

Meredith's march, and they called on people to join them in the name not only of their own three organizations, but of others, such as the NAACP, which had joined in the great demonstrations of the past. But those days were over. The mood had changed. The old unity had gone.

Within an hour, they were marching. On the road, and in a motel that night, the debate went on. When they stopped marching, someone started singing "We Shall Overcome." But when they reached the line "Black and white together," the younger marchers stopped singing, and when they got to the chorus, they sang, "We shall overrun."

There were two points on which King could not get the radicals to give in. They refused to commit themselves to nonviolence. And they did not want white people along.

The climax came in Greenwood on the eleventh day of the march. That was where Carmichael's friend Willie Ricks first shouted, "Black power!" The crowd deliriously chanted it back to him, drowning the authorized slogan, which was "Freedom now!"

The next day, King, Carmichael and McKissick met to thrash things out in the parish house of a Catholic church in Yazoo City. King had nothing against black power, he said. But the connotations of the phrase would give the impression that they were talking about black domination rather than black equality. Carmichael was impatient with connotations. "Power," he said, "is the only thing respected in this world, and we must get it at any cost."

The meeting ended with a compromise: neither slogan should be used. But that didn't hold. The media had picked up black power. And they were right to see it as marking the end of an epoch.

The civil rights movement was over. Something else had begun. Whether it would bring blacks real power, of course, was another matter.

Vietnam: the Beginning

At the end of January 1965, Lyndon Johnson had succeeded in the first stages of his task beyond anyone's expectation. He had taken the power of the presidency into his hands masterfully, and on the whole—even the Kennedy people had to admit—he had used it wisely as well as effectively. Now he had been re-elected with a majority that even he found satisfactory. This was the moment, before the prestige of victory could be dissipated, to stake his claim to the respect of the historians.

Johnson was so conscious of the eye of history that a joke went around Washington about the style of his speeches:

Q: Why does LBJ talk so slow?

A: Because he thinks he's dictating to a stonemason.

Yet his ambition to build a Great Society was not the vulgar megalomania it has been drawn as. Here was a political leader in a position of apparently impregnable strength. He had to decide how to spend national resources that were growing at the rate of 5 per cent a year. His economic advisers were telling him that they had discovered the secret of perpetual growth. "Both our increasing understanding of the effectiveness of fiscal policy," they wrote in that month's economic report to Congress, "and the continued improvement of . . . our economic information, strengthen the conviction that recessions can be increasingly avoided and ultimately wiped out." Here was one of the rare moments when a government seemed to have real freedom to compose a national agenda with some assurance that it would be able to do most of the things it chose to do. Lyndon Johnson's agenda was neither unwise nor unworthy.

The package of legislative proposals that he put forward in his State of the Union message that January was drafted with a virtuoso politician's hand. There was something in it for every group that had gone to make up

the motley army of his majority. There was an education bill for the young, and a medical-care bill for the old; an arts foundation for the sophisticates, and a change in the immigration laws for the folks from the Old Country. Business was to be placated with large cuts in excise taxes, and labor with repeal of the hated "right-to-work" clause of Taft-Hartley. The desert West was to get water, and the crowded Northeast was promised trains running at two miles a minute.

But the program was more than just a political balancing act or another dip in the old bran tub. It was a venture into what might be called the metapolitics of postaffluence: the politics, that is, of a country where the number of chickens comfortably exceeded the number of pots. The President invited Americans to start work on the building of a society that would ask "not how much, but how good; not only how to create wealth, but how to use it; not only how fast we are going, but where we are headed." His speech echoed the language in which Alexis de Tocqueville, a century and a quarter earlier, had described what seemed to him the essence of the American character: "Forever seeking, forever falling to rise again," Tocqueville had written, "often disappointed but not discouraged, he tends unceasingly towards that unmeasured greatness so indistinctly visible at the end of the long track." In that same spirit Johnson (and his speechwriters) saw the Great Society they wanted to build not as a stable condition of pluperfect affluence but as "the excitement of becoming—always becoming, trying, falling, resting and trying again—but always trying and always gaining."

If it was something more than just politics, Johnson's program was also something more than just rhetoric. In a real sense he was proposing to carry out the agenda of the liberal consensus.

It was not only Johnson's program, after all. The proposals were based on the recommendations of the fourteen task forces he had set up, back in August, to follow up the speech at the University of Michigan, in May, with which he had launched the good ship Great Society. The membership of those task forces was like an honor roll of the liberal intellectual community. Far more than under the Kennedy administration—more than ever before or since, indeed—this was a moment when the intellectuals, especially the social scientists, had the run of the domestic departments of the federal government as recruits, consultants, idea men, kibbitzers and mandarins. With the ambrosial scent of presidential approval in the air, they fell over each other to fund studies and to back the most promising of those studies with massive federal action programs. It can be said without injustice to the clever and ambitious men who descended on Washington by every plane, many of them sharpened by years of committee work devoted to fighting for far smaller scraps of funding from founda-

tions, that it had not escaped their notice that the premium would be on those studies that confirmed that problems could indeed be solved by spending federal money and in ways that did not ruffle too many presidential or Congressional feathers.

Even in foreign affairs this was a time of growing hope—for those not privy to the tightly held secret of just how bad things were in Southeast Asia. Since the Cuban missile crisis, there had been a steady downgrading of earlier estimates of the threat from the Soviet Union, military, economic or ideological. "Well-informed Americans," I reported in a column in mid-January 1965, after a round of interviews in the White House, the State Department and the Pentagon, "now no longer fear the Communist power, nor do they expect the Cold War to last forever." The State of the Union message avoided the subject of Vietnam except for a perfunctory pledge, or so it seemed: "To ignore aggression would only increase the danger of a larger war."

Khrushchev had fallen the previous October, at the height of the presidential campaign, and on the same day the Chinese had exploded their first nuclear weapon. The first reports of open confrontation between the U.S.S.R. and China in the Far East had begun to reach Washington; it looked as though the split between the two Communist great powers might be both serious and permanent. The Administration was determined to improve its relations with Khrushchev's successors; and both the Sino-Soviet split and the Chinese bomb seemed on the whole favorable omens for this enterprise.

"This, then," Lyndon Johnson felt able to report that January, "is the State of the Union: free, growing, restless, and full of hope." In this mood of euphoria, on January 27, just one week after the beginning of his first full term in office, he received a memo that appeared like a ghost at the feast and set off the train of events that soon extinguished the high hopes of his inaugural honeymoon.

The memo was signed by McGeorge Bundy but it arose out of a conversation between him and Robert McNamara. It therefore represented the concurrent opinion of the two forceful men whose help and good opinion Johnson had needed so badly that night when the three of them climbed aboard the symbolic helicopter at Andrews Air Force Base.

So far, they now told the President, they had gone along with his reluctance to change his fundamental policy in Vietnam. Dean Rusk, the third-most-powerful of his advisers, they acknowledged, still thought that the consequences of all alternatives to the existing policy were so bad that it simply had to be made to work. They disagreed. Things were going so badly in Vietnam that the present course could lead only to "disastrous

defeat." And so, the memo said, "the time has come for harder choices." With the election behind him and with the danger of a decisive Viet Cong offensive at any moment, the President must choose between "escalation and withdrawal," between abandoning the American commitment to prevent a Viet Cong victory and making that commitment good with American air power. As a last step before the final decision they proposed that Bundy be sent to Saigon to see things for himself.

He left on February 2 with a team of Vietnam experts from the Pentagon, the White House and the State Department. It was one of the fateful moments when the threads of this story spun together as if they were being twisted from on high by a President of the Immortals with a malicious sense of humor and a taste for bad theater.

On February 1, Martin Luther King, back from receiving his Nobel Peace Prize, was carted off to jail in Selma.

On February 2, Alexei Kosygin, the new Soviet Prime Minister, left Moscow for Hanoi. One widespread fear was that the Russians now thought a final Viet Cong victory was so imminent that they were trying to claim a share in the credit for it. President Johnson, in any case, took this opportunity to announce that he hoped to meet Kosygin at the summit in a year's time or so.

On February 3, two U.S. destroyers were scheduled to sail on what was called a DESOTO patrol in the Tonkin Gulf, for the first time since the previous September. Like the ships that had set off the Tonkin Gulf incident in August 1964, their mission included electronic intelligence. But this time there was more than a hint of provocation about its rationale. U.S. aircraft were standing by with orders to bomb carefully chosen targets in North Vietnam if the destroyers were attacked. The plans had been drawn weeks before, under the heading "Punitive and Crippling Reprisal Actions on Targets in North Vietnam," and the code name for the operation was Flaming Dart. At the last moment, however, the DESOTO patrol was first postponed for four days and then countermanded. Washington was reluctant to bomb North Vietnam while Kosygin was in Hanoi.

Flaming Dart was not to be wasted, though. Hanoi did not have any matching inhibitions about attacking Americans in South Vietnam while the President's personal representative was in Saigon. On the night of February 6 (February 7 local time) a Viet Cong unit mortared an American advisers' barracks at Pleiku, in the central highlands, killing nine and wounding one hundred Americans.

The American response, both in Saigon and in Washington, was unhesitating. "We have kept our gun over the mantel and our shells in

the cupboard for a long time now," said the President. "And what was the result? They are killing our men while they sleep in the night." Flaming Dart was ordered immediately.

This was not the first time that U.S. aircraft had bombed North Vietnamese territory; that had happened after the Tonkin Gulf incident. This was the moment, just the same, when—as Chester Cooper, a veteran CIA official, then working in the White House, who had gone to Saigon with Bundy, put it—"the die was cast."

Bundy visited the victims of the Pleiku attack in a hospital that afternoon. He seemed greatly perturbed by what he saw—a little illogically, perhaps, since he had succeeded in maintaining his famous detachment through some hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese casualties.

That same day, in any event, Bundy and his experts boarded *Air Force One* and set off back to Washington. When they landed, Bundy went straight to the White House and handed the President a report he had drafted in mid-air, with an annex drafted by another former Harvard professor, McNamara's right-hand man, John McNaughton. With his first glance, the President could see that the debate in which his advisers had agonized for a year was over.

The situation in Vietnam is deteriorating [Bundy's own report began], and without new U.S. action defeat appears inevitable . . . within the next year or so. There is still time to turn around, but not much. . . .

The stakes in Vietnam are extremely high. . . . The international prestige of the United States, and a substantial part of our influence are directly at risk in Vietnam. There is no way of unloading the burden on the Vietnamese themselves, and there is no way of negotiating ourselves out of Vietnam, which offers any serious promise at present.

A negotiated withdrawal, Bundy said, would in his judgment constitute "surrender on the installment plan." Instead he recommended as "the most promising course available" what he called a policy of "graduated and continuing reprisal."

The phrase did credit to the Harvard training in verbal skills, for what Bundy and McNaughton were saying was that the time had come to move beyond reprisals in the natural meaning of the words, namely retaliation for specific acts, such as the attack on U.S. ships in the Tonkin Gulf or on the barracks at Pleiku. Now they were urging the President to take the momentous decision, long contemplated and long deferred, to make systematic use of American air power so as to strengthen Saigon and weaken Hanoi. It was perhaps McNaughton, the lawyer, who devised the

semantic *léger de main* by which a decision to retaliate could be made to slide unnoticed into a decision to go beyond retaliation:

Once a program of reprisals is clearly underway [the annex began], it should not be necessary to connect each specific act against North Vietnam to a particular outrage in the South. . . .

This reprisal policy should begin at a low level. . . . At the same time it should be recognized that in order to maintain the power of reprisal without the risk of excessive loss, an "air war" may in fact be necessary. We should therefore be ready to develop a separate justification for the destruction of Communist air power. The essence of such an explanation should be that these actions . . . in no sense represent any intent to wage offensive war. . . .

In no sense?

After Pleiku, it was as if some membrane of inhibition in Lyndon Johnson's mind had been pierced. One by one, in a few weeks, he ordered actions that he had resisted for as many months of Talmudic analysis and agonized debate inside the bureaucracy.

There was a second Flaming Dart reprisal after a Viet Cong action at Qui Nhon on February 11. This time, it was justified publicly in accordance with the Bundy-McNaughton formula as a generalized response to "continued acts of aggression." Only two days later, on February 13, the President abandoned the fig leaf of retaliation completely and ordered Operation Rolling Thunder, continuous air war on North Vietnam, though what with an Anglo-Soviet peace initiative, poor bombing weather, and political instability in Saigon, the bombing didn't actually begin until early March.

A propaganda campaign to represent the war as almost wholly caused by acts of aggression built up step by step with the "punishment." The campaign was orchestrated around a State Department white paper issued on February 27. This grossly exaggerated the importance of arms supplied to the Viet Cong from outside South Vietnam as opposed to the weapons they captured from government forces, and flatly stated, "The war in Vietnam is *not* a spontaneous and local rebellion against the established government."

This last statement, indeed the white paper as a whole, illustrated just how far the government was now prepared to go in the direction of deceiving the American people not only about its own intentions, which might be justified by the need for operational secrecy, but about the nature of the situation to which it claimed it was obliged to respond. For in a secret paper written to guide the thinking of the President and his top advisers only three months earlier, the interagency Vietnam working group had

conceded, "Despite a large and growing North Vietnamese contribution to the Viet Cong and insurrection, the primary sources of Communist strength in the South remain indigenous."

The decision to launch an air war had been taken on political and psychological grounds—though the President's advisers did not agree among themselves what those grounds were. Walt Rostow, who was still head of the policy planning staff in the State Department but was later to move over to the White House to replace McGeorge Bundy, argued that to bomb Hanoi would be a signal of American resolve to Hanoi. General Taylor, on the other hand, wanted bombing because he thought it would stiffen morale in Saigon. The Bundy-McNaughton report added a third psychological target to these two: "the minds of the Viet Cong cadres."

The military had been arguing for bombing all along for reasons of a wholly different kind. They wanted to destroy, physically, the enemy's ability to wage war, both by bombing military installations in the North and by "interdicting" the lines of communications by which men and munitions were infiltrated into the South.

It did not take long after Rolling Thunder began, in March, for the military's view to triumph. There was a gradual shift from politically and psychologically chosen targets to the lines of communication that the military thought most critical to infiltration.

McGeorge Bundy had not so much as mentioned the sending of U.S. combat units to Vietnam in his post-Pleiku memorandum. (This was no new idea, however. Robert McNamara had written in a memorandum for President Kennedy as early as November 1961 that he agreed with the Joint Chiefs of Staff that "the chances are against, probably sharply against, preventing [the fall of South Vietnam to the Communists] by any measures short of introduction of U.S. forces on a substantial scale.")

On February 22, only two weeks after Pleiku, the new U.S. commander in Vietnam, General William Westmoreland, asked for troops to defend the perimeter of the bases from which Flaming Dart sorties were being flown. Thus did the ladder of escalation lead upward, simply and logically: bombers to protect the destroyers, troops to protect the bombers, and all with "no intent to wage an offensive war." On March 8 two marine battalions splashed ashore at DaNang. The first American combat units had arrived in Vietnam. It would be wrong to suppose that the Administration regarded those two battalions as a decisive commitment of U.S. ground forces. It is not clear whether the civilian officials in Washington saw through the thin pretense that the marines were there just to protect DaNang. The military certainly did. They knew that it

would have needed at least five times as many troops to hold a perimeter wide enough to keep the Viet Cong out of mortar range of the airfield. Westmoreland understood that the two battalions must be the entering wedge of American military commitment, whether that was what the government in Washington wanted or not.

At this critical juncture there was one dissent, and it came from a surprising quarter. General Maxwell Taylor had been the first American official to recommend sending in American troops. Back in 1961 he had proposed to President Kennedy that combat troops be smuggled into the Mekong Delta under the guise of army engineers working on flood relief. Later, again, he was to be a dogged defender of the American presence in Vietnam. But now his reaction to Westmoreland's request was instant and skeptical.

He cabled to Washington the same day that, once U.S. troops were there, the temptation to use them would grow insatiably. He warned that what he called "white-faced soldiers" wouldn't be able to tell the difference between friendly and unfriendly Vietnamese; that the marines were neither trained nor equipped for jungle warfare; and that, like the French before them, they would fail at it.

He was right on every count. But he didn't press his dissent. And no one in Washington, with the single exception of Under-Secretary of State George Ball, took it up.

Now the dam broke. The President, the military and the civilian officials seemed almost to be vying with each other to see who could think up the best reason for pouring in more troops. Westmoreland asked for more marines to secure other bases, and at the beginning of April the President said yes. Even before that, Johnson had asked the Joint Chiefs at a meeting to come up with ways "to kill more VC." He was getting his blood up.

On April 20, McNamara and the other top civilian officials concerned met the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Pacific commander (Admiral Sharp), and Westmoreland in Honolulu. After six weeks of Rolling Thunder, they agreed that air war on the North was not going to prevent Viet Cong victory in the South and decided to try another way of "breaking the enemy's will." They would send in enough U.S. troops to hold four coastal enclaves. This would prove to the enemy that he couldn't win. It was reckoned that a total of ninety thousand American, Korean and Australian troops would achieve this effect.

In May the President's zeal for liberty was diverted by the "crisis" in the Dominican Republic. In the meantime things went from bad to worse in Vietnam. Another government fell in Saigon. The Viet Cong seemed on the point of cutting the country in half. And at the battle of Dong

Xoai, in June, the South Vietnamese Army was closer than ever to abject rout. Westmoreland asked for more troops: either thirty-three or thirty-five battalions, depending on how you calculated. The Joint Chiefs offered him forty-four battalions, and the President agreed to this higher figure by mid-July. By the end of July the Pentagon was planning in terms of a total American strength of 193,000, or more than twice the number that had been thought necessary at Honolulu three months before. That higher force level was actually reached before the end of the year.

Two similarities with the decision to bomb North Vietnam are striking. The first is that, just as Washington decided to bomb before it made up its mind why bombing would help, so troops were poured into Vietnam before it had been decided how they would be used. First they were to be sent to protect bases. Then they were to man enclaves. By mid-June Westmoreland had received permission to commit U.S. forces outside the enclaves, and the first major "search and destroy" operation was mounted in War Zone D north of Saigon.

Secondly, once again the Administration did not tell the American people the truth about what it was doing. On July 28 at a press conference the President said that "the lessons of history" showed that "surrender" in Vietnam would not bring peace. In one breath he wrapped together the Munich myth and the domino theory:

We learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another country. . . .

We intend to convince the Communists that we cannot be defeated by force of arms or by superior power. . . .

I have today ordered to Vietnam . . . forces that will raise our fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 almost immediately. Additional forces will be needed later, and they will be sent as requested.

That was a disingenuous way of describing plans that were already made for sending close to two hundred thousand troops. A reporter asked:

Q: Mr. President, does the fact that you are sending additional forces to Vietnam imply any change in the existing policy of relying mainly on the South Vietnamese to carry out offensive operations and using American forces to guard installations . . . ?

A: It does not imply any change in policy whatever.

One last point is worth noting. This decision to send an American expeditionary force to South Vietnam to preserve its government had been taken with a minimum of consultation with that government and certainly in no meaningful sense at its request. The succession of governments in

conceal from the electorate the nature of the decisions that were being debated. On September 28, for example, in a speech in Manchester, New Hampshire, right in the middle of the policy debate inside the national security apparatus on the very question of bombing, and after it had become plain that at the very least a decision might be taken to bomb North Vietnam, he said this:

Some of our people—Mr. Nixon, Mr. Rockefeller, Mr. Scranton, and Mr. Goldwater—have all, at some time or other, suggested the possible wisdom of going north in Vietnam. As far as I am concerned, I want to be very cautious and careful, and use it only as a last resort, when I start dropping bombs that are likely to involve American boys in a war in Asia with 700 million Chinese.

So just for the moment I have not thought we were ready for American boys to do the fighting for Asian boys. What I have been trying to do, with the situation that I found, was to get the boys in Vietnam to do their own fighting with our advice and with our equipment. That is the course we are following. So we are not going north and drop bombs at this stage of the game, and we are not going south and run out and leave it for the Communists to take over. . . .

Now, that is a fairly remarkable piece of demagoguery by any standards. Connoisseurs will appreciate touches such as “some of our people” for the Republicans, and “with the situation that I found.” The last sentence actually succeeds in confusing invasion and withdrawal! Confusing as they were, however, the net effect of such speeches was to leave the average American voter with a very clear idea. He was being asked to choose between a President who was against both bombing North Vietnam and sending American boys to fight in South Vietnam, and a Republican challenger who was not only in favor of both those things but apparently did not even rule out using nuclear weapons.

The President had gone to similar lengths to deceive the press. Only the very best-informed reporters and columnists in Washington had any inkling of the issues that were being debated inside the national security apparatus. Even those that did were inhibited by a professionally improper but very real dilemma: should they reveal that Johnson *might* be a bomber, and so risk helping Goldwater, who certainly was?

Finally, Congress was largely kept in ignorance. The President made a considerable show of consulting “Congressional leaders,” especially those members of the armed services committees who could be relied on to go along with anything that the military wanted. But the information that congressmen and senators as a whole were given was simply not adequate to support serious critical discussion.

The President had armed himself with authority to do virtually what-

ever he thought necessary in the form of the joint resolution rushed through after the Tonkin Gulf incident. It is doubtful whether, even at the time, the resolution would have passed with only two dissenting votes in the two houses (those of Senators Morse and Gruening) if the Administration had told Congress the truth. By suppressing the fact that South Vietnamese patrol boats, supplied by the United States and with the Administration's approval, had attacked North Vietnamese shore targets only a few hours before the North Vietnamese attacks on the American destroyer, the President totally transformed the character of what the North Vietnamese had done. The Administration's version of events turned a tough but natural response to an invasion of sovereignty into an unprovoked “act of aggression.” That would justify U.S. retaliation and could be relied on to close ranks in Congress and in the country. And the Tonkin Gulf episode was only the most flagrant instance of the way in which Congress was manipulated.

The Pentagon Papers historian of the decision to bomb North Vietnam reports, “The question of constitutional authority for open acts of war against a sovereign nation was never seriously raised.” The President and all his advisers, civilian and military, simply assumed that in practice the absolute power to make war belonged to the presidency.

The secrecy and isolation of the national-security bureaucracy were to have many results. One of the first of them was a certain stale quality about the bureaucracy's own work. It is depressing to open the Pentagon Papers and see how the written arguments of men with a reputation for clarity and intelligence—McNamara, John McNaughton, the Bundy brothers—were dominated by *cliché*, fixed ideas, unexamined assumptions and a persistent tendency to argue backward from predetermined conclusions.

The best known of the assumptions is the so-called “domino theory.” As early as the hearings on the Mutual Security Act, in 1951, Dean Rusk was arguing that since the Viet Minh rebels in Indochina had help from China, then their war against the French was tantamount to Chinese aggression and would in turn encourage further aggression elsewhere. In June 1964 the President asked his advisers whether this was still true: would the rest of Southeast Asia fall if South Vietnam came under North Vietnamese control? Back came the considered response of the CIA's Board of National Estimates:

With the possible exception of Cambodia, it is likely that no nation in the area would quickly succumb to communism as a result of the fall of Laos and South Vietnam. Furthermore a continuation of the spread of communism in the area would not be inexorable, and any spread which

did take place would take time—time in which the total situation might change in any number of ways unfavorable to the communist cause.

That expert judgment destroyed the whole rationale for U.S. policy. It was not, so far as the Pentagon Papers reveal, discussed or challenged. But here is all that remained of it in the final draft of the Working Group's report, a single qualifying clause as the archaeological vestige of an argument buried under mounds of assertion:

The so-called "domino" theory is oversimplified. . . . Nonetheless Communist control of South Vietnam would almost immediately make Laos extremely hard to hold, have Cambodia bending sharply to the Communist side, place great pressure on Thailand . . . and embolden Indonesia to increase its pressure on Malaysia . . . could easily, over time, tend to unravel the whole Pacific and South Asian defense structures . . . the loss of South Vietnam [would not necessarily be as serious as the loss of Berlin] . . . there would almost certainly be a major conflict and perhaps the risk of nuclear war.

Closely related to the domino theory was the Munich analogy: the fixed idea that anything less than total victory in Vietnam must be abject surrender, that the United States must fight wherever its will was challenged to the slightest degree. Both the President and the Secretary of State were much given to drawing the Munich analogy (naturally with Ho Chi Minh in the role of Hitler). This befitted men of an age to have lived through the dangers of isolationism and appeasement; but the analogy was also part of the standard kit of concepts for many of their younger advisers.

The perception of Vietnam itself in Washington was bizarrely unreal. Here and there, among CIA veterans or in the lower ranks of the State Department, it was possible to find men who remembered that the two Vietnams had been parts of the same territory only a decade before, and that complex and substantial transfers of population had taken place that were scarcely irrelevant, for example, to the quarrel between Diem and the Buddhists. In the higher ranks of the bureaucracy, however, such a pedantic insistence on local peculiarities was suspect. It smacked of the type of foreign-service officer who has gotten too much involved with his post, gone native, even, and blurred the grand simplicities of struggle and duty. There is no trace in the Pentagon Papers of any awareness that the Catholics who had gone South after 1954 and who made up a disproportionate part of the support for the Diem regime might seem to most Vietnamese in the South every bit as foreign as Communist "infiltrators" returning to their native province after training in the North. The Administration, in its inner debates just as much as in its statements for outside consump-

tion, stuck to the rigid notion that a country called South Vietnam was being invaded by its "neighbor," North Vietnam, exactly as if Mexico were being invaded by the United States. This notion contradicted the facts of Vietnamese language, ethnology, politics and history, but it had the simple merit of providing a legal rationale for American intervention.

A similarly unshakable assumption was that the Viet Cong were controlled by Russia, or China or both. Long after the Administration's policy toward the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe had come to be based on a realistic appreciation of the implications of Sino-Soviet tension, the myth of monolithic communism seemed to survive in the darker corners of even the most luminous of bureaucratic minds. In March 1965, for example, John McNaughton jotted down, in a rough draft for his own guidance, an extraordinarily revealing little formula for "U.S. aims" as he saw them:

70%—To avoid a humiliating U.S. defeat (to our reputation as guarantor).

20%—To keep SVN (and then adjacent) territory from Chinese hands.

10%—To permit the people of SVN to enjoy a better, freer way of life.

Also—To emerge from crisis without unacceptable taint from methods used.

Not—To "help a friend," though it would be hard to stay in if asked out.

It is disturbing to learn that the most trusted of Robert McNamara's advisers, in the very moment of weighing the crucial decision whether to advocate committing U.S. troops to South Vietnam (which he did advocate, successfully, a few days later), privately supposed that they would be going there to prevent it being occupied by the Chinese! From that one scribbled note, in fact, a good deal of the intellectual climate inside the bureaucracy at that critical period can be reconstructed. There was the pseudorational quality lent to arguments by expressing them in numbers. This was a particular habit of McNaughton's. In perhaps the most important of all the papers he drafted, the annex to McGeorge Bundy's memo written on the plane home after Pleiku, he estimated the chances of success for bombing as "somewhere between 25% and 75%." It is amusing to speculate what grade Professor McNaughton would have given to a student who expressed such a hopelessly noncommittal opinion, even on the most trivial of subjects, and then tried to dress it up with false precision by expressing it as a percentage. But, then, McNamara loved statistics. The Pentagon ran on them. In Saigon the war was all but fought by numbers. As General Taylor had scathingly put it, it was as if the war could be won on a points score: so many KIA, so many defectors, so many hamlets cleared, so many tons of ordnance dropped. The process by which in

the end these statistics came to blot out reality started inside the heads of clever people in the Pentagon.

Then there was the primacy given to the matter of prestige. It was seven times more important, for McNaughton, to avoid humiliation than to help the people of South Vietnam. That was frank enough. In another of his papers he put the same point even more pithily:

Our stakes in South Vietnam are:

- a) Buffer real estate near Thailand and Malaysia and
- b) Our reputation.

It was not only with America's reputation for toughness among the Communists that the President's advisers were so preoccupied; it was also her reputation for toughness among her allies. "We must maintain," said the final draft of the Working Group's report in November 1964, perhaps the most thorough position paper of this whole period, "particularly to our key Nato allies, the picture of a nation that is stronger and at the same time wise in the exercise of its power." In the background there was a specific concern with asserting American world leadership now that it seemed to be challenged by General de Gaulle. In the top-level discussion of that same paper, Dean Rusk argued that Vietnam must be held because other nations would lose confidence in the United States if it was not. "If we did nothing to affect the course of events in Vietnam," he went on, "it would have the effect of giving more to de Gaulle."

Lastly, to squeeze one more inference from the text of poor McNaughton's scribble, whatever might be maintained in public, there was no pretense inside the bureaucracy that the United States was in Vietnam because anyone in that country wanted an American presence. "It would be hard to stay in if asked out," McNaughton wrote—not that it would be hard to get out if asked to stay in. It was Washington's constant preoccupation, from the time of the Buddhist crisis in the summer of 1963 on, to ensure that the government in Saigon not ask the United States out. In every discussion of any hypothetical negotiated settlement, the irreducible minimum American position was that the government of South Vietnam that resulted from such a settlement would accept American aid. This was not the policy of the reluctant benefactor. It was the superpower intent on preserving world leadership.

There has been much discussion of the nuances of opinion within the national-security bureaucracy, and correspondingly little realization of where the essential division lay. This was above all a debate between the civilians and the military. And it was one in which—notwithstanding the

widespread belief that Kennedy and McNamara established civilian control in the Pentagon—the military habitually won their point.

There were several reasons for this. The military fared very well as bureaucrats, for one thing. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were consistently adept at presenting the military alternatives in such a way that their preferred solution was likely to be chosen in the long run.

One cannot read the documents without a sense of the superior drive and vitality of the military case. The Joint Chiefs made up their minds by the end of 1963 that "the root of the problem is in North Vietnam and must be dealt with there." They were probably wrong. The root of the problem was an insurgency in South Vietnam, and it was not until after the American escalatory measures of 1965 that North Vietnamese support became crucial to it. Nevertheless, over twelve months of tortuous and sometimes fluctuating debate, the civilians were drawn to the military position.

It was almost as if the imperative to escalate had a life of its own. It steadily wore down arguments *against*, and seemed to call forth arguments *for*. Both in the case of bombing and in the case of sending in troops, the decision seems to have been reached before the bureaucracy could make up its mind exactly why it had been reached. In both cases, after the decision had been taken, military strategy quickly asserted itself and pushed aside the tenuous rationales of the civilians. Once General Westmoreland had gotten his troops, he stopped keeping them to protect air force bases, nor did he leave them in enclaves to communicate messages of American determination. He went hunting the Viet Cong with them. And once they had gotten orders to bomb, the Joint Chiefs used those orders to bomb the enemy's lines of communications, not to exert psychological pressure on the politbureau in Hanoi.

The military had one great advantage: they knew what they wanted. Once—it was in a discussion of the possibility that a certain course of action might lead to the danger of a nuclear exchange—General Maxwell Taylor silenced the Secretary of State's hesitations by declaring brusquely that there was "a danger of reasoning ourselves into inaction." Reasoning, to the military men, was something that ought to end in action, not a way of deciding whether action was desirable or not. The fundamental question, whether the United States was right to be committed in Vietnam, was not much discussed in the meetings recorded in the Pentagon Papers. But on one of the few occasions when it was, the discussion was summarily ended by the Joint Chiefs' representative present, Admiral Mustin. He didn't like the implication that there was any alternative to defending South Vietnam, he said: "There isn't."

One reason why the military won their point so often and so easily

was that the civilians tended to be deferential toward the men in uniform. In part this may have been an automatic response subconsciously caused by the fact that so many of them had been junior officers themselves—"captains and majors, telling the whole world what to do." "Twelve years ago," wrote Harry McPherson of his feelings in the Pentagon mess when he was a civilian officer there in the middle 1960s, "you were a corporal in the Air Force. . . . Now you were sitting across from a major general who survived the Bataan death march. He embodies the military virtues of stamina, courage, allegiance to country." Not all of McNamara's civilian staff, notoriously, felt that way about generals. But on the whole, the civilians were trying harder to show the military that they understood the military point of view than the military were trying to show the civilians that they understood theirs.

There was another reason why the military case should prevail. It was in the logic of the debate. On one side were those who favored swifter movement to higher levels of military force, on the other those who argued for the slower application of more restrained levels of force. The fundamental alternatives—that the United States had no vital interests at stake in Indochina that were worth fighting for, that it could not effectively advance its interests by using force, and that it should lessen its commitment and withdraw—these arguments were never heard. In an argument between men who agree that they must use force to prevent something happening and disagree only on when to use it, it is not hard to predict that force will be used in the end. In the absence of a Left, the men of the center will always be drawn to the Right. Only thorough debate, in Congress, in the press, and in politics, could have prevented any other result. And public debate was the last thing the presidential elite wanted.

John McNaughton's special assistant at this time was a young man named Daniel Ellsberg. He helped to draft many of the papers in which the question whether to bomb North Vietnam was discussed. He did not read those papers, he said in a lecture in a Boston church many years later, with the same eyes that his wife and children brought to them when they eventually read them:

Here is some of the language they read in the Pentagon papers about our bombing policy:

"We all accept the will of the DRV as the real target";

"Judging by experience during the last war, the resumption of bombing after a pause would be even more painful . . ."

"water-drip technique . . ."

"It is important not to 'kill the hostage'"

"fast/full squeeze" option versus "progressive squeeze-and-talk . . ."

"the hot-cold treatment . . ."

"our salami-slicing bombing program . . . ratchet . . . one more turn of the screw."

It was, Patricia Ellsberg said, "the language of torturers."

There is a difference between the way a torturer uses force and the way a soldier uses it. A torturer may not need to use much force; just enough to inflict pain, for he is in no danger himself. The soldier uses as much as he needs to destroy his enemy and make himself safe. The case the Joint Chiefs were arguing was the soldier's case. If the United States was at war with the Vietnamese Communists, as the civilians said, then let its military power be used as it has always been used in war, to defeat the enemy as swiftly as possible.

The civilians' model was not war but the imposition of the will of the United States on people who might frustrate and humiliate the United States in the sense that a victim can humiliate a torturer by refusing to obey his will but could in no circumstances hurt the United States. The position of the civilian officials, therefore, when they argued for just enough bombing to "break the will" of Hanoi, may have been more "restrained" than the policy of the Joint Chiefs, who wanted the immediate destruction of North Vietnam's capacity to make war; at the same time, it was more "godlike," more arrogant. And, worse than a crime, it was an error.

For in spite of the voluminous analysis and the pseudorational discourse, the President's civilian advisers were quite simply wildly wrong. They consistently overestimated their own strength. They underestimated the strength of the enemy. They overestimated their ability to prevent infiltration. They underestimated Hanoi's ability to match the build-up of American manpower: the ratio between Saigon's forces and the guerrillas was less favorable to Saigon after half a million Americans had been injected into the war than it had been at the beginning. And above all they underestimated their own weakness.

There is no mention, in all the voluminous debate about escalation, of the possibility that frustrating the Viet Cong might involve any serious cost for the United States other than the ordnance expended and a few casualties. The cost of allowing the Viet Cong to win was always present in that debate. The cost of trying to prevent that victory was not even seriously discussed. And yet it was to shake American society to its foundations.

War, Peace and Two Americas

Amongst democratic nations, in time of peace, the military profession is held in little honor and practiced with little spirit.

Alexis de Tocqueville,
Democracy in America

After the Tet offensive, the peace movement could have been forgiven for imagining that its prayers had been answered and that the day of Jubilo had dawned at long last. There was a sudden, massive and unprecedented swing of public opinion against the war.

In January 1968, immediately before Tet had printed on the national retina its pictures of frustration and defeat, the Gallup poll had reported that a clear majority (in fact 56 per cent) of the American people, as measured by its usually reliable sample, still classified themselves as hawks and that they still outnumbered the doves (28 per cent) by just two to one.

Just three months later, the balance of opinion had jibed over to the other tack. The doves had overtaken the hawks. They now led by only the narrowest of margins, it was true (42-41 per cent). But the trend was unmistakable, and at first glance it seemed to show that the peace movement had succeeded in converting the nation. By early 1969, for the first time, more than 50 per cent of Gallup's respondents had concluded that American involvement in Vietnam had been a mistake from the start. In 1965 fewer than a quarter of the sample had taken that view. After Tet the proportion who maintained that the war had always been a mistake grew continuously. It passed 60 per cent in the spring of 1971, and by the end of President Nixon's first term had approached two thirds of the American people. Within two years of Tet, to put it neatly, the ratio of doves to hawks had swapped over: from 56-28 per cent in favor of the hawks in

January 1968 to 55-31 per cent in favor of the doves in November 1969. Even to think of that month, however, is to remember that the state of American opinion was anything but neat. For November 1969 was the month in which the strength of the peace movement seemed to reach its peak; and it was also the month in which Richard Nixon, in a television speech to the nation, successfully counterclaimed that, against the great mass meetings demonstrating for peace, he could appeal to a silent majority.

There are in any case inherent difficulties in the attempt to measure how public opinion has moved on a given issue over a period of time. It is rare, for one thing, to find a long series of polls in which the same question has been asked in the same words. If the question has not been asked in the same words, the results are not comparable. Even if it has, they may not be very enlightening, because events may have changed so much that the same words no longer refer to the same reality. "Isolationism" in 1940 meant something very different from what it meant when Dean Rusk and others tried to revive it as a bad word for the opponents of American military intervention abroad.

In the particular case of Vietnam, the effort to divine the mind of America was even more fraught with booby traps than usual. In the early days of the war there were a good many reports in the press, and not least in such "liberal," "Establishment" papers as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and *Newsweek*, to the effect that if President Johnson was under any pressure to modify his policy on Vietnam, that pressure came from the Right. In part, this confirms the general observation we have made that politics in the age of consensus was often in effect a conflict not between Left and Right but between moderate-right- and extreme-right-wing policies. It reflected that determination to have "no enemies on the Right" which the pundits of the foreign policy Establishment, the media, and so many politicians seem to have acquired as the legacy of fear in the McCarthy period.

Whatever this idea may tell us about the political psychology of Washington, however, it had no basis in fact. Elaborate analysis of poll data and of a specially devised 1966 National Opinion Research Center survey by Sidney Verba and other social scientists found that those who supported the President anyway were likely also to support further escalation of the war, while those who opposed him were statistically likely to favor de-escalation. In scanning the horizon to the Right of him with such care, posting no pickets to the Left, Lyndon Johnson had made the political mistake of his life. It was from the Left that the Indians had been creeping stealthily upon him.

The implications of the data were chaotic. Few Americans, it

showed, could truthfully be called either hawks or doves. Their views were simply not that consistent. Nor did it seem possible to discover any strong correlation between attitudes to the war and any of the sociological and demographic characteristics that traditionally predict political loyalties in the United States. It wasn't possible to say that the rich were for the war, or that the poor were; or that the young took any one view of it, or that the old did. Neither religion nor the strength of religious belief seemed to have anything to do with it. And while the southwestern states, as one might expect, were more in favor of a tough war policy, the South, as one might not have guessed, was most in favor of de-escalation.

There were two very interesting exceptions to this negative rule. Men were more likely to be hawks than women. And blacks, whatever their level of education, were significantly more opposed to escalating the war than whites with the same amount of education.

But what were tidy-minded social scientists, let alone politicians, obliged by the coarse needs of their trade to deal in broad, marketable generalizations, to make of the confusing, and sometimes apparently contradictory pattern of public opinion on the war? The NORC survey showed, for example, that no fewer than 88 per cent of the American people would be willing to negotiate with the Viet Cong, and that a majority, 52 per cent, would go so far as to hand South Vietnam over to a coalition that included the Viet Cong. And yet equally imposing majorities rejected any policies that smacked of scuttle. Eighty-one per cent said they would disapprove if the President were to announce tomorrow that the United States is going to withdraw from Vietnam and let the Communists take over. The same data could be read to sustain the view that America was either a nation of hawks or a nation of doves.

It might be thought that this confusion was the result of ignorance and indifference. If so, as the war went on—as more Americans were killed and as the peace movement's campaign of education took effect and as people read more about the war and saw more of it on television—one might have expected opinion to become less confused and shake out into some clear pattern. That didn't happen. To some extent opinion did at least seem to become more polarized. Morris Janowitz, a sociologist at the University of Chicago, wrote that the nightly spectacle of the war on television "hardened and polarized public sentiment" so that by the end of 1967 "those people who are skeptical of the war now have a vehemence in their skepticism. Those who are for the war see Americans being killed and they don't want those sacrifices to be in vain." That was true. But the pattern never did become a simple one.

Two stereotypes, in particular, came to be so universally accepted that they became crucial shibboleths in determining political attitudes in the

early seventies. These were two related ideas: that young people were more likely to oppose the war than their elders, and that the more highly educated people were the more likely they were to oppose it. The peace movement, disproportionately recruited from the young and highly educated, took both propositions for granted, not without a touch of arrogance. But so, too, did its enemies. Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew, by campaigning against kids and snobs, showed that they accepted both propositions as true. They were not.

In May 1971, for example, Gallup found that two thirds of those with a college education thought that the war had been a mistake; three quarters of those with only a grade-school education thought the same. "If we divide a sample of the American public roughly into thirds on the basis of how attentive or informed they are about Vietnam," wrote three social scientists in a report commissioned by SANE and the Commission for a Livable World, and so hardly prejudiced against middle-class liberalism, "we find that the top third tends to show the most hawkish attitudes, the bottom third the most dovish, with the middle third falling somewhere in between."

Nor did the data support the assumption that the young were disproportionately doves. As of 1968, data from the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center showed that college-educated white people in their twenties were more likely than older people with only grade-school education both to justify the war and to favor intensification of it, in both cases by the very substantial margin of twenty percentage points or more. In the *American Journal of Sociology*, late in 1972, Michigan's Howard Schuman summed up the evidence like this: "A careful review of public opinion data over the last seven years [i.e. 1965-72] shows that on most war-related issues, the greatest opposition to continued American involvement has come from the least educated parts of the population. A related finding is that when it comes to Vietnam, the 'generation gap,' at least in a simple form, has been largely a myth."

How can these findings be squared with the evidence of campuses on fire with rebellion against the war? Were the polls simply inaccurate? No. Was the upheaval of student feeling against the war, then, an illusion? Of course not. But things were nevertheless not quite as they seemed.

The Tet offensive, so decisive a turning point in so many other ways, produced the first clue to the meaning of this riddle. For it was after Tet, as we have seen, that the decisive swing in public opinion against the war took place. And Tet was a defeat for American policy. The sharpest increase in mass public opposition to the war, then, followed the clearest indication to date that the United States was not winning it.

The peace movement had not been born of the response to Viet

Cong offensives. It had sprung up in protest at American aggression. Its first great surge came after the escalation of American offensive action in the spring of 1965, and it flared up with its most incandescent intensity after the invasion of Cambodia in the spring of 1970.

The key to the riddle, in fact, lies in grasping the fact that the peace movement and mass public opposition to the war were two different phenomena. They sprang from different emotional roots, they affected different kinds of Americans, and they responded to different events. Indeed, they were to some extent mutually opposed movements.

Once this is understood, the poll data can indeed be made to fit with the fact that the great universities and certain other groups who shared their culture—intellectuals, journalists, publishers, clergymen, and some politicians and business leaders—went on fire against the war. Then many of the other apparent paradoxes in the politics of the seventies can be resolved. The answer to the riddle of the Vietnam polls, in fact, becomes in turn the clue to the larger riddle of the Nixon majority.

Many of the characteristic habits of thought of the liberal consensus, and of the national media which had been so largely converted to that ideology, played their part in creating this confusion about the nature of American attitudes to the war. There was the media's tendency to generalize from examples. A student demonstration against the war at Berkeley, a second at Michigan and a third at Columbia became projected as an image of "youth in revolt against the war." Then there was the rhetorical exaggeration of liberal optimism. "Everyone," people under this influence liked to say, "goes to college in America now," when the fact was that less than half of the Americans born in any given year even started to attend any kind of college. And lastly there was the liberal myth of the abolition of class, the false egalitarianism that pretended that there was no difference between the young people who went to Berkeley, Michigan or Harvard, and those whose experience of college meant state colleges, or community colleges, or small denominational colleges, or other institutions which were largely untouched by the fervor against the war.

It is quite true that after the invasion of Cambodia in the spring of 1970, sentiment against the war spread rapidly to many colleges where there had been previously very little sign of dissent. It is also true that, even then, fewer than 30 per cent of the institutions of higher education in the United States were affected. There is a mass of evidence of the deep cultural divide, on the issue of the war and in fact on other issues too, between the leading universities, and particularly those with large graduate schools, on the one hand, and attitudes at smaller colleges and among young people who did not go to college at all.

In an article in *Scientific American* in June 1970, for example, Philip

Converse and Howard Schuman reported the results of one study of the difference between opinion at what they called "leading universities" and at other colleges. They grouped the respondents in the Survey Research Center's sample according to a rating of the quality of the university they attended, based on factors such as faculty salaries and information about the academic quality of students. This was their conclusion: "Throughout the entire period from 1964 to 1968, alumni of the smaller colleges"—by smaller, interestingly, Swarthmore and Oberlin notwithstanding, they meant "non-quality"—"although they came [eventually] to see the war as a mistake, clung to a harder line than even the non-college population. It is this constituency from smaller colleges more than any other that has served as the backbone of popular support." And of course, since there were far more students at "smaller colleges" than at "leading universities," this explains why, in spite of what was happening at Berkeley or Harvard, college students and recent graduates did not appear nearly so dovish in national surveys as one would expect. Before the silent majority, there were the forgotten students.

There were two classes of college, then, with different attitudes to the war. There were also two different classes of students in this respect.

A survey done by Daniel Yankelovitch for *Fortune* in January 1969 revealed this very clearly. Yankelovitch divided young people between eighteen and twenty-four into three groups in an ingenious way. One group consisted of those who didn't go to college at all. Those who did go to college were shown the two following statements and asked which came closer to their view:

- 1) "For me, college is mainly a practical matter. With a college education I can earn more money, have a more interesting career, and enjoy a better position in society."
- 2) "I'm not really concerned with the practical benefits of college. I suppose I take them for granted. College for me means something more intangible, perhaps the opportunity to change things rather than make out well within the existing system."

Those who preferred the first statement, Yankelovitch called the "practical-minded" students. The second group—there is a revealing value judgment concealed here—he called "the forerunners." The practical-minded students were more likely to come from blue-collar families—a third of them did—and more than half of them were enrolled in business, engineering or science programs, with clear vocational implications. Four out of five of the "forerunners" were in the arts or humanities, and only a quarter of them came from blue-collar families.

Not only, Yankelovitch found, were the "forerunner" students far

more likely to be doves, and correspondingly far less likely to be hawks, than either the "practical-minded" students or those who didn't go to college at all (actually, 47 per cent of the latter, 37 per cent of the "practical-minded" and only 20 per cent of the "forerunners" called themselves hawks); even more revealing were the different attitudes, indeed you could almost say the different cultures, that lay behind that bottom-line decision to be for or against the war.

The "forerunner" group was far more committed to bringing about change and far less committed to living "the good Christian life" than the other two groups. It was far more critical of parents and the older generation, far less inclined to identify with the middle class (a poignant point, since the "forerunners" were by definition members of the middle class, while the others, who were in danger of exclusion from it, clung to it). Only 17 per cent of those out of college, and 36 per cent of the "practical-minded" thought that draft resistance was justified under any circumstances; 67 per cent of the "forerunners" did. And the "forerunners" were far less likely to admit to feelings of patriotism and far more disposed to state, "There are worse things to fear politically than the threat of Communism," than those who did not go to college. In each case, the "practical-minded," hoping for "a better position in society," show up halfway between the two poles. They appear like so many poor souls in limbo trying to scramble out of the harsh realities and stern beliefs of the American working class into the loose, cool freedom of that upper-middle-class culture in which, not needing to "make out," a fellow could afford to think, with an idealism perhaps tinged with condescension, about "the opportunity to change things."

The contrast between the attitude toward the war of the more privileged students and that of other young people showed up also when such students were compared with a broad sample of the population. Again, the work was done at the University of Michigan, naturally enough, since it is both one of the two or three chief homes of public-opinion research and the cradle of the campus peace movement. In the summer of 1971 the university's Detroit Area Study asked a sample of the general population of the city and its surrounding suburbs not only whether they thought the war had been a mistake but also why. Their answers were then coded in terms of the main themes that respondents mentioned as reasons against U.S. intervention. These responses were then compared with those of students in three sociology classes at the university. The results were very striking. There were sharp differences between the students' views and those of the general Detroit population. And those differences followed a coherent and extremely suggestive pattern.

The students were far more likely than the Detroiters, for one thing,

to be concerned by Vietnamese as well as by American casualties. In the general sample, 73 per cent of those who mentioned war casualties as one of their reasons for thinking that the war had been a mistake, meant by that *American* casualties only. No less than 85 per cent of the students referred either to Vietnamese casualties in this context or to those on both sides.

Again, of those who argued that the United States should not have become involved because the conflict in Vietnam was a civil war, 84 per cent of the Detroiters turned out on further analysis to mean, "We should get out because *they* are causing *us* trouble," whereas 57 percent of the students thought the United States should get out because the war was a civil war and "*We* are causing *them* trouble."

Most revealing of all, only 11 per cent of the Detroit sample opposed the war on the grounds that U.S. policy in Vietnam was morally questionable. And of those, more than half (6 per cent) did so only in the sense that they asked in effect, "Who are we to say what is right there?" a type of response that might reflect isolationism or even racism, rather than moral doubt. More than a third of the students, on the other hand (35 per cent), said that their opposition to the war was based on what were classified as moral or politicomoral grounds, saying, for example, that the war was "imperialist" or simply "immoral." Again, more than three times as many of the students as of the Detroiters (10 per cent as against 3 per cent) cited negative feelings toward the government of South Vietnam among their reasons for opposing the war.

In all the whole period from 1964 to 1972, the most massive shift in public opinion against the war came after Tet. Two years later, there came news from South Vietnam which, if moral revulsion were the basis of such surges of antiwar feeling, ought to have set off an even more massive defection. Seymour Hersh broke the news of the My Lai massacre in February 1970. Its implications were just those which might most have been expected to disillusion those whose support for the war had survived Tet. My Lai meant that the distinction, on which the whole case for the war rested, between Viet Cong and villagers was even more tenuous than it had seemed. And it also meant that the ambiguities and frustrations of the war had damaged the morale and the discipline of the American military to the point where it was seriously doubtful whether they could still claim to be upholding the values of international law or democracy. Did the news of My Lai send a second seismic wave of opposition to the war through American public opinion? It did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, President Nixon, a few months later, saw and seized an opportunity to bid

for popularity by intervening on behalf of Lieutenant Calley, who had been found guilty of the massacre.

There were, in short, two oppositions to the war, one moral, the other pragmatic. The widespread popular disillusionment with the war from 1968 on, which showed up not only in public-opinion polls but also in support for "peace" candidates such as Robert Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy in the 1968 presidential primaries and George McGovern in 1972, came from people who were not even speaking the same language as those who organized those campaigns. The opposition to the war on the campuses of the great universities, among intellectuals, in the media, and even at the comparatively "grass roots" level of state and local leadership in political campaigns, reflected moral considerations. Whether because they sympathized with Vietnamese nationalism or because they believed America had no right to intervene or—which was most often the case—because they were horrified by what would have to be done, both to Vietnamese and to American society, if the war was to be won, those who shared the humanist, humanitarian culture of the American intelligentsia thought that the war was a crime.

To the great majority of Americans the war was worse than a crime, as a cynical Frenchman once said: it was a mistake. The swing of public opinion against the war did not mean that the peace movement had succeeded in achieving its dream of mass conversion. It reflected the cannily realistic judgment that winning the war didn't seem worth the price. Some measured that price in American lives, in boys they knew who had gone over there and not come back. Others measured it in squandered resources that would have been better spent at home: on economic problems and inflation. Others, again, thought in terms of the realization that the war was dangerously dividing the country and diverting its attention from more urgent priorities. No doubt the judgment also reflected the fact that the broad mass of public opinion had never embraced the stern joys of America's world role quite as wholeheartedly as the politicians, the intellectuals, and the cheerleaders of the liberal ideology in the media. It was at the point, in any case, where they could see that it was affecting their own lives that the majority of Americans made up their minds, pragmatically and, as usual, very sensibly, and certainly not out of any sense of moral guilt, that the war was a mistake.

By 1971 some two thirds of the American people had come to this conclusion. An unknown but very large proportion of them used another word for it. The war, as they saw it, was a "mess." The word was a refrain. It recurred again and again, in public opinion surveys, in *vox pop.* interviews on television, in ordinary conversations the length and breadth of America, in country clubs and corner taverns. Welfare was a mess, and the

cities were a mess, and nobody knew what to do about them. The war was a mess, and there at least the answer did not seem hard to find. It was past time to get out of it.

Few people realized it at the time, as the polls recorded higher and higher percentages against the war, but this mood was deeply ambivalent. Opposition to the war was spreading out from Berkeley and Cambridge, New York and Washington, into every corner of the country. But the farther you went, geographically and culturally, from those places, the smaller the proportion of moral compunction in that opposition and the larger the dose of sheer gruff impatience and irritation.

There was a good deal of academic consternation in 1968 when political scientists discovered that a high proportion of those who, in Indiana for example, had voted for Robert Kennedy in the primary, went on to vote for George Wallace in November. For the war was the great issue. How could you vote in May for a man who asked, "Are we like the God of the Old Testament that we can decide what hamlets in Vietnam are going to be destroyed?" and then vote in November for a man who said, "Pour it on . . . there's no sense in talking peace to that crowd until you've got 'em whipped"? From the logical perspective of political scientists or national political editors, that might be baffling and even perverse behavior, but from the standpoint of someone who didn't honestly much care what happened in Vietnam as long as it stopped affecting his life, it made a great deal of sense. And there were a great many such people.

In 1968 the Survey Research Center showed just how many. By a margin of roughly five to three, it found, people said they thought it had been a mistake to intervene in Vietnam in the first place. But by almost the same margin, they called for a "stronger stand," even if that meant invading North Vietnam! Almost as many of those who thought it had been a mistake to get involved wanted to get out by escalating the war as wanted to get out by simply withdrawing.

The same study documented another point of the greatest importance. Not only did ordinary people not turn against the war for the reasons that had made students and intellectuals rally to the peace movement; most of those who disliked the war, disliked the peace movement even more. The SRC asked people to evaluate a number of political groups and leaders on a scale that measured their feelings about them, from highly positive to highly negative. Reactions to "Vietnam war protesters" were by a wide margin the most negative shown toward any group. Three quarters of the sample reported negative feelings toward them, and the remarkably high proportion of one third went so far as to put the peace movement at the extreme negative point of the scale, a penalty box

rating that was rarely used for any other group. Most extraordinary of all: more than half even of those who themselves favored immediate and total withdrawal from Vietnam recorded negative feelings about those who publicly advocated this same position!

"The campus peace movement has . . . tended to assume," one study of public opinion and the war concluded, "that the 30 per cent or 40 per cent of the public [who wanted to get out of Vietnam as quickly as possible] are their devoted followers. Sad to say, the truth is very near the contrary."

Father Andrew Greeley, of the National Opinion Research Center, has elaborated on this feeling with all the understanding of a priest who knows the white "ethnic" neighborhoods of Chicago and perhaps shares some of the feelings he describes:

In the eyes of the white ethnic, "peace" has been identified as a "radical" cause. The ethnics want no part of contemporary radicalism, especially when it is advocated by long-haired college students. . . . However moral or virtuous the present radical movement may be, it has turned off between 60 per cent and 90 per cent of the American population. If the white ethnic is told in effect that to support peace he must also support the Black Panthers, women's liberation, widespread use of drugs, free love, campus radicals, Dr. Spock, long hair, and picketing clergymen, he may find it very difficult to put himself on the side of peace.

One may well ask, of course, who was purveying this misinformation to the people who believed it. It is an open question whether the Abbie Hoffmans or the Spiro Agnews were more assiduous in insisting that peace and drugs were inseparable. But that only goes to confirm Greeley's point. In any case, the most interesting part of Greeley's description is his insistence on a point that also emerges clearly from the survey data: the class basis of this hostility to the peace movement. True, Greeley is sufficiently steeped in the tradition that denies the importance of class in American society that he talks about "the white ethnic" rather than about the working class, and about "the Establishment" when another might write the bourgeoisie. But with these translations the class analysis could not be plainer if the passage had been written for Pravda:

From the point of view of the Polish television watcher on Milwaukee Avenue on the northwest side of Chicago, the long-haired militants and their faculty patrons are every bit as much part of the Establishment as are the presidents of corporations. . . . Richard Nixon, to some extent, and Spiro Agnew, to a very considerable extent, are anti-Establishment figures and someone like David Dellinger with his Yale degree is very much an Establishment personage. The protesters and the militants are the sons and daughters of the well-to-do.

. . . The peace movement is seen as very much of an Establishment movement, working against the values, the stability and the patriotism of the American masses, which masses incidentally are seen as footing the bill for Establishment games and amusements.

There were, then, after 1968, two movements in American opinion relative to the Vietnam War. Both worked in the same direction for some abrupt change in policy that would end the war. With an ill grace, they traveled the same road.

One movement—the one we usually call "the peace movement"—was numerically small though immensely influential. Its motivation was essentially moral; its basic attitude was that the war was not only unjustified, futile, dangerous, corrupting and wasteful, but that it was *wrong*. Its basic policy therefore was to end the war as soon as possible and at whatever cost. Ironically, since many of the founders and leaders of this movement were radicals and socialists who believed as a matter of faith in the potential radicalism and pacifism of the working class, in practice its appeal was almost exclusively to those who, whatever their family background or financial status, belonged in cultural terms to the upper-middle class.

The other movement was sprawling, inchoate, and so unorganized that it is taking a liberty with language to call it a movement at all. Its dominant tone was not idealistic but realistic. Its members were all those Americans, many tens of millions of them, who said—some stressing one reason, some another—"whatever we might like to think, let's stop kidding ourselves. This war is a mess, and it's got to stop." They were to be found in every socioeconomic class. But the largest number of them were to be found in the ranks of the working class. George Wallace, bidding for their support, talked about "this average man, this man in the textile mill, this man in the steel mill, this barber, the beautician, the policeman on the beat . . . and the little businessman," and that was a good list of some of the people who belonged to this movement, though Wallace could have added the farmer, the office worker, the engineering student at night school and the retired couple in Tampa or San Diego. Only a fraction of this movement was to respond to Wallace. Its chief heir and destined beneficiary was Richard Milhous Nixon.

In March 1968 a young conservative intellectual named Richard Whalen (best known up to then for a biography of President Kennedy's father) was taken onto Nixon's campaign staff to help formulate the candidate's policy and write his speeches on Vietnam. Already in early 1968 Nixon was being advised, by Melvin Laird in particular, that military victory might be impossible. After Tet he could see as well as anyone, and better than most, that the war was becoming increasingly unpopular. On

March 29, which was a Friday, Whalen was working with Nixon on putting the final touches to what was to be his first policy statement on Vietnam, which was to be taped the next day, Saturday. As Nixon thought aloud about Whalen's draft, Whalen made notes. Suddenly he found that his pen had stopped. The full implications of what Nixon had just said sank in:

I've come to the conclusion that there's no way to win the war. But we can't say that, of course. In fact, we have to seem to say the opposite, just to keep some degree of bargaining leverage.

According to Whalen, the speech was to have called for a summit meeting with the Soviet Union as the first step toward negotiating an end to the war in the context of general détente. It was never given, however. Within hours before he was to have gone to the studio to tape it, Nixon learned that President Johnson had taken network time for a speech of his own on Sunday night, March 31. That was the fateful night when Johnson announced his decision not to run for re-election. Nixon promptly cancelled his own speech, and from then on until the campaign was over and he had entered the White House, he adroitly kept silence on the specifics of his Vietnam policy.

A few days after the inauguration, he was talking to National Security Council staff in the White House when he suddenly turned to Henry Kissinger and said, "You and I are going to end this war." At that moment in time, the lengthy process of hammering out in detail how it would be done had only just begun. There had been position papers, written by Kissinger and other experts while Nixon and his advisers were still at the Hotel Pierre in New York, between election and inauguration. They spelled out every option, from immediate withdrawal to massive escalation. There had been the NSSM-1 study, based on a questionnaire sent around the departments, brainchild of Daniel Ellsberg. And on January 25 there was a formal meeting of the National Security Council, at which the decision was taken to withdraw U.S. troops from Vietnam, not immediately but gradually, and to withdraw them unilaterally, in advance of negotiations with Hanoi.

That was only the first signpost to a rough and winding road. It would be almost four years before Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger had discovered exactly how the war could in fact be ended, and on what terms. It would take secret diplomacy of Byzantine ingenuity, and some disingenuousness. It would take public showmanship, and the discovery of a real, if limited, harmony of interest, at summit meetings in Moscow and Peking. It would take the discreet help of the Communist superpowers themselves. The conflicting but convergent interests of the Soviet Union

and China, the fears of Saigon and the stubborn will of Hanoi, the suspicions of the Pentagon and the impatience of the American electorate—all had to be fitted into that improvised formula. And still it would take years of ambiguous action and dogged killing in Indochina; open troop withdrawal and secret escalation of the air war; the rundown of the draft to disarm the peace movement and the extension of the war to Laotian and Cambodian sanctuaries; the frequent deception of Congress, and the American people, and the South Vietnamese ally; years of "Vietnamization," and then a climactic application of American strategic air power: it would take all that before the war could be ended or, rather, before American withdrawal could be portrayed as the end of the war.

The purpose had been there in Nixon's and Kissinger's minds all along. It was rooted in three conclusions, which their very different minds both found inescapable. First, the American people wanted the war ended. Second, the war could not be "won." Third, the war dare not be "lost." Those simple rules defined the limits within which Nixon could maneuver to keep American political support in line for whatever solution Kissinger could negotiate, and within which Kissinger could find a solution that would be politically acceptable to American public opinion. Those rules had been laid down by the emergence of three clear majorities in American public opinion after Tet: a majority that held that it had been a mistake to get involved in Vietnam in the first place, a majority who wanted that involvement ended, and an even larger majority that rejected the peace movement's policy of immediate and unconditional withdrawal.

In 1968, in the mysterious way in which two hundred million people contrive to communicate their dominant mood, the American people had spoken. It was public opinion that laid down the terms on which Richard Nixon had to find an end to the war. In so doing, public opinion, the new voice of the American majority, had brought a whole era of foreign policy to an end.

Nixon's own personal predilections, of course, were those of a hard-line anti-Communist. In 1966 he had said, "This is a war which has to be fought to prevent World War III," and until 1968 there was little evidence to suggest that he thought in terms of anything short of military victory. But if he stood at the right-hand end of the foreign-policy consensus, he did not stand outside it. There were differences of nuance and style, but not differences of substance, between his position on the war and those of President Kennedy, President Johnson and the other liberal Democrats who had helped to deepen the American involvement.

When it spoke out for an end to the war not at any price but as a more urgent national goal than victory, the new voice of the American

majority rejected the old consensus on foreign policy, which had for some years largely ignored the opinion of the majority or, rather, taken its continued support for granted. Even more decisively, as we have seen, the majority had also rejected the radical alternative as proposed by the peace movement.

It would be natural to attribute this evolution of majority opinion on the war to the specific history of Vietnam, in isolation from what was happening in the U.S.A. But to do so would be to fail to explain the fact that, at exactly the same time, the same shift was taking place in opinion on domestic issues. There, too, a new majority simultaneously rejected the liberal program for perfecting society, and resisted the radical attack on that program. It is time, therefore, to take a closer look at the mood and composition of that new majority.

PART IV