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Southeast Asia Ten Years after the Fall of Saigon

Lieutenant General Bernard Trainor, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)

When I received the invitation to come to Newport and give a retrospective on Vietnam, it turned out to be a somewhat painful experience. Like many of my generation—following our departure from Vietnam and later after the fall of Saigon—we pretty much put the experience behind us. Your invitation forced me to think not only about those days, but what has happened in the ten years since Saigon fell.

American involvement in Vietnam was already deep by 1964, although we had not yet committed forces. We had advisers in-country and our involvement was significant, but the final commitment—ground combat forces—had not yet occurred. In this earlier period we placed great emphasis on the country team, on the mechanics of the way a country team operates and how one operates in an insurgency environment. In its training regimen the Marine Corps looked to past insurgency experience, such as Nicaragua, for models to be applied to Vietnam. I would have to say there was very little questioning of the efficacy of our involvement. We lived in an age of innocence that focused on mechanics and assumed efficacy.

I first went to Vietnam in 1965 and, as a major, ran a covert operation under deep cover. I went out there with all the crusading spirit and nobility for which the Marine Corps and the Nation is rightfully known. I returned to Vietnam as a lieutenant colonel in 1970 to be a battalion commander, first of an infantry battalion and later of a reconnaissance battalion. I can say that by then a good deal of the crusading zeal had vanished, because of what had happened in the intervening period. I found myself not so much a “crusader” as a “campaigner” in the best British tradition—where one did what had to

An adaptation of a lecture given at the Naval War College

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be done, but in the process tried not to get anybody hurt because we were just waiting the situation out. So much for personal reflections.

The United States in the early 1960s had little real interest in South Vietnam in terms of its economy, even in terms of its geopolitical location. Our concern for the region was primarily ideological. If you are to understand what happened during that period you have to put yourself back into that period. And, if you do so, you have to ask yourself, "Would we have done anything differently?" It is easy in retrospect to see where we made our mistakes, but it must also be recognized that at that time the United States was on an anticommunist crusade. We had this great sense of nobility. We viewed ourselves as the savior of the world. It was summed up in the euphoric rhetoric of John F. Kennedy, and we believed the rhetoric.

All other nations at the time were doing what all other nations traditionally did, which was to look after their own selfish and parochial interests. The United States was doing more than that, it was looking to the well-being of the world and saw itself as the sort of nation we assumed the founding fathers wanted us to be—the light and hope of the world. There were two manifestations of our commitment to this noble cause—this willingness to bear any burden, to face any threat in the cause of liberty, which Kennedy so eloquently articulated in his inaugural address. First was our willingness to spend the blood of our youth in combat in support of freedom, and the other was the selflessness and sacrifice of the Peace Corps. These were generous efforts for the well-being of the world and both were also designed to thwart the threat of communism.

How did we view this threat of communism? This is very important, because the threat was viewed as monolithic. We had known of a split between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC), but I do not think that there was a full understanding of that split. I think there was a suspicion that the split was a facade, for while there may have been some sort of theological dispute between these two actors, both China and Russia were in fact one enemy and they posed an enormous danger. There was the fear of the domino reaction—that this combination of China and the Soviet Union, this great red blot that filled all our maps at the time, would flow into Southeast Asia and all of Southeast Asia would tumble in sequence with drastic consequences. This was viewed as a real possibility. After all, there were insurgencies in the Malay Peninsula and there was a very strong communist movement in Indonesia. There was an enormous concern for the spread of ideological communism and the spread of communism from the point of view of a hostile power base in Southeast Asia in the Pacific Basin and along the lines of communication into the Indian Ocean.

There is another aspect of the times that I think was important. President Kennedy had a severe shock with the failure at the Bay of Pigs. Kennedy also

had had some unpleasantness dealing face to face with Nikita Khrushchev. There was concern that the Soviets looked upon Kennedy as being all rhetoric and no substance. One way to show resolve was a clear commitment in support of South Vietnam. So our involvement in Vietnam began initially as a support role, but the involvement grew.

Then Kennedy was assassinated and we had a new President who had absolutely no interest in Vietnam, one who really was not taken by the anticommunist crusade. He was a domestically oriented President whose main goal was the Great Society. However, he became hostage to events. To a large measure, he became hostage to the foreign policy and military experts who surrounded him, until he lost his confidence in them. But I think perhaps the thing that influenced Johnson's decisions more than anything else was simply Lyndon Johnson. He was a tough, hard-bitten political Texan, who was not going to take crap from anybody. And if those rascals out in Asia, those little slopeheads, were giving us a problem, by God, we'd get them squared away. I think there was a measure of that present in his policy decisions.

I am not going to dwell upon what led up to the war as you have been privileged to read those far more knowledgeable on this subject than I. But I felt that it was useful to give you a perspective from the 1960s because it is important in terms of a soldier's understanding of events and an evaluation of the outcome.

What would have happened if we had not become involved in Vietnam when we did and in the way we did? For our purposes today let us take a parametrical approach and look at a worst-case situation and a best-case situation. *Worst case*; there is little doubt that had we not gone into Vietnam the Diem regime would have fallen, and there would be a Vietnam united today as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). There may not have been the same amount of bloodshed and destruction, but Vietnam would still be communist.

The 1964-65 PKI revolt in Indonesia would have most likely succeeded. I think a case can be made that its failure and the successful counter coup, conducted by the Indonesian military, was the result of encouragement drawn from the U.S. commitment in Vietnam. The suppression of the PKI probably would not have taken place if there was not that sense of confidence of the U.S. commitment to that part of the world. But a counter coup did take place, the PKI was destroyed, and Indonesia today is not a "people's republic." The insurgencies that were taking place in Thailand and in the Malay Peninsula, they too probably would have succeeded. Possibly, the Philippines would also have experienced a renewed communist insurgency.

In this process, there would have been tremendous regional turmoil between 1965 and 1985. Whether that turmoil would have subsided with all of

Southeast Asia under an iron-fisted communist rule, I do not know. But the turmoil would have been prolonged and clearly the direction would have been toward ultimate communist domination, a realization of the domino theory. Western influence in the area would have collapsed under this worst-case scenario, and the Communists would have dominated the lines of communication between the Indian Ocean and the northern Pacific.

In addition, there would have been the discrediting of the United States worldwide, because of the perceived emptiness of our rhetoric. We were already suspect because John Foster Dulles years earlier, at the height of the cold war, encouraged uprisings in Eastern Europe. Various uprisings did, in fact, take place. They took place in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and in Hungary. We did nothing. Now to have encouraged anticommunist resistance with the rhetoric that we would bear any burden, etc., and then back off, well, I think we would have suffered severe decline of influence around the world in terms of being a reliable friend and ally. It is conjectural as to what effect that would have had on NATO.

A final point on the worst-case scenario. If we had not intervened and Diem collapsed, I think there would be limited Chinese influence in Southeast Asia and virtually no Soviet influence within the area. The North Vietnamese would have seen to their exclusion, having achieved their goals unaided. If their traditional enemy, China, were cut out there would have been no need for a countervailing Soviet presence. In my judgment that would have been the outcome in the worst case of nonintervention.

The best-case situation, resulting from nonintervention, also would have been a united Socialist Republic of Vietnam, but one which was quiescent with its neighboring states—Thailand, the Malay states and Indonesia—free of communism, but certainly not dealing with the United States in the cooperative way that we see today. I think the same thing would have been obtained with regard to the PRC and the Soviet Union—limited PRC influence and little, if any, Soviet influence. That then is my parametrical approach to what would have happened if we had not intervened; a communist Vietnam but within a vastly different milieu.

But we did intervene and just in human terms the price was 350,000 Americans killed and wounded. Is the difference that great between the effects of intervening or not intervening, whether it be worst case or best case? I suspect that had we not intervened, the discrediting of the United States would have been the greatest damage. But we did intervene and the war had a tremendous impact in the United States. Its impact was synergistic in that there were other things going on which compounded the impact of the war and the war in turn compounded the impact of these other events: there was the civil rights revolution, the youth revolt, the women's revolt and Watergate's effect on the body politic.

Think about these events in conjunction with an unpopular war. What other nation in the world could have suffered such social and political turmoil, shrugged it off like a gnat on an elephant's back, to become stronger and better than ever? Any one of these events could have brought down a less resilient government, democratic or nondemocratic. Today in this country it is as though that upheaval had never happened. We have absorbed the whole thing. There is residual effect, but clearly it has in no way damaged the structure of the Government or the faith of the people. At the very least it gives me great confidence in the strength and character of this country, and also the wisdom of our Founding Fathers.

Now let us look at Vietnam ten years after. I think the first thing that should strike us is the lack of national interest in a region which had so captured the attention and emotions of the United States—where so many people bled and died, and when so much of our treasure was poured out to no avail. With the exception of the humanitarian aspect of the MIA-POW issue, there is a singular lack of American interest in the area today. Vietnam is treated by the American people with a form of benign indifference. In spite of the horrors of Kampuchea, the American people are not agitated about Southeast Asia at all. This is extraordinary! Extraordinary in the sense that the totally all-consuming focus of our society for so long is so ignored today. Why should something so important *then* be so unimportant *now*? The answer to that question is one of ideological mind-set. What was ideologically important in the sixties became discredited in the seventies and a matter of indifference in the eighties.

From a regional standpoint, what do we see today? First and foremost is the emergence of ASEAN. Southeast Asians were frightened by what had taken place in Vietnam. The nations that today we call ASEAN welcomed our involvement in the area during the sixties. It bought them time to strengthen their own institutions—political institutions, economic institutions, and, most importantly for the region, their cooperative institutions. So that is a plus in terms of what resulted from our involvement in Vietnam. There is another form of “ASEAN” emerging. It can be described as an Indo-Chinese federation in which Hanoi seeks to achieve in its long sought goal of a united Indo-Chinese made up of the SRV, Laos, and Kampuchea. Both of these political alignments can be seen as regional products of the war.

Within the SRV, we find an economic-political basket case. It is a case of revolutionaries and theorists—who are great warriors but lousy administrators and lousy politicians—successful in gaining control of a country but incapable of running it. It is a bureaucratic state, it is inefficient, it is suspicious, and has all the hallmarks of any totalitarian state; inept and inflexible. As a result of its own inefficiencies the SRV has had to establish relations with an outside power that could provide the economic help to keep

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it afloat. Of course, that outside power is the Soviet Union and this in turn gives the Soviets an entrée into the region. But the SRV still remains an economic-political basket case. It is ridden with factional strife as all institutions of that nature are. However, that may be changing as Le Duan may be emerging as the de facto strong man in Vietnam. He may improve the country's economic and political base, and settle the two major issues that the SRV faces—Kampuchea and the SRV's relationship with the United States.

Another regional outcome of the war is the greater polarization between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. They are further apart than ever; Vietnam is one of the problems and Kampuchea is at the core. The Kampuchean issue has exacerbated the relationships between the PRC and the Soviet Union. This is a far cry from the absolute belief on the part of most American people and, indeed, successive Administrations, that the PRC and the Soviet Union were in league. Here we have the anomaly of the outcome of a war that was eventually lost, where there exists today greater antagonism between these two communist giants than ever before.

Another regional outcome, not included in the best or worst-case scenario that I described to you, is the presence of the Soviet Union in the SRV. Hanoi had to turn to somebody for assistance, and obviously, it was not going to be the PRC. The Soviet Union, needless to say, is opportunistic, and has eagerly provided aid and assistance to the SRV, in return for base rights at Cam Ranh Bay. This serves a useful military entrée to the area, but it also has a certain effect on China. What we see is a substantial U.S.S.R. presence in Vietnam, but it would be a mistake to overestimate the degree of influence the Soviets enjoy in the SRV as the result of that presence.

The final and perhaps one of the most significant regional aspects of the war plus ten years is the relative stability of the area. ASEAN is getting stronger, and the SRV remains tied down by its own internal problems and the problems of Kampuchea. So there exists a degree of stability within the region, as opposed to the instability which existed prior to our entrance into the fray.

On the international scene, what have been the results of Saigon plus ten years? A major one from the point of view of our allies has to be: "thank God, the United States has gotten out of that mess, it has cut its losses and refocused its attention elsewhere." The "elsewhere," of course, being Europe, where most of our influential friends felt the main focus of attention should have been all along.

Yet what of the argument about our *bona fides*, our credentials, our credibility? Today the Europeans say, "We never doubted them." It is easy for them to say that in retrospect, but if we had not gone into Vietnam, given all our rhetoric and initial assistance and support, would they indeed have the same sense of American dependability today? I am not so sure, because one of

the implied criticisms to emerge after we had thrown in the towel was that the United States had gone back on its word. Be that as it may, the European consensus is that the United States should never have gotten involved in Vietnam but even having done so, should have gotten out of there quickly. To Europe, Vietnam was an aberration and beyond that, there is no interest in the area.

Our relationship with the People's Republic of China has been enhanced by our Vietnam experience. We do, in a sense, have common goals with regard to both Southeast Asia and the Soviet Union. That is a real plus on the international scene. As I have already stated, the relationship between the PRC and the U.S.S.R. is worse than ever, in part due to Vietnam.

In essence that is my view of the regional and international scene ten years after the fall of Saigon. But how about the domestic scene? What have been the consequences for the United States? Clearly the age of innocence is over—no longer are we the policeman of the world, the guy in the white hat who will bear any burden. Is that good? That depends upon future events but it is a fact. We are not the crusader any longer. The one time in the post-Vietnam period that we did play crusader—our intervention in Lebanon—we got burned again. So perhaps the lesson of Vietnam is seen to have been underscored by what happened in Lebanon.

Another consequence of Vietnam has been reduced confidence in national leadership. Traditionally, Americans have given the leadership of the Nation the benefit of the doubt and accepted the foreign policies of the Government without real question. That's over. National leadership is today being challenged daily by John Q. Public in Iowa and by his representative in the halls of Congress. The World War II and postwar idea of a bipartisan congressional support for the Administration in power in matters of foreign affairs exists no longer.

Congressional challenge to the President is an ongoing thing, a product of the Vietnamese War with Congress playing a much greater role in foreign affairs. Witness the War Powers Act, witness the Clark amendment which prevented us from getting involved in Angola shortly after the Vietnamese debacle. Consider congressional performance in the struggle for Central America, and congressional actions relating to our involvement in Lebanon. Congress, for good or ill, is now a much greater player in foreign affairs, and the origins of that trend can be traced back to the challenge to the President over Vietnam.

The reemergence of isolationism is a by-product of Vietnam. Its companion piece is our quest for simplicity—good but simple solutions. I have the greatest respect for Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. However, his speech outlining the preconditions for the commitment of U.S. Armed Forces, the so-called Weinberger doctrine, seems to me to be the essence of

simplicity. If his prescriptions are taken literally—that we are not going to get involved in military action unless we have clear objectives, unless we can fully use our military resources, unless we have the support of the people behind us, and unless we can win—we would paralyze our ability to act. But that is also a reflection of the post-Vietnam trauma that we went through in the military, particularly among the senior military. I've heard that speech absolutely applauded by many senior officers followed by the comment, "By God, no more Vietnams. If we're going to commit combat troops again, we're going to require public support. We're going to demand clear objectives." Nice, but not likely; and that is an effect of the war, this quest to return to a womb of simplicity that in fact never existed.

Another domestic outgrowth of the war and a recent one at that, is a growing sense of national shame. The abuse of Vietnam veterans who were spit upon when they returned, the adulation for those who resisted the war, and burned the flag and their draft cards and fled to Canada. That record of performance is a source of national discomfort. I also think there is a growing sense of shame that the United States, having committed itself and its honor to an ally, imperfect as that ally was, let that ally down. This is beginning to gnaw on the American conscience. Unfortunately, it appears that where we failed in real life, we compensate by macho posturing on the silver screen. Hollywood, it seems, is equally capable of a Rambo as a Jane Fonda.

I would like to give you some concrete evidence to support my case for a troubled American conscience. Two events support this thesis—Grenada and the U.S. action in response to the *Achille Lauro* ship hijacking. The almost euphoric response of the American people to both events, to me, is in a sense exculpation for our failure in Vietnam. If you recall in the Grenada operation, it was roundly condemned by the media, and they are supposed to have the pulse of the American people. The media, in general, was shocked when the American people rose up and said to Ronald Reagan, "Right on!" in the face of almost universal media condemnation of the action. Public support for the President's actions staggered the media. They went into a huddle to figure out why they had misread the public and they had a thousand explanations. But, I submit to you that the public was simply saying, "Thank God we have reestablished our honor after the shame of Vietnam." The same thing occurred when the Navy intercepted the Arab hijackers. All sorts of cases can be made as to the international illegality of what we did, but that is beside the point. There was no way to convince the American people that counterhijacking was not the right thing to do. To me these are simply manifestations that indicate we as a people feel very uneasy about our failure in Vietnam. All of these things I describe have been generalized as the "Vietnam Syndrome," and I suspect that is as good a description for it as any.

The last point I would like to make about the domestic consequences of Vietnam is a long-term legacy. It is the Asian influx to this country. We may have abandoned the South Vietnamese, but the South Vietnamese did not abandon us. They fled Vietnam, they fled in great numbers and they fled to us. They are still fleeing. In the long run, it may be that this Asian influx is the greatest reward that this country will receive in return for the sacrifice of 350,000 young men killed and wounded in that war, because we have traded in that sacrifice for thousands of Asians who have come to this country and who are making the United States a better country. All you have to do is look at all the admirable student academic records and the impressive adult work record that is being established by these vigorous Asian people to understand the dimensions of their repayment for our efforts. They believed in the American dream, and fled to its shores as the alternative to a tortured life at home. Years from now we may view this contribution to America as a blessed outcome of the war.

As to the future, I think what you will see in a regional context is a continuation of stability, but it will be a political, economic, and military balance within a framework of regional institutionalization. I refer to ASEAN and some form of federation of SRV, Laos, and Kampuchea. The two regional institutions will be in competition with one another but they will also seek a certain degree of regional cooperation. ASEAN seeks a benign Indochina. They would hope that the Communist bloc looks to its own affairs and does not try to export its revolution. ASEAN will try to counter any such export by economic, political, and military strength and greater cooperation between its members.

Hanoi, for its part, will seek to consolidate its gains, solve the problem of Kampuchea and achieve the long sought Indo-Chinese federation. It will strive to convert the ASEAN nations into people's republics. However, I do not think that it will, in the foreseeable future, pursue that goal with any notable vigor. There is certainly no indication that Hanoi is now supporting in any great measure the various insurgencies that do exist within the ASEAN region.

I think the Hanoi leaders will also seek to play the Soviets off against the United States and against the PRC. They will try to set up a cross-trump to work to their own advantage. The main purpose will be to limit Soviet influence, still recognizing their dependence upon Soviet Union economic aid. Playing a U.S.-China card is one way for Vietnam to mitigate Soviet influence. In the process, however, they will also seek to exploit the Soviet Union for all its worth in economic aid until Hanoi gets its own house in order. Finally, I think Hanoi very badly seeks international legitimacy, but not to a point that it would do anything for it. But it does want legitimacy and that is embodied in U.S. recognition of the SRV.

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From the point of view of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese seek to avoid Soviet encirclement. They are very concerned about Soviet presence in Vietnam, particularly at Cam Ranh Bay. So the Chinese will seek an independent Kampuchea, but they recognize that this goal is not very realistic as the SRV will probably persevere in Kampuchea as long as necessary to bring it under its complete control. China views the Soviet presence in the SRV as a means of providing them with greater leverage with the United States.

How about Moscow? What is the view from the Kremlin? As you recall, both under the worst-case and the best-case situation I postulated earlier, the Soviets would have had little influence in the region. But now they do. They use their presence and their influence within the region to put pressure on the PRC. Secondly, their presence is used to intimidate Japan, our strongest ally in the Pacific. The Soviets will try to dominate the area ideologically with the Moscow form of Marxism-Leninism. They will clearly try to prevent a resurgence of U.S. power and influence within the area. They will try to woo the ASEAN nations and convince them that the U.S.S.R. is an understanding, worthy, and legitimate partner within the region and one with whom ASEAN should cooperate. Of course, they will also try to strengthen their military position in the region through use of such places as Cam Ranh Bay. That is not just to annoy China or the United States but because of a perceived military need. You have to recognize that between 60 percent and 80 percent of the flow of supply and commerce to the Soviet maritime provinces comes by way of the Indian Ocean and up the far Western Pacific. While we talk about our SLOCs to the Indian Ocean going through the Straits of Malacca, the Soviets do also. So they do have some legitimate concerns for their SLOCs in the area.

With regard to the future of the United States and the SRV, I think we will primarily be interested in humanitarian matters—the POW-MIA issue. Almost to the exclusion of everything else, that is going to dominate whatever interest we have in the region. Otherwise, we will continue to treat the area with benign neglect while seeking to strengthen the capabilities of the ASEAN nations. Needless to say, the Philippine Islands, which is a separate but certainly a very critical issue today will receive increasing emphasis—particularly in view of the Soviet presence in Cam Ranh Bay. We will also seek to increase our cooperation with China as a counter to the Soviet influence within the region.

I would be remiss when looking at Saigon plus ten and the future if I didn't address the recognition of the SRV. I am not so sure the question is one of *if* we will recognize them, rather than a question of *when* we will recognize them. You can get a lot of arguments pro and con on this subject, but ultimately we will recognize Hanoi if, for no other reason, than to have a window within the region and, indeed, have a sort of counter to the Soviets. I think at the

present time, recognition is of minimum interest to both sides. But, on balance, I think Hanoi's quest for legitimacy and the need to control Soviet inroads argues that Hanoi is more interested in recognition than are we. The impediment to our recognition of Hanoi at this time is public attitude. The public is tender about Vietnam, and I think there would be some real domestic difficulties in getting over the hurdle of recognition. Thereafter, the relationship of normalization probably would flow without too much difficulty, but presently, I think, is just more than American tolerance would bear. Another impediment, of course, is the POW-MIA issue and the callous way in which the Hanoi Government has dealt with that issue. This should come as no surprise to us, because they did exactly the same thing with the French after their failure in Indochina. The Kampuchean situation, of course, also continues to be an impediment to recognition.

I have given you a view of how we ended up in Vietnam, also my judgment of what would have happened if we had not gone there; worst case, best case. We have looked at the present situation and a judgment has been made on my part as to what the future should look like.

Permit me, therefore, to come to some conclusions. I think that the main conclusion that I come to is that in retrospect, Vietnam was a searing of the soul of the United States. I think the real damage resulting from our failed intervention was one of the spirit, which has been translated into foreign policy, and that has been a distinct minus.

As for the military effects, there has been a surprising reluctance at self-examination and reflection to see how well or poorly we performed in Vietnam. Hopefully the doors will open and we will take a hard look at ourselves. We have, in large measure, hidden behind the theory that we were stabbed in the back by the politicians. The stab in the back theory in the sense that "they" did not allow us to fight the way "we" wanted to fight, etc., etc. Convenient excuses. The Army did attempt to look at itself immediately at the end of the war but it closed the door very quickly, because it did not like what it saw. Given the climate of the time when the Army did this, they might have feared some very serious institutional problems within an already demoralized Army. We got a little peek at the dissatisfaction in Gabriel's book, *Crisis in Command*. But all critical data on Army leadership and performance in Vietnam is probably locked up in the War College at Carlisle. But to the Army's credit, it did start the process of self-examination and I believe they are starting again.

My own service, the Marine Corps, has not looked at Marine performance at all. We have printed monographs and said a lot about our role in Vietnam, but we have not carefully looked at the way we led and fought. We did many things right but, in my judgment, we also did a lot of things wrong. We should look at our performance for the sake of the future. The time is now. As for the

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Navy, it has always been indifferent to Vietnam performance and remains indifferent. The Air Force has collected comprehensive data on the air war but only seems interested in the mechanical aspects of the war and testing the effectiveness of airpower.

The military, like Secretary of Defense Weinberger, tend to look to the idea of clear-cut and purely military conflict. As a result it involves itself in diverting technical arguments and discussions; the merits of maneuver warfare versus attrition warfare, the efficacy of light infantry versus armor, second echelon attack and operational maneuver groups. These subjects are useful in that their addressal is legitimate, but they also provide marvelous decoys to keep us from dealing with the most likely and real issue we face, i.e. how do we cope with a constrained politico-military conflict? We are not going to fight World War II again, where a modern Patton can display a marvelous operational art. We are not going to use military force as the exclusive arbiter of events when our interests are threatened. Today we do not fight "wars." We did not in Vietnam and we will not now. Unless there is some absolutely catastrophic series of mistakes in your lifetime, you are not going to fight "wars" either. You are going to be involved in political—and note I say political first—political-military engagements of one form or another. The political is the essence of what happens. The military aspects are secondary. That was the case in Vietnam and that is why it was so frustrating for the military.

Our officer corps insisted on fighting a military war when it was a politico-military war. We still cannot seem to adjust to this reality. The military is secondary. There is little room for the operational art because that assumes an unfettered military. At most there is room for some minor tactics within a political context. Everything is dominated by politics, whether you like it or not. The dangers of escalation or destabilizing second and third order of consequences to our military actions ordain that political considerations and sensitivities will dominate strategy, the operational art and even tactics. That is the way it is. In large measure, that is the way it has been for a long time. We in the military insist on wanting to fight, not the last war, but the wars of the last century. We have to disabuse ourselves of that mind-set. We have to think about warfare in its political context and attune our techniques and forces to that reality.

