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A Theory of Just War and Its Application to the American War in Vietnam

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

A THEORY OF JUST WAR AND ITS APPLICATION
TO THE AMERICAN WAR IN VIETNAM

A THESIS, SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The days from January 29 to March 31, 1968, mark the Tet Offensive, the most significant period of time in the American war in Vietnam. It will be one purpose of this paper to explain this great irony: what was a military victory for the American forces should have signaled to American leaders that the war in Vietnam was unwinnable. Another purpose of this paper will be to demonstrate that, because the war was not winnable at a price America was willing to pay, and because our leaders could reasonably have been expected to understand this after the Tet offensive, all American forces should have been immediately withdrawn from Vietnam at that time. Our failure to immediately withdraw after Tet cost the American and Vietnamese people another five years of war, and did nothing to alter the final outcome of the struggle.

It is clear that, looking back in 1990, our war in Vietnam did not achieve its objective: saving South Vietnam from Communist aggression. What this thesis will attempt to argue is that among several alternative courses of action, the course of action America chose caused more harm, death, and unhappiness than other alternatives would have caused.

This thesis will argue that the war in its entirety was morally wrong because it simply did more harm than good to both Vietnam and America.

However, I will argue that this result was not easily foreseen by a rational American government in 1964, on the basis of the evidence available to it. Therefore, while I will argue that the war in its entirety was immoral, I will also argue that from the our perspective in 1964 the decision to wage war was at least rational. I will define a rational decision as a decision which, on the basis of the available evidence, can be reasonably expected to produce the best consequences.

The crux of my argument, however, is that after the Tet Offensive, it ought to have been clear to a rational American government that the objectives it sought could not be achieved. It should have been apparent that more war would only bring more pain and death to Vietnam and America. Therefore, on the basis of the available evidence in 1968, the only morally correct decision would have been to withdraw immediately.

To summarize the objectives of this thesis, I wish to show that our entire war in Vietnam was immoral. I also wish to show that in 1964, our decision to wage war could be said to be rational, but that by 1968, our decision to continue to wage war was clearly irrational.

The theoretical framework of this paper will be explicitly utilitarian. The utilitarian must not simply

evaluate the actual consequences of an historical act when evaluating its morality. To do so is to get only half of the philosophical story. To get the other half, the philosopher must evaluate the action from the perspective of an agent seeking to perform that act which, given the available evidence, was the act which could have been reasonably expected to have the best consequences. In this paper, I will seek to uncover both halves of the moral dilemma that was our war in Vietnam.

To do so, I will first need to explain and defend the utilitarian moral framework within which I will place the American war in Vietnam. In the first chapter of this thesis I will do so, paying special attention to J.J.C. Smart's distinction between that which is 'rational' and that which is 'morally right'. His distinction plays an important role in this paper.

In the second chapter of this thesis the real objectives of this paper, which were introduced above, will be fully developed.

CHAPTER 2

UTILITARIANISM AND A THEORY OF JUST WAR

Traditionally, ethical theories have been classified as either teleological or deontological. Teleological theories hold that it is solely the consequences of a given action which determine its moral rightness or wrongness. Deontological theories argue that the rightness or wrongness of an action can be determined by understanding factors other than the consequences of the action, such as the nature of the act itself, or the motive of the agent. Utilitarianism as it is usually understood is a teleological ethical theory wherein the consequences of an action are evaluated as to whether or not they tend to maximize happiness.

Perhaps the best known formulation of the utilitarian principle is Mill's essay, Utilitarianism. Mill saw a need for a first principle of ethics, a standard by which an act might be judged to be morally right or wrong. The standard he found was utility.

"The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals 'utility' or the 'greatest happiness principle' holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence

of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure."¹

Implicit in hedonistic utilitarian theory is the idea that the good, happiness, and pleasure are equivalent. I will assume a quantitative, hedonistic form of act utilitarianism for the purposes of this thesis. It will hopefully become clear, as I explain the specific features of my theory of just war, that the central arguments of this thesis will work within the framework of any plausible theory of value.

For the quantitative hedonistic act-utilitarian the good and happiness (as pleasure) are one. According to Thomas Hearn, "Utilitarianism is the teleological theory which asserts that of the possible acts in a given situation one should perform the one which will bring about the most good for the most number of people."² According to Mill, it is the sum total of happiness that the utilitarian ought to seek to maximize. "The utilitarian standard is... the greatest amount of happiness altogether."³ In a general sense, then, I will assume that actions that maximize happiness maximize the good.

Those who sacrifice their own pleasure for the sake of others (martyrs, for instance) do so because they increase the total amount of happiness in the world. Mill's utilitarianism recognizes the power of humans to sacrifice their own good for the benefit of others, and recognizes acts of sacrifice as morally right if and only if they increase

the amount of happiness in the world.⁴ It might be clearer, then, if we amend Hearn's statement to say, 'One should perform the act which will bring about the greatest net total of happiness.' Mill explained that it is not simply the agent's own happiness the utilitarian must seek. The utilitarian must be a disinterested agent, in that he must act so that the greatest amount of happiness is achieved by a particular act. If that means that the agent, or another individual, must suffer for the greatest amount of happiness to be achieved, so be it. The utilitarian has no choice but to perform the action which produces the greatest sum total of happiness.

A difficult question presents itself to the utilitarian. What, exactly, does it mean to be happy? What is the nature of the happiness a utilitarian seeks? No philosopher has ever given a conclusive answer to that question. However, different forms of utilitarianism have developed different ideas of what it means to be happy.

J.J.C. Smart explained two forms of utilitarianism in his essay, "An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics." In general terms, it seems that happiness for the hedonistic utilitarian is pleasure. For the quantitative hedonistic utilitarian, all forms of pleasure can make us equally happy. All pleasures of equal quality or intensity are equally valuable. For the ideal utilitarian, however, some states of mind, such as learning, are intrinsically valuable apart from their pleasantness. Viewing quality art, for instance, would

have greater value than a sensuous pleasure for the ideal utilitarian. For the hedonistic utilitarian, however, it is simply the pleasure itself which makes us happy. Happy people, for this type of utilitarianism, have a favorable balance of pleasure and pain. The amount of pleasure, its intensity combined with its duration, is equal to the amount of happiness received.⁵

Mill's unique sort of utilitarianism is difficult to place within these definitions. For Mill, certain forms of pleasure are more valuable or desirable than others. These types of pleasures are more valuable for Mill simply because they give us more happiness. The pleasures Mill refers to as the more valuable are those which are separate from the 'animal appetites'. Animals are content to eat, sleep, and reproduce; these activities give animals pleasure and therefore give them a certain level of happiness. Humans need these pleasures, but if restricted to these animal pleasures alone, we will not be truly happy. We also need the "pleasures of the intellect, of feelings and imagination, and of moral sentiments" to be happy as human beings.⁶ Once we experience these pleasures, we cannot simply be content in the lower pleasures. "Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites and, when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification."⁷

Mill claims that those humans who have been exposed to both the animal and the distinctly human types of pleasures

will indicate a preference for the latter. For this reason the higher pleasures are more valuable. Once we have known the higher pleasures, Mill argues, we cannot be truly happy without them. And, given a choice between the two, those who have experienced both will choose the higher.⁸

It must be mentioned that, according to Smart's definition, Mill is not an ideal utilitarian. The higher pleasures of the mind are valuable for Mill because they make us happy. According to Smart, the ideal utilitarian holds that certain experiences are valuable apart from their tendency to give us pleasure and happiness. Mill, however, does distinguish between the bodily pleasures and the mental pleasures in that the latter are more desirable and valuable. The quantitative hedonistic utilitarian will not admit that different types of pleasures of equal intensity and duration have different value. It is this latter sort of utilitarianism that I will assume for the purposes of this thesis.

Forms of happiness were not Mill's main concern, however. His main concern was that the end of all actions which are morally right be happiness in general. "The ultimate end... is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments."⁹

Just as utilitarians have different notions of what is intrinsically valuable and ought to be maximized, utilitarians also have different notions of how to evaluate the consequences of actions. An act utilitarian will wish to

evaluate only the specific consequences of a specific action when determining that actions moral worth. According to J.J.C. Smart, act utilitarianism is, "The view that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends only on the total goodness or badness of its consequences."¹⁰ In order to evaluate an action under act utilitarian principles, one simply evaluates whether or not the act has maximized happiness. If the act has maximized the amount of happiness in the world, or minimized the pain, then that act was morally right. If the act resulted in less happiness, or more pain, then the act was wrong.

Opposed to the view that the rightness of an action depends of that action producing a state of maximum happiness, rule utilitarianism states this: the rightness or wrongness of an action is to be judged by the goodness or badness of the consequences of a rule that would require everyone to perform a like action under like circumstances. Rule utilitarianism is a restricted form of utilitarianism in that under this theory, acts are judged not as to whether or not they specifically promoted the greater good, but as to whether or not they follow a rule which promotes the greatest good. It is clearly utilitarianism, though, because an act must be performed only if, "uniform acceptance of a corresponding rule would maximize expectable utility."¹¹ Rule utilitarianism does not simply evaluate an action by asking whether or not it conforms to a rule. The act, under rule utilitarianism, is not only right or wrong by virtue of

the rule it follows, but also by virtue of the utility of everyone's conforming to that rule.

The distinction between rule and act utilitarianism stated in general terms is this: act utilitarianism evaluates the consequences of specific actions, while rule utilitarianism evaluates the consequences of everyone's obeying a certain rule or set of rules. If the general welfare and happiness is to be promoted by the breaking of a rule, then it is clear that under act utilitarian principles, the rule ought to be broken.

It is an unfortunate consequence of act utilitarianism that it seems to work best in hindsight. After an act has been done, one can evaluate its consequences and decide on its rightness or wrongness. However, a utilitarian must often make a decision on which act to choose from among the available alternatives in order to maximize future happiness. It seems clear that as utilitarians, we ought to choose that action which seems likely, given the available evidence, to secure the greatest expectable sum total of happiness.

We cannot predict future consequences of actions with complete certainty, but we can attempt to understand the situation as we would reasonably expect it to unfold, given the evidence, if various alternative actions were done. The utilitarian simply chooses that action which can be reasonably expected at the time to be most likely to maximize utility. That which is maximized is expected utility. The expected utility of an action is the amount of good an action

can reasonably be expected to produce, given the available evidence. According to J.J.C. Smart, "All we can do is to assign various probabilities to the various possible effects of an action."¹²

It is quite possible for an action to seem morally good according to utilitarian principles before the action is done, but later to be proven wrong according to the same utilitarian principles. This is inevitable, given the fact that humans cannot foresee the future. Smart recommends that we use the term "rational" to describe an action which, on the available evidence, seems likely to maximize happiness. He also recommends that we use the term "right" to describe an action which truly does maximize happiness.¹³

It seems to me that this distinction is important when evaluating historical events. The utilitarian must not simply evaluate the real consequences of the historical act (as far as they can be determined) when evaluating its morality. I believe that to do so is to get only half of the philosophical story. To get the other half, the philosopher must evaluate the action from the perspective of the agent facing several alternatives.

At this point it will be necessary to make a terminological distinction. Looking backwards at an action, one can determine its real consequences. From our perspective in 1990, we can look back on America's years in Vietnam and get a reasonably clear picture of the real consequences of our actions in that country during those

years. By evaluating these consequences, we can determine the real utility of our actions in Vietnam. However, in the year 1964, it was only possible to make an educated approximation about the consequences of our future actions. Faced with a set of alternative actions, and a set of probable consequences corresponding to those actions, America was forced to choose. In 1964, America chose the course of action which seemed most likely to have the best probable consequences, and therefore have the greatest expected utility. On utilitarian grounds, given the fact that an agent reasonably expects on the basis of the available evidence that a certain action will give the best consequences, the agent ought to perform that act. "If doing 'A' has, among all the things 'X' can do, the maximum net expectable utility, then it is 'X's' duty to do 'A'."14

The expected utility of an action differs, then, from the real utility of an action by virtue of the perspective from which the act is viewed. Real utility can be determined by looking backwards at the real action and its real consequences. Expected utility can only be determined by examining, on the basis of all available evidence, what the probable consequences of a given action among a set of alternative actions will be.

Unfortunately, it must be admitted that we only know the actual consequences of one alternative action in any given historical situation. We can make educated guesses at what the actual consequences of other alternatives might have

been. These guesses, however educated, do remain at the level of informed conjecture. We will never know what the actual consequences of not supporting South Vietnam militarily might have been, but we are in a position to make an informed guess as to what the actual consequences would have been. This difficulty is not just a problem for my thesis, though. It is a methodological difficulty for anyone who makes moral judgements regarding historical events.

At the start of this Chapter I noted that ethical theories have traditionally been defined as either teleological or deontological. To repeat, teleological theories hold that it is solely the consequences of a given action which determine its moral rightness or wrongness. Deontological theories argue that the rightness or wrongness of an action can be determined by understanding factors other than consequences, such as the nature of the act itself, or the motives of the agent. W.D. Ross, in The Right and the Good, has developed a deontological moral system which might be seen as challenging the utilitarian morality. It is not my intention in this paper to exhaustively examine Ross's theory of what makes an act right or wrong. Nor is it my intention to show conclusively that utilitarianism is a better moral theory. What I will attempt to do is to point out what, from the utilitarian perspective, are two important weaknesses in Ross's moral system.

Ross's system centers on his list of Prima Facie moral duties. These duties are guidelines we must consult before

we make a moral judgement. A Prima Facie duty is a duty which, all things being equal, we have an obligation to uphold in action. For Ross, one who acts rightly does so without ultimate regard for the total consequences of the act, but simply because he recognizes a duty, an obligation, to do the right thing. "When a man fulfills a promise because he thinks he ought to do so, it seems clear that he does so with no thought of its total consequences... What makes him think it right to act in a certain way is the fact that he has promised to do so."¹⁵ This situation, for Ross, has moral relevance in that making a promise obligates one to keep that promise. All things being equal, one has a moral duty to uphold the Prima Facie duties in action. For Ross, it is self-evident that in circumstances where one of these duties clearly applies and there are no conflicting duties of greater moral importance, the morally right act is that act which conforms to the corresponding duty.

Quickly summarized, these are Ross's moral duties: 1) To keep a promise, and to right one's wrongful acts; 2) To return "services" given; 3) To distribute happiness according to merit; 4) To benefit others where possible; 5) To improve one's self where possible; 6) To avoid injuring others.¹⁶

There are often situations, Ross admits, where these duties conflict. Our actual duty cannot be determined until all the circumstances have been determined. In situations where the Prima Facie duties conflict, our actual duty will

be that Prima Facie duty which is most important. "Besides the duty of fulfilling promises I have and recognize a duty of relieving distress, and when I think it right to do the latter at the cost of not doing the former it is... because I think it the duty which is in the circumstances more of a duty."17 The actual duty will always be a Prima Facie duty for Ross, and it may override a different Prima Facie duty. An act will be right for Ross if it conforms to the most appropriate or important Prima Facie duty.

The fact that Ross's duties appear to him as self-evident does not mean that they will appear to a utilitarian as self-evident. Dr. Carson writes, "Mill and other utilitarians do not think that it is self-evident that [certain] acts are Prima Facie wrong."18 The usually accepted definition of self-evidence indicates that truths which are self-evident will be accepted without question by virtue of their own powers. The fact that reasonable thinkers could disagree regarding the self-evidence of Prima Facie duties indicates that they are only true insofar as they are accepted by those who agree with Ross. For this reason, utilitarians argue, the truth of Prima Facie duties is provided by their adherents, not by the duties themselves.

The type of acts Ross would claim to be self-evidently Prima Facie wrong are acts which break those duties. For instance, for Ross it is Prima Facie wrong to break a promise. However, breaking a promise may be permitted if it fulfills the Prima Facie duty to help others, and if it has

been determined that under a certain set of circumstances the duty to help others is 'more of a duty' than is the duty to keep a promise. Even though breaking the promise is permitted, for Ross breaking the promise is still Prima Facie wrong. For the utilitarian, though, if breaking the promise serves the greater good, then breaking the promise is right in all senses, not simply permitted. Utilitarians consider no acts right or wrong apart from their consequences. Until the consequences (probable or real) are understood, the utilitarian reserves judgement on the act.

It seems to the utilitarian that in almost all conceivable moral dilemmas, the duty to benefit others and the duty not to harm others ought to carry the greater moral weight. The problem the utilitarian has with Ross in this case is that Ross provides no real mechanism for ranking duties in order of importance. For the utilitarian, it is not enough for Ross to simply say that, in a given situation, the duty to help others is more important than the duty to improve myself because... I think it is so. What is to prevent the Rossian from reversing himself in the next situation, thinking the duty to improve himself 'more of a duty'? To rely on intuitions to solve disputes between other intuitions is surely to invite moral inconsistency.

The utilitarian avoids this philosophical trap by providing a mechanism to mediate between intuitions. He simply works to maximize the good. This is the end of ethics for the utilitarian. Ross's deontology has no such end; it

is simply a mess of intuitions, none of which are any more important than any other, save for the whims of the agent.

For Ross, however, utilitarianism can lead to absurd actions in concrete situations. In a situation where breaking a promise would lead to a slight gain in happiness or pleasure, the utilitarian would seem to be obligated to break the promise. If all the utilitarian is concerned with is consequences, Ross might argue, utilitarianism destroys the force of moral obligations all of us feel intuitively. Taken to its logical extreme, Ross might claim, utilitarianism could lead to a society in which moral rules (other than those regarding consequences of actions) are not observed. If we could no longer trust our fellow man to keep a promise, or obey any other moral rule, society itself would suffer.

For Ross, the utilitarian is much too quick to break moral rules. If one were faced with a situation where lying or breaking a promise would result in a slight increase in the good, the utilitarian, Ross claims, must break the rule. In a situation where lying would clearly result in a much greater benefit to others, Ross could agree with a utilitarian and admit that one ought to lie. However, Ross would refuse to admit that the lying itself was good. The utilitarian would claim that the lie was a part of an act which resulted in a greater good, and was therefore right. Ross will only admit lying when another duty clearly overrides the obligation not to lie. Because there is Prima

Facie obligation not to lie, Rossians will only lie in extraordinary situations. Because the utilitarian does not seem to recognize the intuitive obligation not to lie, it seems that he will lie in any situation where even the slightest good will result.

A central objection, as I see it, that Ross would have to utilitarianism here is that moral rules (except for the rule that mandates maximizing happiness) mean nothing, and have no hold on us. The rules, or duties, Ross has explained do seem to have a basis in our intuitions. In our ordinary life, most of us do seem to feel that lying is wrong. Utilitarians, however, will seem to claim that in a situation where lying results in any greater good, lying is right. Utilitarianism seems to make the claim that our moral intuitions, and the moral rules they have given birth to, are meaningless. For Ross, to deny the meaning and power of our moral intuitions is to deny the ground of morality itself.

Utilitarians would answer that the justification for our moral intuitions is, in fact, utilitarian. Utilitarians do realize that a world in which no one can rely upon anyone else to tell the truth would be a confused and dysfunctional world. In any situation where lying is an option, utilitarians realize that the lie itself is bad for society in general, and bad for the individual who lies. The lie is bad for society in that it weakens the trust we must have in our fellow man to speak truthfully. The lie is bad for the individual because it can weaken the intuition we all do feel

against lying, and may lead to more lying in the future.

Therefore the utilitarian, like Ross, will only lie when it is clear that a great good will result that will outweigh the negative effects of the lie.

The utilitarian answer to the criticism that utilitarians do not admit the power of moral rules is that rules are, in fact, an important part of moral life. R.M. Hare, for instance, would claim that most of our moral decisions can be made on an intuitive level, where rules operate. Act-utilitarians of all sorts will admit that it is disadvantageous to make utilitarian calculations in every moral situation. Society as a whole will work better if everyone conforms to a set of moral rules. Only in special cases, where rules conflict or do not clearly apply, does one make calculations. If utilitarianism demanded that one make calculations every time one acted, and refused to acknowledge moral rules, Ross' criticisms would be effective. Utilitarianism does, however, realize the efficiency of moral rules.

Also, it would be extremely awkward and time consuming to be constantly calculating the consequences of one's actions. Most individuals simply do not have the time or the ability to thoroughly evaluate the expected consequences of each and every action. Utilitarianism understands these limitations, and requires that moral agents make calculations only in special cases.

The ultimate purpose of this chapter of the thesis was

not to establish utilitarianism as the best sort of method for solving moral disputes. The purpose of this part of the paper was to explain and defend the methodology that will be used in my theory of just war, and its application to the American war in Vietnam.

My theory of just war will, of course, be utilitarian, but I will refrain from being limited to a certain version. It is my belief that explaining and defending a specific utilitarian theory will make this part of the theses entirely too complicated. In situations such as war, hopefully it is clear what good consequences are (gaining freedom for a people, keeping a people from oppression, etc.) and what are bad consequences (being killed, having one's home destroyed, etc.) Any plausible theory of value will say these same things. It is not necessary to outline a specific theory of value to justify that certain consequences of war are good and that certain consequences are bad.

This theory of just war will keep in mind Smart's distinction between the 'rational' action and the 'right' action. If the decision to wage war is on the available evidence likely to secure the greatest good for the greatest number, then fighting is rational. For the war to be morally right, that war must in fact have secured the greatest good for the greatest number.

It must be acknowledged that a nation/group's objectives can change during the course of a war. It may well have been right to fight for unconditional surrender at the start of a

conflict. However, it may well also be wrong to prolong a bloody conflict in search of that goal. If the greatest good will be served by changing the objectives for which a nation/group fights during the conflict, the change ought to be made. And if the greatest good would be served by a nation/group's quitting the fight at a particular point in time, the nation/group ought to quit the fight at that time.

Therefore, during a war, it must be continually be asked if prolonging the fight is rational. If continuing the war from a specific point in time (either in the same manner in which it had been fought, or in an altered manner) is on the available evidence likely to secure the greatest good for the greatest number, then continuing the war is rational.

Likewise, if continuing the war from a specific point in time (either in the same manner in which it had been fought, or in an altered manner), did in fact secure the greatest good for the greatest number, then continuing the war was right.

This theory of just war, then, has four separate but closely related points:

1) If the decision to wage war is, on the available evidence, likely to secure the greatest good for the greatest number, then waging war is rational. Wars which do not meet this condition are irrational.

2) If waging war did in fact secure the greatest happiness for the greatest good, then waging war was right. Wars which did not meet this condition were wrong.

3) If continuing a war from a specific point in time

(either in the same manner in which it had been fought, or in an altered manner) is on the available evidence likely to secure the greatest good for the greatest number, then continuing the war is rational. Wars which do not meet this condition are irrational.

4) If continuing the war from a specific point in time (either in the same manner in which it had been fought, or in an altered manner) did in fact secure the greatest good for the greatest number, then continuing the war was right. Wars which did not meet this condition were wrong.

It is clear that acts of war are always violent, disruptive, and bloody. It also seems clear that under any plausible theory of value, destruction is of negative value. When one's home has been destroyed in a bombing raid, or when one has received third degree napalm burns, or even when the population of one's quiet village has been subject to execution, specific theories of value matter little. The simple fact of war is this: war has a tendency to cause damage to that which makes life worth living.

For utilitarians, the consequences that war forces on both participant and civilian are of negative value. For a Rossian, a war such as our war in Vietnam clearly violates his duty number six, which states that moral agents ought to avoid injuring others. Even for Kant, who stated the categorical imperative, it is clear that a maxim which allows the kind of destruction that was indiscriminately and purposely rained on Vietnam is clearly not a maxim that one

would will to be universal law. Under all reasonable theories of morality and value, the type of war we waged in Vietnam has negative value. To insist on a specific and detailed theory of value in a just war theory is only to confuse the issue.

People have a tendency to get killed, or have their lives dislocated in horrible ways, in war. As was made painfully clear by our experience in Vietnam, it is not only those who make war who are subject to this. Civilians can and often are victims of war. It seems to be enough to say that the destruction war causes to everyone involved is obviously of negative value. However, the simple fact that a theory of just war is put forth implies that there could, indeed, be a just war. Such a war would be a war in which the suffering was outweighed by the good gained. Whether or not a particular war was a just war, a war which was morally right, can only be determined from the backwards looking perspective. If the war did, in fact, secure the greatest good for the greatest number, the war was right and just. The question now becomes, what is the nature of this good? It is not the purpose of this paper to get caught up in a lengthy metaethical debate, so it will hopefully be enough to say that in this context, the good is that which makes life worth living in the most basic sense. Necessary conditions for a life worth living might be existing without fear, oppression, hunger, and being free to pursue happiness in all its forms.

Which methods ought to be used to pursue this good in war? Utilitarians will admit that it is not possible to make utilitarian calculations in all situations where one faces a moral choice. In war, where combatants face extremely stressful situations every day, it is simply not possible to demand that utilitarian calculations be made before every action. The greatest good will be served by admitting a series of rules which can be broken only in exceptional situations. Which rules of war, then, would countries universally agree to, if they were rational, impartial, and believed they might be involved in a war at some time? Richard Brandt points out that nations will choose rules that maximize utility even if they are self-interested, for they do not know ahead of time who will have the advantage in a particular war, and would not wish to be bound by a set of rules which favors the more powerful.¹⁹ Brandt points out also that nations will insist that these rules do not impede their chances for victory in war.²⁰

If we assume that nation/group 'X' was right in waging a war, we also assume that their victory will result in the greatest good for the greatest number. The only individuals capable of preventing 'X' from achieving the good are those who fight or support the fight against them. Civilians who do not fight, and who are not actively involved in supporting the war effort against 'X' are not impediments to the goal of 'X'. Intentional, direct, killing or injuring of these civilians will do nothing to advance the good, and is

therefore wrong.

It is inevitable, however, that in war civilians will die and be injured as a side-effect of operations designed to help win the war and secure the good. These bad effects are permitted only if the chances for victory, and securing the good, are great enough to outweigh the bad effects. Brandt writes, "Substantial destruction of lives and property of enemy civilians is permissible only when there is good evidence that it will significantly enhance the prospect of victory."²¹

The methods used to secure the good in war must, then:

- 1) Not allow the direct, intentional killing or injuring of civilians;
- 2) Allow the indirect killing or injuring of civilians only when it is clear that such an action will significantly aid in securing victory and the good.

In war, these rules will be violated. It is a simple, unfortunate, fact of war that combat troops will kill or injure those people who ought not be killed or injured. Young men, trained to kill and injure, are not always able or willing to distinguish those who ought to be killed and injured from those who ought not. This is one of the prices of war. One instance of a wrongful killing does not, however, make an entire war unjust.

From a backwards looking perspective, if a war was fought by a nation in such a way that the methods it used caused so many innocent deaths and injuries that it became

disproportionate to the good sought, that war was wrong. From a forwards looking perspective, if a nation is causing so much harm to civilians that the destruction becomes disproportionate to the good sought, then the methods ought to be changed so as to find proportionality between destruction and the good to be secured. If this cannot be done, any continuing waging of war is wrong.

CHAPTER 3

AMERICA'S WAR IN VIETNAM

Charlie Company arrived at Landing Zone 'Dotti' on January 26, 1968. Their mission was no different from that of other American combat units in Vietnam: to locate and eliminate Viet Cong rebels. These men had been well trained in the art of killing. Their actions in the coming months, specifically during Operation 'Muscatine', would prove just how well the men of C Company had learned to kill. However, it would also indicate in a most graphic manner just how chaotic and misguided the American war in Vietnam had become.

Army intelligence had advised Captain Ernest Medina, leader of 'C' Company, that the entire 48th Viet Cong Battalion complete with about 250 men had taken a position in the hamlet of My Lai 4. (My Lai 4 carries this number as it is one of several numbered sub-hamlets within the larger Song-Mu village.) Medina's orders to Charlie Company were that the 48th Battalion was to be destroyed, as was My Lai 4. Many men in 'C' Company thought that Medina had ordered them to kill everyone in My Lai 4. "When we go in to My Lai, it's open season," Medina reportedly said.²² On March 16, 1968, Charlie Company was helicoptered into My Lai 4 to begin 'Muscatine'. Medina's orders had been accepted without question by his

men. The civilians of My Lai, knowing that anyone who ran from American troops was considered Viet Cong, did not flee Charlie Company. The Americans gathered the civilians from their huts. As was the case throughout the incident, no one in 'C' Company had been shot at or assaulted in any way.

Upon the orders of 2nd Lieutenant William Calley, several civilians were herded into the center of the village. According to Paul Meadlo, PFC, this came next: "We stood 10 to 15 feet away and then Calley started shooting them. I started to shoot them."²³ Hysterical villagers protested their innocence, chanting "No VC! No VC!", but the slaughter had begun. Several villagers panicked, and attempted to escape. PFC Dennis Conti recalled, "First we saw a few men running... and then the next thing I knew we were shooting at everything."²⁴

Calley next ordered more civilians to the edge of a ditch at the eastern edge of the hamlet. Meadlo reported that, "I guess I shot maybe 20 to 25 people in the ditch... men, women and children. And babies."²⁵ By the time Charlie Company had finished its duties at My Lai⁴, between 450 and 500 Vietnamese civilians were dead. PFC Michael Benhardt observed that, "We met no resistance and I saw only three captured weapons. We had no casualties... I don't remember seeing one military age male in the place."²⁶

Perhaps the most telling comment on the My Lai massacre came from Private Herbert Carter. "The people didn't know what they were dying for and the guys didn't know why they

were shooting them."27 It may be possible to understand Carter's quote in a wider context, indicative of a war gone horribly wrong.

Just how and why the war was so wrong is one subject of this part of the paper. It is important to remember, however, that doing what is wrong, and doing what is irrational are different matters. To repeat the distinction, actions which are wrong are actions which, taken from a set of alternative actions, did not have the best actual consequences. Actions which are irrational are actions which are not, on the basis of the available evidence, likely to secure the best consequences. In Vietnam, America did wrong, but I will argue that the irrationality of our actions was not fully understandable until after the Tet Offensive. If I am right, it will become clear that after the Tet offensive, not only was America doing the wrong thing in Vietnam, but it was also acting irrationally. Moral agents who know (or ought to know) that their actions are irrational are obligated to stop their actions. America eventually did leave Vietnam, but only after five more bloody years of war after Tet.

The events preceding our involvement in Vietnam are complex indeed, and it is not the purpose of this paper to become immeshed in strictly historical issues. However, a rudimentary understanding of Vietnam's history, particularly as influenced by French colonialism, is needed in order to understand the whole of the Vietnam problem.

Stanley Karnow, in Vietnam, A History, notes that as early as the fifteenth century Europe had been pursuing various interests in Asia.²⁸ (At this time the country of Vietnam occupied only the northern two-thirds of the area it now occupies. In the Fourteenth Century Champa existed to Vietnam's southeast, and the Khmer Empire sat at its southwest. To the immediate west of Vietnam then were the Thai and Laotian Kingdoms.)²⁹ French missionaries and entrepreneurs frequented Vietnam seeking to expand trade and spread religious (Christian) beliefs. By 1787 the Vietnamese had signed a treaty with the aggressive Frenchmen, ceding territory to them, and giving the French exclusive trading privileges.³⁰ By 1887, following various Vietnamese uprisings and rebellious action against French rule, the French conquered Vietnam and set up the "Indochinese Union". All of modern day Vietnam, including Tonkin in the Northern region, Annam, and Cochinchina in the South, as well as Cambodia and Laos, were subject to French rule.³¹

In 1890, Nguyen Sinh Cung was born in the village of Nghe An, in Central Vietnam.³² In the coming years, he was to personify and lead the rebellion against the exploitive and dominating French capitalists who ruled Vietnam. Perhaps the words of Paul Doumer, governor-general of Vietnam in 1902, sum up the French attitude towards the Vietnamese. "When France arrived in Indochina, the Annamites were ripe for servitude," he wrote.³³ Against this uncaring and repressive French colonial government, the 'Bringer of

Light' rebelled. Ho Chi Minh (Nguyen's pseudonym), the West was to discover, would become both symbol and catalyst in a determined struggle against any power challenging the unity and sovereignty of his beloved homeland. For Ho, there would not be two wars, one against the French and one against the Americans. For him, the struggle was one protracted battle against 'Western Imperialism'. And he simply would not lose, regardless of the damages he or his country might sustain.

On September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed Vietnam's independence during a speech in Hanoi. He borrowed from the American Declaration of Independence in an attempt to seek U.S. support for his cause. But, as Woodrow Wilson had in 1919, the U.S. rejected his pleas. Above all, Karnow notes, Ho was a "pragmatist, principally preoccupied with Vietnam's salvation."³⁴ Ho's decision to turn to Communism for aid in the struggle, after the American rejection, was partly a commitment to the Communist ideal, and partly a pragmatic decision. Ho's studies in Paris with prominent leftists such as Jules Raveau had served to push Ho towards socialist ideals.³⁵ America's rejections of his pleas for aid, and his perception of Socialism as weak, served to convince Ho that only the Communists, (namely, Soviets) had the power to help ignite a revolution which would free Vietnam.³⁶

In September of 1940, in a prelude to Japan's entry into World War Two, the Japanese invaded and occupied much of Indochina, leaving the French government in Vietnam intact.³⁷ By March 9 of 1945, the Japanese had taken over the French

administration in Vietnam.³⁸ After the Japanese capitulation in August of 1945, power in Vietnam was given over to a provisional government in Hanoi, led by Ho Chi Minh and Bao Dai.³⁹ French authorities then regained control of their colonies in Vietnam under British auspices.⁴⁰ Ho's Vietminh rebels refused to accept further control by Western powers, and rebelled against the French, with a resurrection of armed hostilities between the Vietminh and the French in late 1946.⁴¹

In 1945 the Japanese, cut off by Allied forces from food supplies, stole the entire rice crop in Vietnam. The result was a horrible famine in which two million Vietnamese starved to death. The great suffering felt by Vietnam then boosted nationalistic feelings to a fever pitch. Following the Japanese surrender in 1945, the Vietminh rebels attempted to seize power. Incredibly, the British then replaced the oppressive Japanese government in Vietnam with the only slightly less repressive French. The Vietnamese Communists under Ho Chi Minh were outraged, and were able to rally much of the ravaged nation to fight for independence under Communist banners.⁴²

On September 24, 1946, Vietminh rebels attacked the French-held Saigon airport and the local prison, where they freed hundreds of comrades. War had broken out in Indochina. America supported France and their regime in Saigon, headed by Bao Dai. The Vietminh rebels, though, were well supported, if not in money and hardware, but in spirit. "A

nationalistic culture, nearly xenophobic in intensity, inspired in Vietminh activists the concept of a virtually holy war against the foreign invaders and their native clients."⁴³ This intensity was to become manifest at Dienbeinphu in 1954, where the French were ultimately defeated.

The stage was set for Geneva, where the Communists would sit with the Americans and the French. For Americans, Geneva marked the point in time where a South Vietnamese government began to be organized; it was where the beginnings of South Vietnamese independence were laid down. For Ho and the Communists, Geneva simply marked a lull in the struggle for Vietnamese independence.

The agreement at Geneva in 1954 was not a political agreement, in that it did not establish boundaries for, nor did it establish the existence of, two separate Vietnams. Although American officials would interpret the agreement differently, the accords simply called for an end to the battles. "The only documents signed were cease-fire accords ending the hostilities."⁴⁴ The country would be divided at the 17th parallel. French forces would withdraw from north of that line, and the Vietminh would withdraw from the south. In the summer of 1956, nationwide elections would be held, whereby the nation would be reunified. The U.S., clinging to its fears of an international Communist conspiracy, agreed reluctantly, but Saigon, led by Ngo Dinh Diem, did not, fearing Communist victory. The U.S. would come to back Diem,

and support his claims to independence.

Anti-communist sentiments ran high in the U.S. then, and our government was not prepared to capitulate to any agreement that might have resulted in a Communist takeover of Vietnam. Unfortunately, "the Communists, who had fought to unify Vietnam, would not accept the prospect of permanent partition", as Diem and the U.S. wanted.⁴⁵

By 1955, then, the U.S. had begun to directly fund the Saigon government. We also had begun to train and advise its army. By 1957, Communist insurgency had started again in South Vietnam, and by 1959 North Vietnam had begun to move weapons and military advisors of their own into the South via the Ho Chi Minh trail. By 1962 the U.S. had 12,000 military advisors in Vietnam.

In 1964 the Tonkin Gulf incident occurred, in which an American Navy destroyer may have been attacked by North Vietnamese patrol boats in the northern South China Sea. A congressional resolution sparked by the incident allowed President Johnson to finally intervene in Vietnam without going through the arduous process of declaring war. By 1965 the U.S. had committed ground troops to Vietnam. This commitment was both the culmination of a long historical process, and the beginning of a tragedy of mammoth proportions.

The first goal of this paper is to argue that, among several alternative courses of action available to it during the Vietnam War, America failed to choose the one which had

the best consequences. For this reason, our war in Vietnam as a whole was wrong. Five representative course of action available to America which I will analyze are these:

1) Not to fight, or provide aid to South Vietnam in any way.

2) To become involved in the Vietnam slowly, through a process of gradual escalation. (This, of course, was the alternative America chose.)

3) To fight as hard and as aggressively as was politically possible from the start of our involvement, sending up to 200,000 men to Vietnam in 1963, and merciless bombing of North Vietnam through out the war.

4) To send an even larger ground force into Vietnam, using much less air and artillery power, sustaining heavy American casualties, causing less civilian casualties, while fighting a strictly guerilla type of war.

5) To drop nuclear bombs on North Vietnam, and Viet Cong strongholds in South Vietnam.⁴⁶

The course of action America chose was, of course, gradual escalation. It is possible to speculate on what the consequences might have been had America chosen alternatives 3, 4, or 5, and I will do so later.

I will begin by examining some of the real consequences which arose from America's actions in the Vietnam War.

It must be remembered that America lost this war, and the Communists did take over Vietnam. Had we chosen not to fight, the Communists still would have taken over Vietnam.

This would have happened without eight years of war with the Americans, however.

Much has been made of the issue of South Vietnam's legitimacy as a state following the Geneva Conference of 1954. Whether South Vietnam was a legitimate state under attack by foreign aggression or an illegitimate regime propped up by Western interests is not relevant (for utilitarians) for the purposes of this paper. The issue in this paper is morality, not legality. All arguments centering around international law and international agreements are therefore not pertinent. Whether it was a civil war between the North and the South of Vietnam, or a case of over-the-border aggression, one thing is clear. It was war. And America chose to involve itself in that war.⁴⁷

It is indisputable that America's involvement in the Vietnam war, understood in its entirety, failed to secure the greatest good for the greatest number, compared to the alternative of not fighting. If we had not intervened in that war, the Communists would have taken over the whole of the country, perhaps in two to three years. (It took the Communists about this long to take over Vietnam after America withdrew in 1973. Perhaps it would have happened more quickly. By 1973 America's actions had weakened the Communist fighting capacity somewhat, which may have delayed their eventual takeover of the entire country.) As it turned out, our actions failed to prevent a Communist takeover of Vietnam. Our actions did, however, add greatly to the pain

and suffering that country experienced. Our actions also cost the lives of some 56,000 Americans. On this simplest level, then, our actions were wrong. (The other alternatives I have suggested and their probable consequences can and will be explored.)

The issue demands further explanation, however. Exactly how did our actions contribute to this great suffering?

The Communist mind-set in that war was one of steely determination. They simply would not allow their country to remain severed by foreign powers. Vietminh rebels who fought the French at Dienbienphu were of the same mold as the Vietcong rebels who would later battle American troops in South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh claimed, "You can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours. But even at those odds, you will lose and I will win."⁴⁸ It was a failure of U.S. policy not to recognize that the national will of the Communists was uncompromisable.

Because of this unshakeable will, and because the Communist resistance chose to fight the war by hiding themselves amongst a civilian population, America was forced to use extreme measures to wage war in Vietnam. My argument here is that our methods of fighting did, in fact, allow the killing of civilians, many times when it was most decidedly not clear that such actions would have significantly increased the chances for victory. The problem was that all the evidence points to the fact that the U.S. waged this war in a manner that did not separate, or distinguish between,

combatants and noncombatants. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, we had by 1968 begun a systematic destruction of the Vietnamese people. "The declaration of America's statesmen are not as candid as Hitler's were... 'Declare you are beaten or we will bomb you back to the stone age...' They [the U.S.] have said: 'genocide yes, but conditional genocide'.⁴⁹ Sartre's point is that one cannot force surrender upon a force as determined, and as entrenched within a civilian population, as the Communists were. In order to defeat such a force, the only option is to destroy both civilian and combatant. Consciously or not, we were involved in a systematic slaughter of the Vietnamese people.

In the South, the choice is the following: villages burned, massive bombing, livestock shot, vegetation destroyed by defoliants, crops ruined by toxic aerosols, and everywhere indiscriminate shooting, murder, rape, and looting. This is genocide in its strictest sense: massive extermination... Is it any different for the North?... Not just the daily risk of death, but the systematic destruction of the economic base of the country... of hospitals, schools, places of worship... Deliberate attacks against civilians.⁵⁰

Sartre's arguments are emotionally powerful. And they are based solidly in fact.

Journalist Jonathan Schell recounts the BENTON bombing operation carried out against supposed Vietcong hideouts in the Quang Ngai province in 1967. An area of several square kilometers was targeted, wherein the VC supposedly had taken refuge. The area had been declared a 'free-fire zone', which meant that anyone in it was fair game for our bombers, artillery, and ground troops. Schell recounts, "I flew for

two weeks with the forward air control planes, and what I saw day by day was the bombing of the villages and their burning by combat troops."51 In the end, "an area inhabited by 17,000 people was about 70 percent destroyed with no warning."52

The most infamous case of civilian deaths in Vietnam was, of course, My Lai. Unfortunately, there was more than one such incident. Robert Lifton notes, "No soldier I have talked to has been surprised at the news of My Lai... They have either been party to, or witness to similar or smaller incidents."53 My Lai became a symbol for American policy, it seems, because of the face-to-face interaction of murderer and victim. More destructive than any ground operation could have been, however, was the rain of fire American bombers and artillery dropped on that country. Indiscriminate bombing runs, and the policy of free-fire zones, violated the generally accepted principle of noncombatant immunity flagrantly, dislocating scores of civilians, and producing countless refugees.

The problem for our military was that it was sometimes impossible to distinguish the enemy from the civilian population. The harder it became for our soldiers to find the enemy, the more villages we destroyed, and the more bombs we dropped. Unfortunately, "These approaches are intrinsically utterly indiscriminate- they strike entire populations... virtually an entire people is America's enemy."54

The policy that seems to have been the least discriminating and the most destructive was that of the 'free-fire zone'. Inside a free-fire zone any and all Vietnamese are assumed to be the enemy. Civilians are then subject to bombing, artillery strikes, and sometimes relentless ground assaults in which any hut or house not destroyed by the bombs or artillery might be burned to the ground. "A free-fire zone is an area in which, by official declaration, there are no friendly forces or populace and in which targets may be attacked on the initiative of U.S. commanders... Since everybody is an enemy, everyone and everything becomes a target."⁵⁵ To get at VC who live and hide amongst peasants, it was official if undeclared policy to kill all the peasants, if need be, to uncover the enemy. Warning leaflets were sometimes dropped into the villages prior to the assault, describing the bombing that would occur if the civilians continued to allow VC to reside there. It was not explained in the leaflets how unarmed peasants were to deny armed rebels access to their villages.

A larger problem with American policy in free-fire zones was that in at least half the cases, camps of VC were mislocated, or VC were not there when the bombs fell on the peasants.⁵⁶ In free-fire zones, as well as in other indiscriminate bombing missions, the relation between policy and reality blurred badly. Huts were bombed, and then classified as "military targets destroyed", and areas were targeted for bombing on little more than cursory inspections

of areas from 5,000 feet in the air.⁵⁷ Regardless of official protestations to the contrary, there was little, if any, effort on the part of those participating in the bombing and shelling of villages to distinguish combatant from noncombatant.

It would be impossible to ignore our use of chemical warfare in Vietnam. In particular, the use of napalm and herbicides was destructive to noncombatants. "Napalm, a highly incendiary fluid that clings, has the capacity to maim permanently and induce slow death... its use in Vietnam has involved many civilian and peasant families."⁵⁸ In the case of such a destructive and horrifying weapon, special care ought to have been taken to keep it away from civilian populations. It cannot be argued, even from the standpoint of military necessity, that it was right to drop napalm on noncombatants. If the only way to keep our troops in Vietnam safe was to drop napalm, artillery, and bombs indiscriminately on civilians, while at the same time using more than one hundred million pounds of herbicide to destroy the natural environment (⁵⁹), we ought not to have been in Vietnam at all.

The attitude of a U.S. Army Captain describes fairly well the disdain Americans had for Vietnamese civilians, and the reluctance of American troops to even attempt to sort enemy from peasant. "One Captain was asked how he knew a man he had just shot running out of a hut was a VC, said, 'Son, I know he's a VC by the nine bullet holes in his chest'.⁶⁰ A

U.S. Special Forces estimate concluded that we were killing or wounding ten civilians for every VC.61

American policy, I conclude, failed miserably to distinguish combatant from noncombatant. "Translated into human terms, the U.S. has made South Vietnam a sea of fire as a matter of policy, turning an entire nation into a target." 62 It is not my intention to indict the footsoldier or the bomber pilot. It is, however, my intention to indict the military system and policy that manufactured him. Our military leadership as a whole is responsible for its failed, destructive policy.

It is undeniable that the individual must take a certain amount of responsibility for his actions, but it is not possible to burden him with full responsibility. It was the system that trained him to kill, and it was the system that taught him to follow orders without question, it was the system that put him in Vietnam, and most importantly it was the system that had made explicit the policy that refused to distinguish combatant from noncombatant. It was American leadership, then, from the President on down to military policy makers, who failed to separate civilian from enemy in Vietnam. In no way was the senseless manner in which the U.S. waged war in Vietnam right under the principle of non-combatant immunity.

The senselessness to which Schell (and others) refer, it seems, is the impossibility of defeating an enemy who, 1) refuses to be beaten, and, 2) hides himself among a civilian

population. By fighting the way we were fighting, I do not think such an enemy can be defeated without utterly destroying him and those around him. However, fighting a true guerilla war would have meant increasing the amount of our ground troops greatly, and reducing the amount of our protective firepower, which would have resulted in a much higher rate of American casualties. Politically, it does not seem that America was willing to accept these higher demands in order to fight in such a way as to confront a guerrilla force on its own terms. As a result of our reluctance to accept these demands, we were left with the above difficulties.

Was the cost to America and Vietnam worth the struggle? We accomplished nothing in Vietnam. We did, however, "shatter Vietnam's economy, disrupt its social texture, and exhaust its population in both the North and the South."⁶³ About ten percent of the entire Vietnamese population, more than 4 million soldiers and civilians, were killed in the war.⁶⁴ America lost over 50,000 men. It is clear that our war in Vietnam did not achieve the greatest good for the greatest number, compared to the option of not fighting at all.

There were alternative courses of action America might have chosen to pursue in the Vietnam war. Alternative #3, to fight as hard and aggressively as possible from the start of our involvement, sending 200,000 men to Vietnam in 1963, and merciless bombing of North Vietnam throughout the war, was

one of these other options. Understanding that the following is mere speculation, what might have happened if we had taken this course of action?

It is important to remember that America's entry into the Vietnam war began slowly, with small amounts of troops and military advisors. In 1963, when Kennedy was assassinated, America had only 16,263 military advisors in South Vietnam.⁶⁵ Various advisors to Kennedy, including Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, indicated to Kennedy that a quick and large build-up of American forces in Vietnam would bring the crisis to an end. Kennedy was advised that as many as 200,000 troops would need to be immediately deployed, and that air strikes against North Vietnam would need to be launched, in order to control the situation. McNamara was convinced that "maximum U.S. forces required on the ground in Southeast Asia will not exceed... 205,000 men."⁶⁶ These advisors were convinced that Kennedy was, "trying to accomplish a very large objective... on the cheap."⁶⁷

Unfortunately, the approach Kennedy's advisors expounded ignored two important factors: the limits of air power, and the very nature of the struggle in Vietnam.

In a struggle mostly fought by guerilla forces, air power will not succeed in destroying an enemy's will or ability to fight. America never understood this simple fact. "President Johnson believed that carefully controlled bombing would ultimately compel Hanoi to end the war by making it too

costly."68 Others in that administration, like National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy and Secretary of State Dean Rusk were convinced that bombing would "break Hanoi's will to fight".69

It does not appear that American air power had such capabilities. Viet Cong rebels needed only a small amount of material to fight. "No amount of bombing could stop a meager amount [of materials] from reaching the South."70 For that reason, destroying the population centers of the North, or its agricultural system, would not have had a great effect on the war in the South.71 Even if American air power had succeeded in halting Hanoi's support of the VC, it was not certain that the VC would have stopped fighting. "The cessation of Northern support was no guarantee that Saigon could survive against the Viet Cong."72

The failure of America to understand the limits of its air power indicated a failure to understand the very nature of the war itself. For Norman Podhoretz, even a large and immediate American entrance into the Vietnam war would not have been effective. "Yet even if Kennedy had taken [his advisors] advice and gone in fast as well as big, the chances are that the result would have been futility."73 Faced with a guerilla war, America had prepared for and attempted to fight a massive conventional war. Initially, America attempted to prepare the South Vietnamese Army for a conventional over-the-border invasion by the Communists, not realizing that the bulk of the war in its early stages was to

be fought by local resistance. Later, when America entered the war, "The Army chose not to adapt to the unique environment of Vietnam, instead conducting big-unit operations against bands of guerillas, and relying too heavily on technology and the lavish use of firepower."74

Given the reality of these two grievous misunderstandings by the United States, it seems that a more aggressive entrance and posture in Vietnam would not have assured victory. "In short, it seems reasonable to conclude that the only way the U.S. could have avoided defeat in Vietnam was by staying out of the war altogether."75 It also seems reasonable to conclude that such an aggressive option would only have resulted in more death and destruction than did the option we chose, and the end result, a Communist takeover of Vietnam, would not have changed. Most probably, this option would not have achieved the greatest good for the greatest number compared with the other options I have listed.

The final option I have listed is the option of extreme aggression. We could have chosen to drop nuclear bombs on North Vietnam and on VC strongholds in South Vietnam. This option would simply have eliminated anyone in Vietnam who stood in the way of American goals. This option would clearly have caused more harm than any other option. We would have literally destroyed most of the country of Vietnam, killed many more civilians than we actually did, and we may well have scared or angered Russia enough to start

World War III. For these reasons, this course of action was not considered a real option by America. I examine the option only as a logical possibility.

There, then, are five representative options America faced in the Vietnam war. They range from the option of not fighting at all to the option of extreme aggression. A Communist takeover of Vietnam was inevitable, given the Communist will, the Communist method of fighting (which America could never understand or deal effectively with), and our own military limitations. Therefore, the option which would have kept the pain and suffering in that situation to a minimum was the option of not fighting. America failed to choose this option, and therefore acted wrongly by fighting a war in Vietnam.

Likewise, the methods America used to wage war in Vietnam tended to allow the killing or injuring of civilians when it was not clear that such actions would have significantly aided in securing victory and the good. The indiscriminately destructive nature of military actions such as in My Lai, or free-fire zones, resulted in unnecessary civilian deaths. For this reason, as well as the others I have outlined, our war in Vietnam was wrong.

Given the situation America was faced with in 1960, however, our decision to fight in Vietnam can be said to be at least rational. However, given the situation America was faced with in 1968, our decision to continue to fight cannot be said to be rational. Just why this is so is the subject

of the final portion of this paper.⁷⁶

As I mentioned previously, J.J.C. Smart has explained the difference between that which is right and that which is rational. I would argue that, in the evaluation of an historical action, the distinction hinges on the perspective in time from which one views the action. If one is at a point in time where several courses of action are being considered, it is not possible, strictly speaking, to know which action will be the 'right' one. All it is possible to do from that perspective is to choose that alternative which is, on the available evidence, likely to produce the best results. After the action is completed, it is possible to judge the real consequences of the actions, and thereby judge the rightness or wrongness of the action. The terms "rational" and "irrational" are to be used "to appraise [actions] on account of their likely successes."⁷⁷ I would argue that our initial decision to wage war in Vietnam was a rational decision. In order to show that this decision was truly rational, two points must be demonstrated. The first point is that the goals we sought in that war did at the time seem most likely to represent the greatest good for the greatest number. The second point is that, at the time, it could have been reasonably concluded that we would succeed in obtaining those goals in an armed conflict. (If it could not have been reasonably concluded that we would succeed in Vietnam, then deciding to fight there was a decision that could only be reasonably expected to raise the body count,

contribute nothing towards obtaining the good, and would therefore be irrational.)

Proving conclusively that Democracy is a better political system than Communism is remains the task of political scientists. However, I think it is safe to say that, given the economic failure and oppressive nature of Communism in the world today, Democracy is the method of government which has the better chance of affording the citizens of a given country a prosperous and good life.

While the notion of a 'Communist conspiracy' to take over much of the world seems ridiculous to us in 1990, this notion did not seem so far-fetched in the years after World War Two. "By 1947 there were alarming signs that the Soviet Union had no intention of surrendering control over the countries of Eastern Europe... Further, the Soviets were employing local Communist parties to subvert non-Communist countries like Greece and Turkey."⁷⁸ A policy of 'containment' was developed by the Truman administration, indicating that, "It must be the policy of the U.S. to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by... outside pressures."⁷⁹ The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was formed to resist Soviet efforts to claim more of Europe. In 1950, the United States went to war in Korea, extending the principles of containment to Asia; we left little doubt that America would indeed use military force to stop the spread of Communism.⁸⁰ There was, then, a policy in place to support a defence of South Vietnam, and a

precedent in which America had demonstrated her willingness to use force to support that policy.

Given that American intervention in Korea resulted in keeping that country from falling completely to Communism, and given the relative prosperity of South Korea, it could be said that our intervention there did, in fact, secure the best consequences. If American intervention in Korea, where Communist aggression was halted, secured the good, it can be argued that America could have also logically expected to secure the good in fighting Communism in Vietnam.

Kennedy argued that America had a real interest in protecting South Vietnam from Communism. If Saigon fell to the Communists, "Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, the Philippines and obviously Laos and Cambodia... would be threatened."⁸¹ This infamous 'domino' theory, which held that losing South Vietnam would leave many other countries vulnerable to a Communist takeover, is not held in high regard today. From Kennedy's perspective, however, given Communist aggression in Eastern Europe and China, and what was to happen in 1962 during the Cuban missile crisis, the threat of a Communist offensive throughout Southeast Asia must have seemed very real. Ultimately, Kennedy argued, if we did not squarely face this threat in Southeast Asia, "The United States, inevitably, must surrender the Pacific and take up our defenses on our own shores."⁸² It seems reasonable that, given the aggressive activities of Communists worldwide from the period immediately after World

War Two up to the time when America finally committed ground troops to Vietnam in 1965, America would come to feel (during that same period of time) that the stability of the non-Communist world, and, by logical extension, its own future, was at stake. Given that situation, I would argue that the only rational decision would have been to oppose Communism in Southeast Asia.

If we did not do so, some thought, would that not signal to the Communists that they had free reign to overtake various countries at will? "Vietnam represented a test of American responsibility and determination."⁸³ How could America claim to be on the side of the right and the good if it permitted those who were on the side of evil to overrun South Vietnam? How could the nations of the free-world depend on America if it turned its back on South Vietnam? America concluded, rationally it seems, that if it were going to truly represent and stand for the good, it must stand squarely against that which was not good.

There could be no argument that those who threatened South Vietnam were Communists. "The Vietminh rebels [who fought the French, and who would later evolve into the Vietcong] were certainly Communists and they were clearly tied to the international Communist movement. Their leader, Ho Chi Minh, had actually founded the Communist party of Vietnam, he had been trained in Moscow, and his forces were now being supplied by the mainland Chinese."⁸⁴ And, immediately after the French had been defeated at

Dienbienphu, America could claim that Saigon was no longer tainted by Western colonialism. "There was now an indigenous non-Communist government in South Vietnam."85

America was faced with a situation it could not turn away from. The only remaining question was, could we expect to achieve our goals through armed conflict in Vietnam? This is a most difficult question to answer, in that the true scope of the problem in Vietnam did not present itself immediately. There was never a time, in the early 1960's, where it was obvious that America was committing itself to eight years of brutal war. If we had know in 1962 what we know in 1990, that the Vietnamese rebellion was incredibly well-organized, unbelievably determined to win, extremely hard to locate in an utterly foreign terrain, and very easily supplied, perhaps our decision to fight would have been different. As it was, we only learned these things as we fought our way through the jungles of Vietnam. The question remains, could we have learned these things before we decided to fight? I do not think so.

We did, in fact, attempt to learn about the Vietnamese and the nature of the struggle there.

No conflict in history was studied in as much detail as it was being waged. Officials from nearly every Washington agency would conduct surveys in Vietnam... They included weapons technicians, economists, sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, biologists, chemists, and public opinion pollsters. They investigated the effects of defoliants, the impact of bombs, the efficiency of cannon. They scoured villages and interviewed peasants. They interrogated enemy defectors and prisoners. They pored over captured Communist documents...86

But even with all this study, no answers to the Vietnamese problem was found. It seems reasonable to conclude that, if America could not answer these questions during the war, after it had been exposed to the situation, it would have been impossible to answer these questions before the war, before we had been exposed to the situation.

What we did know in the early 1960's was that Communism was threatening South Vietnam, and that South Vietnam needed America's military assistance. This we gave, in small amounts at first, but in increasing amounts as the problem came to be seen as increasingly larger. We gave this assistance in part because we were certain we were on the side of the good, and in part because we were confident we would succeed. Unfortunately, we were confident we would succeed because we failed to understand exactly what would be required for America to win in Vietnam. What makes our confidence at the time reasonable, however, was that it was impossible to understand that winning was impossible until we were involved in a full-scale war.⁸⁷

Given the historical/political conditions which made Vietnam a war we could not turn away from, and our reasonable confidence that we would be successful there, I would conclude that America's decision to wage war in Vietnam was rational. This does not mean that this decision was right. My point is only that, given the available evidence in the early 1960's, America did choose that action which could reasonably have been expected to reap the best consequences.

However, in deciding to continue to wage war after the Tet Offensive in early 1968, America did not choose that action which could have been expected to give the best consequences. The Tet Offensive began on January 29, 1968, and was concluded March 31, 1968. The Offensive was an organized Communist assault on the cities and military strongholds of South Vietnam. It was designed both to overwhelm the anti-Communist forces in South Vietnam and stimulate a general uprising by the people of South Vietnam in favor of the Communist cause. It was a bold move militarily. Never before in this war had the Communists attempted an attack of this nature or scale. "The People's Liberation Armed Forces and elements of the Vietnam People's Army had gathered for synchronized assaults on cities, towns and military headquarters throughout South Vietnam. For years they had been men of the jungle, daring in boast and banner but cautious in the commitment of major military assets. Now they would emerge everywhere."⁸⁸

The Communist hope was that during the celebration of Tet, the Vietnamese lunar New Year's celebration, their enemy would be unprepared for attack. They hoped to stretch the American and South Vietnamese defences to the breaking point, and they hoped to ruin the government of South Vietnam in the process.⁸⁹ The Communists had committed nearly 70,000 troops to the Offensive, almost one-quarter of their entire force.⁹⁰

In these objectives the Communists failed. "In many places, they were swiftly crushed by overwhelming American

and South Vietnamese military power."91 The battle for the Mekong River delta in southernmost Vietnam, and the battle for Hue' in the North of South Vietnam, illustrate the nature of the Offensive. In the Mekong delta, the South Vietnamese defences proved poorly prepared for the Viet Cong assault. "There was no alarm, in many cities, until enemy troops began firing in the middle of town."92 South Vietnamese officers balked under the intense pressure of the Communist attack; in one delta province an American adviser found the province chief wearing a set of civilian clothes under his military uniform in order to facilitate a quick getaway.93 Finally, American firepower was able to secure the delta area, but the Viet Cong attack had made a clear point, even though, as was the case with the entire Tet Offensive, the Communists failed to hold any territory.

The Viet Cong, though, were well-organized, more so than the Americans had thought, and they were frighteningly driven to achieve victory. The Army of South Vietnam, however, revealed themselves to be less than heroic. "For a fleeting instant, some of the hidden realities of Vietnam were illustrated... These included the determination and fanaticism- heroism, one might say- of the Viet Cong officers and men, and the failure of will and nerve of a number of South Vietnamese officers."94 Indeed, the Viet Cong had lost in the Mekong delta, but their Offensive had demonstrated an unexpected tenacity, and it had shown just how unprepared this part of South Vietnam was to defend itself.

The battle for Hue' was a tremendous struggle, easily worthy of its own chapter in a military history of Vietnam. I will try to explain the highlights of this battle in a brief manner. "The twenty-five day struggle for Hue' was the longest and bloodiest ground action of the Tet Offensive and, quite possibly, the longest and bloodiest single action of the war."⁹⁵ On the night of January 31, 1968, two North Vietnamese battalions mixed with Viet Cong forces began their attack on Hue'.

Among their targets were the military airstrip, an ammunition warehouse, a police station, and the U.S. military advisor's compound.⁹⁶ Some of the heaviest fighting occurred in the walled Citadel, a holy place within Hue' where relics of ancient Emperors and ancestors were held. The fighting in and out of the Citadel was brutal house-to-house combat, with Americans rooting out the Communist troops occupying the city. Marine troops fighting northward from the Military Advisors Compound were able to gain only four blocks in seven days, during which they sustained heavy casualties.⁹⁷ Progress in the Citadel was slower still. It was clear that Communist forces in Hue' were fighting with the same fierce resolve that their comrades in the Mekong delta had displayed. Furious attacks on American positions in Hue' continued until the sheer number and power of American and South Vietnamese forces were able to overtake the final Communist strongholds in Hue': the Citadel itself and the suburban Gia Hoi area. By February 24, these strongholds had

been cleared.98

The damage to Hue' itself was extensive. Nearly 80% buildings in the city itself had been destroyed or damaged by artillery.99 The brutality of the Communist forces became apparent when a mass grave containing 2800 bodies was found; the bodies were those of Southern Vietnamese government personnel.100

As was the case in the Mekong delta, extraordinary actions by American troops managed to take back what territory the Communists had gained. (It must be admitted that, though, in Hue' the 1st South Vietnamese Division's elite 'Black Panther' Company distinguished itself in the fighting.101) The heretofore unseen courage and determination of the Communist forces surprised the American and South Vietnamese forces, as did the ability of the Communists to organize and carry off such a massive operation.

It must be remembered, however, that the Tet Offensive was a military loss for the Communists. The Offensive had failed to scatter the enemy, it had failed to stimulate a popular uprising, it had, in the end, failed to win the war. "Where was the glorious victory? What happened to the seething revolutionary masses...? Where were the legions of puppet troops who were ready to turn their guns around and join the revolution? Where was the light at the end of the tunnel?"102 The end of the war was not yet in sight; the Communists, who had thought victory was within their grasp,

must have known then that the struggle would be longer than anyone had imagined. But they would not give in. As Don Oberdorfer reported, "No hard information is available on the state of mind of the... Vietnamese Communist movement."¹⁰³ It is not possible to know the extent of Communist morale after Tet. It is possible to know this, however: they did not quit the struggle. After a crushing military defeat, a defeat which was from the Communist point of view was supposed to have been a glorious victory, a defeat in which the Communists lost perhaps 40,000 men (104), they kept fighting just as hard as they had before.

From the American point of view, what did all this mean? First, it was clear that, while the Communists were not winning the war, neither were we. "The Communist attacks on the cities of South Vietnam show that we don't have the country under any kind of control and that we are in a much worse position than we were in two years ago," claimed Eugene McCarthy.¹⁰⁵ When General Westmoreland asked America to send an additional 206,000 troops to Vietnam on March 9, 1968, claims that we were winning the war seemed to take on even less credibility. "If so many Communists were killed and their Army routed, why were 206,000 more Americans required? If this 206,000 were dispatched to war, what assurance was there that another group of 206,000 would not be needed then, and another after that? Was there no end to this bottomless pit..?"¹⁰⁶

What should have been clear to the American government

by April of 1968 was that we were not going to win that war. It should have been clear by then that our best efforts were not injuring the will of the Communists. It should have been clear by then that our massive air force was not effective against an enemy who had little or no industrial targets. As a young American fighter pilot reported to a group of White House aids in February of 1968, "We were going through the worst fucking flak in the history of man, and for what- to knock out some twelve foot wooden bridge they can build back a couple hours later?"¹⁰⁷ All these things should have been clear to the American government after the Tet Offensive, but, judging from the fact that the last American combat troops did not leave Vietnam until March 29, 1973, apparently these things were not clear. Nixon's foggy notion of achieving a 'peace with honor' only served to prolong an already bloody war. By April of 1968, it was not reasonable to believe that the Vietnam war was winnable.

If a war is not winnable, and the good is not achievable, prolonging hostilities simply adds more death and destruction to an already grim scene. As I see it, our options at this point were these:

- 1) Stop fighting and withdraw immediately.
- 2) Withdraw slowly, maintaining an active combat presence, while attempting to give the responsibility for victory to the South Vietnamese.
- 3) Increase our efforts greatly.

The rational alternative in any situation is the one

which holds the most promise, given the evidence an agent has about that situation, to have the best consequences. The best consequences may be those in which the good is maximized, or the best consequences may be those in which the bad is minimized. In the case of Vietnam, since it was clear that we were not going to achieve what we had determined at the time to be the good, the best consequences would be those in which the bad was kept to a minimum. Also, it must be pointed out, alternative three was not possible. By spring of 1968, due in part to the political reverberations of the Tet Offensive, a large segment of the American public had lost its patience with the war in Vietnam. It is extremely doubtful that public opinion would have allowed any increase in troop number past the 540,000 troops we had in Vietnam at the end of 1968.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, this final question remains, was the rational decision in 1968 to keep fighting, while withdrawing slowly and attempting to turn the war over to the South Vietnamese, or was the rational decision to withdraw immediately?

The question here is not whether or not our continuing the war after the Tet Offensive was right or wrong. That issue has already been decided. As I have explained earlier, our entire war in Vietnam was wrong. It must be noted, however, that even under our strategy of gradual withdrawal, we did an extreme amount of damage to Vietnam after the Tet Offensive. Edward Herman reported, "The continued use of American air and artillery power in the cities of Vietnam

since the Tet Offensive has created more refugees, destroyed more allied property, and killed more civilians in the urban area than all the VC rocket and mortar attacks during the entire war."109 (Underlining mine.) It seems clear, then, that continuing to wage war after the Tet Offensive was wrong because it failed to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number. But was the decision to continue to wage war after Tet rational, i.e., was the decision on the available evidence likely to secure the greatest good for the greatest number?

Let us examine one of the key goals of our slow withdrawal strategy, Vietnamization. Under this strategy, the war was to be turned over slowly to the South Vietnamese. Two points are relevant here. The South Vietnamese had never been tested in major operations without American help. Also, the reason America was involved in that war in the first place was that South Vietnam had desperately needed our military assistance in the early 1960's. There was no evidence to suggest that the South Vietnamese Army was capable of winning the war without significant American aid in 1969 or at any time thereafter. A failed South Vietnamese excursion into Cambodia and Laos in 1970 that was intended to destroy parts of the Ho Chi Minh trail demonstrated that, in fact, South Vietnam was incapable of fighting without American aid.110

Vietnamization was doomed to failure because the South Vietnamese Army, with the exception of a few elite units, was

simply not competent enough nor enthusiastic enough to defeat the Communists. After nearly ten years fighting alongside them, American officials must have been aware of the military deficiencies of the South Vietnamese.

If, as it seemed clear after the Tet Offensive, the war in Vietnam was not going to be won by American efforts, or by South Vietnamese efforts, or by and combination thereof, the only rational decision would have been to stop fighting. Difficult and depressing as it may have been to simply give up, to abandon South Vietnam to a Communist takeover, continuing to fight was clearly an option that would have (and, in fact, did) have worse consequences. Both America and Vietnam were subjected to five years of unnecessary war because of our decision to continue to fight after the Tet Offensive. What makes the decision to keep fighting after Tet irrational is that we should have known by then that the war was unwinnable. Our failure to understand this simple fact made the period of war from mid 1968 to 1973 not only wrong but irrational.

NOTES

1. J.S. Mill, "Utilitarianism," in Studies in Utilitarianism, ed. Thomas K. Hearn, (New York: Meredith Corporation, 1971), 44-45.

2. Thomas K. Hearn, ed., Studies in Utilitarianism, (New York: Meredith Corporation, 1971), 1.

3. Mill, 49. 4. Ibid., 54.

5. J.J.C. Smart, "An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics," in Utilitarianism for and Against, J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 7-14 passim.

6. Mill, 46. 7. Ibid., 45. 8. Ibid., 47.

9. Ibid., 49. 10. Smart, 4.

11. Richard B. Brandt, Ethical Theory, (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959), 403.

12. Smart, 38. 13. Ibid., 47. 14. Brandt, 382.

15. W.D. Ross, The Right and the Good, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1988), 17.

16. Ibid., 21. 17. Ibid., 18.

18. T.L. Carson, "Ross's Ethical Theory, 1989 (?)" TMs [photocopy], 9.

19. Richard B. Brandt, "Utilitarianism and the Rules of War," Philosophy and Public Affairs 1, (1972): 152.

20. Ibid., 154. 21. Ibid., 165.

22. Seymore M. Hersh, My Lai 4, (New York: Random House, 1970), 41.

23. Ibid., 50. 24. Ibid., 51. 25. Ibid., 63.

26. Ibid., 74. 27. Ibid., 187.

28. Stanley Karnow, Vietnam, A History, The First Complete Account of Vietnam at War, (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1983), 55.

29. Ibid., 102. 30. Ibid., 63. 31. Ibid., 88.

32. Ibid., 118. 33. Ibid., 116. 34. Ibid., 136.

35. Ibid., 121. 36. Ibid., 122. 37. Ibid., 675.

38. Ibid. 39. Ibid. 40. Ibid.

41. Ibid. 42. Ibid, 144-152, passim.

43. Ibid., 182. 44. Ibid., 204 45. Ibid., 214.

46. I would like to introduce a distinction here between what is the best alternative and what is the best alternative that can be implemented, given certain political limitations. While I will argue that alternative 1 would have had the best consequences, it does not seem that the American political climate in the early 1960's would have allowed us this option. It also does not seem that the extremely high rate of casualties that would have resulted from alternative 4, a strictly guerilla type of war would have been accepted by the American public, either. As philosophers, we can speak of these options which logically would seem to have been the best in a given situation. We must, however, at least acknowledge the fact that political factors limit certain possibilities.

47. It is my conclusion, however, that if legality were the issue, America would still not have been on the side of a

legitimate state. Taking into consideration the Geneva Agreements of 1954, it seems clear that the Republic of South Vietnam was not a legitimate authority. It had none of the things a legitimate authority ought to have. It had no power under international agreement, it had little popular support, and it was incapable of existing without outside aid. The Agreements in no way established any authority, and the Saigon regime itself could not have survived without American aid and assistance. Any authority Saigon had came not from Geneva or from its own power, but simply from American dollars and muscle.

48. Karnow, 183.

49. Jean-Paul Sartre, "On Genocide," in Moral Argument and the War in Vietnam, ed. Paul T. Menzel, (Tennessee: Aurora Publishers Incorporated, 1971), 64-65.

50. Ibid., 65-66.

51. Jonathan Schell and others, "Technology and American Power," in War Crimes and the American Conscience, Erwin Knoll and Judith Nies McFadden, eds., (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 65.

52. Ibid., 66.

53. Robert Jay Lifton and others, "Americans in Vietnam," in War Crimes and the American Conscience, Erwin Knoll and Judith Nies McFadden, eds., (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 127.

54. Schell, 57.

55. Edward S. Herman, Atrocities in Vietnam: Myths and Realities, (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1970), 61.

56. Schell, 58-59. 57. Ibid, 63-69 passim.

58. Ibid., 73. 59. Ibid., 69. 60. Herman, 43.

61. Ibid., 42. 62. Schell, 58. 63. Karnow, 27.

64. Ibid., 4.

65. Norman Podhoretz, Why We Were in Vietnam, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982, 57.

66. Ibid., 61. 67. Ibid., 58.

68. Mark Clodfelter, The Limits of Air Power, The American Bombing of North Vietnam, (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 204.

69. Ibid. 70. Ibid., 205. 71. Ibid.

72. Ibid. 73. Podhoretz, 62. 74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. An interesting question arises here. Who, exactly, would believe that the American war in Vietnam would be rational in 1960? An average citizen? Or our national leaders? It is usually assumed that our leaders know more about the state of the world than do our average citizens. Therefore, it might be said that what is rational for John Doe to believe could be irrational for our President to believe. I would still argue, though, that even the most informed government official in 1960 could have reasonably thought our involvement in Vietnam to be rational.

77. Podhoretz, 62. 78. Ibid., 20.

79. Ibid., 21. 80. Ibid., 23. 81. Ibid., 19.

82. Karnow, 250. 83. Podhoretz, 19. 84. Ibid, 35.

85. Ibid., 40. 86. Karnow, 254.

87. If America could have won the war in the manner we were fighting it, without causing tremendous amounts of civilian casualties, it may well have been right to fight in Vietnam. However, the facts show that this was impossible. If America could have accepted the demands of a guerilla war, and fought accordingly, it is still not clear that we would

have won. If we assume, however, that America could have won a true guerilla war, the question then arises, how much killing could victory have justified? Such a question is difficult to answer, but America did not have to answer it, as it found itself unwilling to accept the demands of a true guerilla war.

88. Don Oberdorfer, Tet!, (New York: Avon Books, 1971), 54.

89. Ibid., 135. 90. Karnow, 523. 91. Ibid., 525.

92. Oberdorfer, 170. 93. Ibid., 171.

94. Ibid., 170. 95. Ibid., 219. 96. Ibid., 216.

97. Ibid., 236. 98. Ibid., 247. 99. Ibid., 251.

100. Ibid., 249. 101. Ibid., 247. 102. Ibid., 269.

103. Ibid., 271. 104. Ibid., 279. 105. Ibid., 192.

106. Ibid., 289. 107. Ibid., 212.

108. Karnow, 684. 109. Herman, 63.

110. Karnow, 629-630.

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November 30, 1990 Thomas J Carson

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Director's Signature