and Washington was stale. Washington, I feared, was filled with too many men who had committed themselves to so many past mistakes that they lived only for some crowning disaster which would bury all the smaller errors of the past. Washington was filled with politicians who were concerned with what would bring in votes in the next election or what would discomfit a possible election opponent. In that atmosphere it was difficult to get men to indulge in imaginative statesmanship. Too many were afraid to take a chance. The old policy might be a mistake. It might lead to catastrophe. But change was dangerous and uncertain.

And there were competing counsels.

For instance, there was the military. The military, not unlike the French who had been there before, had not had a good time in Vietnam. Their record was poor, partly because it was not a situation which yielded readily to the application of military power and partly because the politicians were always trying a teaspoonful of this, a teaspoonful of that. When

a general finally got the dose increased to a tablespoonful, this was not enough and he should have recommended a swig. No general won glory by telling his President to turn the job over to the diplomats. So they called for more of whatever it was and hoped for the best. If the Vietcong were stubborn this year, maybe double the force next year would do the job.

I was told when I was still in Hanoi by someone who had been very recently in Saigon that the American military establishment there would not accept negotiations at this time, no matter what Hanoi said.

"They think they have Hanoi on the run," said this man. "They are not going to quit now. They want to pour it on. If it is poured on hard enough, there won't be any Hanoi to bother with."

I didn't know if that accurately reflected the thinking of the American military establishment in Saigon, but I encountered this line in Washington in some quarters on my return. The reasoning was simple. If Hanoi was in trouble, if China was about to blow up, if the North Vietnamese were about to lose their supply line—why talk to them? They will have to crawl to us later on. Let's hit them with all we've got.

From the standpoint of total military victory I found a grim honesty about this argument.

But—and this was a large "but" to my way of thinking—this policy led straight to the confrontation which was most dangerous of all—confrontation with China's land forces, and quite possibly involvement with the Russians. We might crush Hanoi only to find ourselves locked in a fatal nuclear embrace which would eliminate all problems in Vietnam by eliminating the world of which Vietnam was a part.

I thought this to be a counsel of utmost recklessness. But, of course, its advocates never mentioned the cataclysmic potentials. They limited themselves to talk about clobbering Hanoi. But, curiously, Hanoi could have been clobbered at any time in the last two years. And had not been. Why do it now when Hanoi was ready to talk peace?

A strange way to reason. Or so I thought.

But, perhaps, there lay behind this reasoning a hidden factor which governed our whole Southeast Asian strategy. Or a half-hidden factor, one which was often discussed by the Pentagon strategists and the ideologists of war-game theory, the men who created the logical structure against which much of our strategic air policy was elaborated.

This was the line that the real enemy in Southeast Asia was not North Vietnam. It was China. We were there not because we worried much about the regime in Saigon or that in Hanoi but to draw a line against China. This was what much of Asia thought.

I had heard this thesis advanced in Asian capitals in the summer of 1966. The Asians simply did not believe that the United States was investing the sums we were putting into Vietnam or the manpower we were stationing there or the enormous bases we were building in South Vietnam and Thailand simply to fight Ho Chi Minh. No. China was the objective. That was the way they calculated it. We were preparing to fight China. Some thought we were trying to provoke China so that we would have an excuse to bomb it, to destroy its nuclear facilities. After all, had not some of our generals proposed that line? Did it not possess a certain grim sense? If we were going to fight China ultimately, would this not be a good time to do it—before China got too strong, when we could still be sure of knocking out its atomic production centers?

If this was, indeed, our basic, secret, unstated strategy, if Vietnam was a holding operation or a maneuver to try to draw in China, if we were going through the motions of fighting North Vietnam but really were preparing for an assault on China—then, of course, the question of peace in Vietnam became moot. What was the point of it? It would run counter to our genuine intentions and would make it more difficult to cope with China.

For those who believed along these lines—and I had no doubt that many thoughtful men in the Pentagon and perhaps some not so thoughtful men in the Senate shared these ideas—there was nothing more strongly to be resisted than talk of

peace or of ending the conflict in Vietnam. Each time peace talk arose it must be strongly rebuffed. We must not take yes for an answer. We might indulge in a little rhetoric to soothe the ruffled feelings of the world. But we must not let it interfere with the war. This must be remorselessly pressed and escalated to the limit. China must be compelled to intervene. According to this thinking, the very thing which Hanoi most feared—the possibility of Peking's moving volunteers over the frontier—was devoutly to be hoped for since this would enable us to trigger the nuclear offensive which would eliminate China from the map.

It seemed preposterous to suppose that men like President Johnson, Secretary Rusk or Secretary McNamara considered the war in such terms. I had no doubt that they were as eager as anyone to find a solution. But they were also determined that it would be a solution which would stand the test of time and trouble. They did not wish, having made so major a commitment of American treasure and manpower, having so deeply staked their prestige and reputation, to enter a cul-de-sac which would lead to another Panmunjom nor to embark upon a negotiation which would create a ramshackle settlement from which would emerge the next world crisis.

Skepticism was natural. Outright antagonism was another thing. There seemed to me to be one great difficulty about getting talks going. Both the United States and North Vietnam were still in the ring. Neither side was staggering toward collapse. The dangers which Hanoi envisaged were dangers of the future, not the present. In such a situation it was difficult for either side to give the ground which would make compromise possible.

Yet it was plain that the situation had reached precisely the point of development at which the most effective kind of solution could be achieved. It was not easy to end a war, and it was remarkably difficult to end one without laying the train for a new war only a few years in the future. This we had done in our settlement of World War I. It was the ruthless terms ruthlessly imposed on the Central Powers which set the stage

for World War II. I was not convinced that the unconditional surrender imposed upon Germany and Japan at the end of World War II did not contain the seeds of World War III, although this might have been averted by the extraordinary aid rendered by the United States. Yet in Europe many observers felt that if World War III came, Germany would again be the instigator and that the cause would lie in the World War II settlement.

We now were at a striking point in history in Southeast Asia. Hanoi had not been defeated. The United States had not been defeated. Each was conscious of the strength of the other. Each had suffered. But not irretrievably. We could, therefore, if we utilized our instincts for statesmanship, construct a settlement which would have the elements of equity, honor and reasonableness and which might endure.

Were we to follow the course of obliterating Hanoi, of hitting it with everything in the book, of driving North Vietnam back to the caves, would we not create a vacuum—even if we escaped nuclear war with China and/or the Soviet Union? Might we not then find ourselves with nothing but a vast grayland in which not even Marshal Ky would manage to reign supreme? What of neighboring Laos and Cambodia? Would not total defeat in Vietnam, even if obtainable, create a situation in which for a hundred years we would be committed to maintain costly and numerous garrisons to police the marches of the devastation which we had created, the vast and ever-growing jungles, uninhabited by man, beast or bird, which would be our inheritance?

These speculations arose inevitably as one pondered the alternatives.

To my way of thinking the arguments ran strongly toward an effort at negotiation.

The task of negotiating a durable Southeast Asian settlement was difficult. But it was a fascinating one, the kind to evoke a challenge to any diplomat, the kind which would be a monument to the statesmanship of the man who accomplished it, something far beyond the transient triviality of so many

postwar diplomatic settlements. This could be the foundation for a whole new epoch in Asia, one which would contribute to the strength and stability of a world which would endure whatever passing crises might come to China or even to India.

I hardly needed to think about the consequences which would flow from it: the release of American energies and resources to cope with the problems of Latin America and Africa, to turn once again to the raveled threads of Europe, to the critical negotiations over the atom, the *détente* with Russia, to the world population explosion and, finally, to the problem of China itself.

Perhaps those generals were right who believed that the only way to deal with China was to atomize it. But I thought that there must be another way. China was the world's most talented nation, the reservoir of more human skills than any other existent, a people of infinite capabilities, possessor of the world's longest history, the world's most complex culture, inventor of so many of the great technologies of the human era. Was it true that we could not find a way to live with China? Must the globe be turned into a poisonous desert because of China? I did not believe so. Surely America's heritage, Yankee ingenuity and the democratic imagination of our great people could devise a better course.