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The Shadow of War - The Substance of Peace - Yeshiva University

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VIET NAM AND CHINA

THE SHADOW OF WAR--THE SUBSTANCE OF PEACE

I welcome the opportunity to share this day with the Class of 1966. For the most part, you are among the last to have been born during World War II. Hence, you are among the first to have received the pledge of peace of the United Nations in 1945. The preamble to the Charter, you will recall, contains this solemn statement of purpose: "To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."

The pledge has stood for twenty-one years. Commencement addresses this year might well ponder the adequacy of its fulfillment. It is a fitting theme for graduating classes, not only in the United States, but in the Soviet Union, China, France, Britain, and elsewhere.

The Class of 1966 has been witness, since birth, not to a growing peace in the world, but to a procession of crises and conflicts. This class has come to maturity in an atmosphere which for two decades has been heavy with war and the threat of war. This class graduates directly into the face of the bitter war in Viet Nam.

Yet the words remain: "To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."

The detonation of the first atomic bomb gave to these words a great fervor in 1945. The pledge is even more compelling two decades later. Today, nuclear weapons, thousands of times more powerful, are stocked in the arsenals not only of the United States, but of the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France and, perhaps now, China.

At this moment in time, peace is more than an ideal and a hope. It is a universal and urgent human necessity.

The problem of peace is the great preoccupation of the President and of the Senate. It is a problem, unfortunately, which grows more, not less, difficult with each passing day. Indeed, with respect to Viet Nam, we have scarcely begun to delineate the path to peace. We have yet, after extraordinary efforts, to begin to devise a formula for the resolution of the conflict.

During the past year, the effort has been made to end the war by waging more war and it has not succeeded. For a time, the effort was made to end the war by waging less war and that, too, did not succeed. The President has pursued negotiations in public. He has searched for them in private. He has sought a conference on peace on every highway and by-way of international diplomacy.

But peace remains elusive. The end of the war in Viet Nam is not in sight. The question of Viet Nam continues to command our most persevering thought. It continues to demand a most honest, restrained and thorough public discussion.

We owe an unremitting search for a peaceful solution in Viet Nam to the young Americans who have gone and who will go to that tortured land. We owe it to the Vietnamese people who have suffered from the war

in great multitudes and beyond imagining. We owe it to our individual consciences and to the collective conscience of the nation.

Therefore, I address your attention, today, to the problem of peace in Viet Nam. I ask you to consider this problem in the context of the limbo in which, for more than a decade and a half, have reposed the relations between China and the United States. The two questions--peace in Viet Nam and peace with China--are very closely interrelated, if not, indeed, inseparable.

In a direct military sense, it is true that China is not presently involved in Viet Nam. We have, in fact, bent every effort to assure the Chinese that we mean them no harm and that we have no desire to share this conflict in Viet Nam with them. We have, in short, sought to avoid military engagement with China and, except in accident, so far have avoided it.

Nevertheless, China is involved in Viet Nam. Chinese participation is largely indirect, but it is nevertheless a real participation. It takes the form of encouragement of Hanoi and the National Liberation Front in the south. It includes the supply of war materials which are used against Americans and other supporting assistance.

There is also already an element of direct Chinese participation in Viet Nam. Large Chinese labor battalions are at work along the overland routes which come into North Viet Nam from China. Americans have been shot at and shot down by China, as the war in the air over North Viet Nam has skirted the Chinese borders. That is the sort of involvement which already prevails. There is every probability, moreover, that the longer the war goes on, the greater will become the extent of Chinese participation. As time goes on, an escalating war tends to take on its own relentlessness. One-by-one the hatches of avoidance shut down for all concerned.

If the Chinese are linked ever more tightly to the continuance of the war in Viet Nam, it seems to me that they are also tied inextricably to the question of peace in that nation and in Asia as a whole. I shall consider those matters, however, later in my remarks. Let me turn, first, to the inner problems of Viet Nam.

Events of the past few weeks lend to the war an air of bewildering ambiguity. It is not surprising that they engender a great deal of confusion and uncertainty in this nation.

We are engaged in war against the North Vietnamese, the Viet Cong, and the National Liberation Front of the south. But the elements of leadership in South Viet Nam who have the greatest stake in that effort are engaged in a quasi-war amongst themselves. This inner conflict has produced pressures for instability in the south which have little to do with the war in which we are engaged. In the light of these pressures, it is unrealistic to describe the situation in South Viet Nam in a clear-cut ideological context. It has never been, in fact, that kind of simple situation.

To view the conflict as wholly one of an aggression of the north against the south also does not do adequate justice to the perplexing realities of Viet Nam. The war is more than a clash between two nations or hostile strangers. It is also a rending of long associated cultures, north, central and south, which contain relatives, friends and enemies for whom the 17th parallel is a division of dubious significance and durability.

It is illustrative, in this connection, to note that the leader of North Viet Nam, Ho Chi Minh, was born much farther south in Viet Nam

than the present leader of South Viet Nam, General Nguyen Cao Ky. Ho Chi Minh, the communist, was educated extensively in what is now anti-communist South Viet Nam, while Nguyen Cao Ky, the anti-communist, received his training in what is now communist North Viet Nam. And if that leaves you confused, think for a moment what it must do to the Vietnamese people who must live with the confusion.

What I am suggesting by this digression is that while Viet Nam may be two Houses in conflict, it is at the same time one House not only divided, but also united in many ways. What I am suggesting, too, is that events of the past few weeks represent the surfacing of but a few of the complex difficulties of the Vietnamese situation.

It seems to me that these difficulties have grown more intractable and the solutions more difficult since the tragic assassination of President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963. Coup has followed coup until the count has been lost. In the process, the leadership of South Viet Nam has been sundered and weakened, the rivalries have grown, the mutual antipathies have increased. And, in the process, the Vietnamese people have suffered greatly in consequence of these developments as well as from the war.

In all frankness, so, too, has this nation suffered from these developments. The instability amongst the South Vietnamese leaders has meant a steady increase in our involvement in Viet Nam, and especially our military role. There is no question that the Armed Services of the United States have provided a growing margin of power without which a Republic of Viet Nam could not have survived. To them has fallen the task of filling the defensive gap left by the growing strains on the South Vietnamese authorities. On them has fallen the principal burden

of meeting the increased military pressures from the north. These tasks which have been assigned to them by the nation's policies have been discharged with great dedication and at great personal sacrifice.

The increase in the American effort in Viet Nam has been and will continue to be very costly. During the past year and a half, our ground forces commitment has grown from about 25,000 to 267,000. By year's end, this figure will be much higher. The deployment of American naval and air power has been of a very great magnitude. It has brought to bear on Viet Nam the impact of tens of thousands of additional highly trained men who have unleashed a level of destructive power which may approach or even surpass that which was set loose during the Korean war.

At the beginning of 1965, the United States forces were incurring casualties at the rate of about 6 per week. Now, upwards of 500 Americans are killed and wounded each week. For the past five or six weeks in succession, the casualty rate for Americans has surpassed that of the South Vietnamese armed forces.

In monetary terms, the current cost of Viet Nam to the United States has been estimated at an annual rate in the neighborhood of $13 billion and is continuing to rise. In early 1965, the costs were perhaps $1 or $2 billion.

I wish that I could tell you that this powerful injection of American resources had brought the war nearer to a conclusion. But I can only repeat what I said at the outset of my remarks:, the end of the war in Viet Nam is not in sight.

It has been suggested of late--perhaps inferred is more accurate--that the war can be ended quickly by a further expansion of the American military effort and, particularly, by more and better-placed bombing. That is an appealing suggestion, and I have no doubt that it will be heard more frequently between now and November. It wraps up, in one simple thought, a criticism of the present political leadership, a promise of a less painful war, an expectation of victory at a relatively small increase in cost. In short, it suggests that there is an easy exist. Let us underscore one point, here, today: There are easy ways to plunge more deeply into this situation; there are no easy ways out of this situation.

I have just illustrated the extraordinary expansion of the American military effort--including bombing--in the past year and a half. Before going further along that path, it would seem to me that we have a great responsibility to pause and, first, consider carefully the point to which this path has led. I can assure you that the politically responsible leadership of the nation in the person of the President is not unmindful of this responsibility. There is, indeed, a most profound concern as to where this course has led and where it may yet lead.

When the sharp increase in the American military effort began in early 1965, it was estimated that only about 400 North Vietnamese soldiers were among the enemy forces in the south which totalled 140,000 at that time. Today, the overall size of the enemy in the south has increased to 250,000 of whom at least 30,000--a very conservative estimate--are considered to be North Vietnamese regulars. One source suggests that if local Viet Cong battalions which operate within their own provinces

are excluded from the total, the northerners make up approximately one-half of the disciplined professional enemy soldiers in South Viet Nam and may well constitute two-thirds by year's end.

Shortly after the outset of the expansion of the military effort, it was believed that about 1,500 North Vietnamese were crossing the border each month. Just a few months ago, the maximum potential infiltration was thought to be about 4,500 per month. But infiltration has recently been reported in the press to be at a current rate well in excess of this figure.

The field of battle was confined largely to South Viet Nam when the expansion of our military effort began. Air and sea bombardment has now extended the arena of conflict throughout almost all of North Viet Nam. The war has spread sharply into Laos. More and more, it verges on Cambodia and threatens to spill over into Thailand. And as I have already mentioned, American planes have been shot at and shot down on or across the borders of China.

Whatever constructive achievement has resulted from this expansion, the fact must also be faced that the search for peace by intensification of war has begotten, not peace, but a further intensification of war. The expansion of the arena of conflict has yielded, not peace, but further expansion of the arena of conflict.

Is the war, then, to continue to intensify? Is Viet Nam--north and south--to be reduced to a charnel house amidst smoking, silent ruins? Indeed, is that to be the fate of great areas of Southeast Asia and regions beyond?

Experience requires us to recognize that this danger exists in the conflict. Prudence compels us to recognize, moreover, that the terminal point may not be reached until and unless the war has involved China directly. That possibility, it seems to me, should be faced sooner rather than later. We should examine it, now, while there is yet time to examine it in good sense and soberness. We should examine it, now, rather than wait until the actuality is confronted in the heat of some accident, miscalculation or misunderstanding or at the end of that long drift which ends in inescapable military convergence.

Certainly, the experience of Korea counsels us to examine this question without delay and, in so doing, to lay aside the distorting prism of wishful thinking. It will be recalled that a war between Koreans--north and south--a decade and a half ago, became in the end what few expected at the beginning. It became, substantially, a war between the United States and China. And you will recall, too, that in the end peace was not restored to Korea by victory but by a truce which required the agreement of the United States and China.

The question must be asked here as well as in Peking. It must be asked now. Can peace be restored in Southeast Asia, as it was not in Northeast Asia, before, rather than after, a military clash? Can there be a turning off from the course of collision and onto the road of settlement before, rather than after, the crash?

I can give you no assurances on these questions. The answers depend not only on our wisdom and restraint but also on that of the Chinese. I can only stress to you that the relentless search for affirmative answers is a most solemn responsibility which rests especially upon

the leadership of this nation and of China but concerns also the United Nations, the Geneva powers, and the entire world.

There is little doubt that this search is hampered by the long hiatus in United States relations with China. It is a decade and a half since the Chinese revolution and the Korean conflict which followed it. In all these years, little of consequence was done to close the deep void which these shattering events blasted between the peoples of the two nations. On the contrary, the seeds of hostility and suspicion were scattered widely and in both countries. The weeds of a mutual distrust were encouraged to grow high in both countries. The direct human contact between the world's most populous nation and the world's most powerful was reduced to formal and routine meetings in Warsaw between an American and a Chinese Ambassador which, over the years, have averaged out to about one a month.

In the last few weeks members of the Administration have sought to make clear in public statements that this nation seeks to restore some "bridges" to China. That is a helpful initiative. It is also useful to lower our rigid self-imposed travel and other barriers which the Executive Branch is now doing.

These acts accord with the nation's interest and they are most certainly meaningful gestures in the direction of peace. That the Chinese greet these efforts with unabated hostility does not change their validity. In the present state of Chinese-United States relations, all acts are suspect. All doubts are magnified. All fears are exaggerated. These acts, nevertheless, remain proper and modest acts which may one day redound to the benefit of both nations. That is all they are and they ought not to be regarded as anything more.

They do not, certainly, go to the core of the current danger which lies in Viet Nam and Southeast Asia. Indeed, the relevance of these acts must necessarily remain dubious, at least until that danger is faced and begins to abate.

What is needed most, at this time and in the light of that danger, is an initiative for a direct contact between the Peking government and our own government on the problem of peace in Viet Nam and Southeast Asia. This problem is of such transcendent importance, it seems to me, that it is a fit question for face-to-face discussion between China and the United States at the highest practicable level. Our Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, confronted the Chinese Foreign Minister, Chen Yi, across the Conference table at Geneva in 1961-62. It may be that a similar meeting now would be useful in this critical situation.

The meeting could be confined to the two nations, or it could include all the belligerents in Viet Nam. It could include the nations of the Southeast Asian mainland since they all lie in the swath of the war's spreading devastation. It seems to me that there are many possible and acceptable alternatives insofar as participation and arrangement are concerned.

The membership and mechanics of the conference are not key issues. History will not be gentle with those who pursue the shadow and evade the substance of peace. It will not view with sympathy those who stand too much on ceremony or who insist too much on face as the price of coming to grips with its profound problems.

An Asian conference, at this time, cannot draw a distinction between victor and vanquished in this conflict, any more than it was possible to do so in the Korean settlement. All win by peace; all lose by the war's continuance.

What a conference at this time must be concerned with is, in the first instance, a curb on the expansion of the war and a prompt and durable termination of the tragic bloodletting in Viet Nam.

It must be concerned with insuring a choice free of coercion of any kind to the people of South Viet Nam over their future and on the question of the reunification of Viet Nam.

It must be concerned with how the independence and the territorial integrity, not only of Viet Nam, but of other small nations of Southeast Asia can be safeguarded in peace.

It must be concerned, finally, with how foreign bases and foreign military forces can be promptly withdrawn and excluded from Viet Nam and other parts of the Southeast Asian mainland.

These are fundamental questions. Answers to these questions must begin to be found. And, in the last analysis, they must be concurred in by China and the United States. Those are the essentials if the conflict in Viet Nam is to end and if a reasonable and stable peace is to be established in Southeast Asia.

Let me make clear that I am not sanguine as to the possibilities that these questions will be faced in conference in the near future. Even less is it to be expected that answers to these questions are going to be found very quickly. The chasms are deep. The walls are high.

Nevertheless, at some point, these questions will have to be faced and answers will have to be found. It seems to me that we must continue to try to take those first faltering steps toward peace in Asia. We must try to take them, now, before the tragedy, which is Viet Nam, is compounded many times over. That is the great responsibility. It rests on the Chinese. It rests on this nation. It rests, finally, on all the nations of the world.