

ASIAN FUTURES

Charles Wolf, Jr.

May 1968

P-3852

ASIAN FUTURES¹

Charles Wolf, Jr.*

The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California

Considering the effects of President Johnson's statements with respect to cessation of the bombing north of the 20th parallel and his own withdrawal from the campaign in the U.S., let's ask what the effects of the pair of announcements are likely to be? First, what the effects are or are likely to be in the United States? Then what the effects are likely to be in Vietnam, north and south? And what the effects are likely to be in the rest of the world?

In the U.S., I think, the effects of the combined announcements of the bombing cessation and the President's own withdrawal from the campaign are likely to be first that there is some reduction in divisiveness within the American political scene. And the effect of this reduction will be to increase President Johnson's influence on the choice of a Democratic candidate at the Democratic convention next summer. In this connection it is interesting to recall that the President's decision to withdraw from the campaign, in some respects, is analogous to the decision by President Truman in 1952 -- the

¹These remarks are the unedited text of an interview that was taped by The Kokubo (the monthly journal of the Japanese Defense Agency) at Lake Yamanaka, Japan on April 3, 1968 during a conference that I was attending there. The interview will be published in Japanese in a forthcoming issue of that journal. The remarks were made without notes in response to questions posed by Professor Makoto Momoi of the National Defense College.

*Any views expressed in this paper are those of the author. They should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of The RAND Corporation or the official opinion or policy of any of its governmental or private research sponsors. Papers are reproduced by The RAND Corporation as a courtesy to members of its staff.

decision to withdraw from the presidential campaign when he was eligible to run a second time. And at that time President Truman also withdrew in the midst of a protracted war that was becoming increasingly unpopular in the United States. Even though it doesn't seem in retrospect to have been the case, the Korean war, after two years, had become severely unpopular in the U.S. And the effect of Truman's withdrawal was to reduce divisiveness and also increase Truman's influence on the choice of a Democratic candidate -- Adlai Stevenson. Also interesting to recall is that Eisenhower was elected, a Republican Party candidate. If one wants to extend that precedent, one might conceivably imagine that the effect of President Johnson's withdrawal would be to increase the chance of the Republican candidate being elected. In the forthcoming presidential campaign in November, 1968, the effect in the U.S. -- reducing divisiveness and increasing the President's influence on the choice of a nominee -- can also have an unintended result.

Now let me turn to the second category, that is, the effects of the two announcements in Vietnam. Let us consider what the effects of the announcements may be in North Vietnam and then in South Vietnam.

In considering the effect of the announcements on the DRV, we might distinguish between military and political effects. From a political point of view, DRV may have several reasons for responding positively to the President's announcements or responding with some reduction in the level of conflict on their own side or moving toward negotiations. The political reasons for doing so would include the

pressure of international opinion and possibly the influence of the Soviet Union. I have absolutely no idea what the relative strength of pro-Moscow and pro-Peking factions in the Hanoi Government will be. But one might speculate that if the presumption that Pham Van Dong and Giap are reputedly pro-Moscow people in the North Vietnamese structure is correct, that they will be strengthened and that the pro-Peking group will not be strengthened as a result of the announcements. Then there could be internally within DRV a political pressure to respond with some equivalent, corresponding or deescalatory gesture moving toward negotiations. On the other hand, there may also be a countervailing political pressure. The Peking faction -- if indeed there is one within the DRV -- may argue that the President's announcements have been a reflection of the wisdom and the effectiveness of the militant course of action and of support for NLF. Therefore, they may argue that this course of action should be maintained.

On the military side, it seems to me very likely that there would be strong military arguments for not responding to the President's announcements with an equivalent or corresponding deescalatory movement on the part of NLF. And the main reason would be that the announcements would be interpreted as an evidence of the impending U.S. withdrawal and indication of the potential victory by the VC. Since the value of the prize very much depends on how it is acquired, they may very well feel that the correctness of their military actions as reflected by these announcements warrants continuing in the path that they have been pursuing.

So when you balance all these things together on the part of DRV, my own hunch or guess -- since I have no inside information and I am speaking only for myself and not for The RAND Corporation -- my own guess would be that it is more likely that DRV will not respond with any clear and unambiguous deescalatory move and will not enter into serious negotiations (as Mao has said, "Fight; talk; fight"). In short, on the political side there are arguments on both sides, while on the military side everything will probably lead them to believe "let's continue." So sort of loosely balancing what I have said, the probability that they will respond by moving toward serious negotiations or deescalating on their own side will be, say, 0.3. My estimate of their either doing nothing or saying "let's wait and see if the Americans are really sincere" or conceivably saying "we will begin to talk about the agenda," or something like it, would be 0.7. So, I think, it's more likely that there will either be no response or a kind of temporizing response -- negotiations that don't mean very much or that don't get very far.

Now let's consider what the effects on South Vietnam may be. The effects of the announcements may be to spread a spirit of defeatism, that Americans are beginning to pull out and that the prospects don't look too good for the GVN. Not only the "fence-sitters," but some of the GVN adherents may consequently begin to diversify their portfolio -- begin to start temporizing and making contacts with the VC and NLF. That's one possibility. And the other possibility is that the GVN responds to this challenge by an increasing awareness that they have to stand on their own feet or with less

American support. And the indication of this might be the announcement President Thieu made today (April 3) about mobilization: "We will fight on," and "even if Americans withdraw, that won't affect us." I think there are these two very different possible reactions. My subjective guess is that the likelihood of a fracture and splitting up is perhaps somewhat greater than that of a strengthening resolve to meet the challenge (maybe 0.6 for the former; 0.4 for the latter!).

So much for Vietnam. On the rest of the world, I think that in Japan and in Western Europe the effects of the two announcements -- the bombing cessation and President's own withdrawal -- will be favorable and have been favorable. I would qualify that a little bit by saying that the favorable reaction in Western Europe and Japan to the cessation of the bombing will be a little bit muted or blurred by the parts of the announcements which were not entirely clear when the announcements were made.

One of the muting factors is the decision to keep on bombing up to the 20th parallel -- the President said that 90 percent of Vietnam will be exempted from bombing, but it wasn't too clear whether 90 percent is applied to territory, population, GNP or what. From the bombing of Tang Hoa, 209 miles north of DMZ, it seems that the area up to the 20th parallel is still included within the targetable area (and there has been an announcement to that effect). This is one factor that tends to blur or to mute the generally favorable reaction in Western Europe and Japan -- slightly.

The other minor blurring factor is that while saying that we are deescalating or taking this unilateral step to reduce pressure, he

said we were sending 13,500 additional troops. This is a small, but still a blurring factor. These two things have the effects of reducing the favorableness of reaction in Western Europe and Japan. Those are the factors which slightly blur the clear message that he was trying to communicate.

At the same time, as one makes these observations about predominantly favorable effects internationally, it seems to me terribly important to recognize, and maybe particularly important for Japanese public opinion to recognize, that there will be seriously unfavorable reactions from the Johnson statements in some countries (other than Japan, U.S. and Western Europe): in particular, the reactions in Korea and Taiwan and Thailand will be unfavorable and those in Australia will be unfavorable. And I think the reactions in South Vietnam will be unfavorable. Partly this offsetting reaction is because the announcements reflect a concession or backing down or giving in, particularly from the Korean standpoint, since the Koreans regard -- rather accurately -- the role of North Vietnam in directing, guiding and leading the NLF and VC in the South as quite equivalent to the role of North Korea in the very substantial, even though short lived, insurgency in South Korea.

When people make statements about world public opinion, or people wanting to have the bombing stopped, they should recognize that people think differently, and different people have different views. Thais, Koreans, and Australians may have different views from Japanese views.

So the bulk of the reactions internationally -- subject to the muting effects I mentioned above -- will be favorable. There will, however, be unfavorable repercussions in a few places. Where will that leave us? It leaves us with something less than very high confidence that there will be serious negotiations -- at least before the American elections. I did not say there wouldn't be. I said something less than an even chance that there would be. And I gave some rough, crude, personal estimates as to what those relative likelihoods were.

However, let's consider what would happen if there were negotiations either during this period or after the American elections. I think the way to look at the negotiations is in terms of what we have to negotiate for, and what we have to negotiate with (by we, I mean the U.S., South Vietnam, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Thailand; that is, those who have some forces in Vietnam). The basic question is what you want to get out of the negotiations, and what you have as instruments to negotiate with. First, we would like to get a cease-fire. Then we would like to get the withdrawal of North Vietnamese units -- 80 or 100 thousand regular North Vietnamese units -- from South Vietnam. Third, we would like to get a disarming of the Liberation Army and VC -- the surrender of weapons. This is what we would like to get, aside questions of realism. And we would like to get free elections in North and South Vietnam. The Geneva accords in 1954, you will recall, specified that elections would be held throughout the country. So we would like to get elections in North as well as South Vietnam. And we would like to get some way of

enforcing these things -- not only obtaining them, but enforcing and sustaining them. It is one thing to say we would get the withdrawal of North Vietnamese units, and another thing to say we would get a way of enforcing their sustained withdrawal. In other words, we must have an enforcement mechanism.

Now, what are the things we have to negotiate with? We have to negotiate with the following things: the continued cessation of the bombing. We have to negotiate with the withdrawal of U.S. forces. We have to negotiate with something we can yield or give; for example, a central role for the Liberation Front in the election and in the government that results from that election. I am not saying these things ought to be given up. But these are the things we could negotiate with. You must know what you can get and what you can offer. The essence of good bargaining is to get the most for a given amount that you give up. So we have the continued cessation of the bombing, the standfast and withdrawal of the U.S. forces, a role for the NLF in the election and the government, and we have the possibility of trade between North and South, and economic aid through the Asian Development Bank or some international body, with funding from the U.S. and elsewhere. So we have those five or six things to negotiate with.

In the earlier reference to enforcement, I meant that the withdrawal should not only be verified -- counted at the border -- but be enforced so that North Vietnamese units, once withdrawn, would not come back. The U.S. withdrawal is less of a problem since three U.S. divisions, if they come back, cannot reenter secretly. But

10

North Vietnamese units could reenter without being detected -- unless their withdrawal is enforced.) I think the real problem is a sustained border patrol and a sustained disarming of VC so that the resumption of coercion or terrorism would not make any coalition government simply a facade. So I think the real problem is the enforcement problem.

And when people talk about negotiations, the primary problem is enforcement and the secondary problem is what you have to enforce -- but people tend to think about the negotiations just the other way around. They tend to think about the negotiations in terms of free elections, coalition and cessation of violence. I think those are important but they are secondary. The primary question is how you enforce whatever you negotiate. Unless you have some reasonable prospects of enforcing what you negotiate, the value of what you negotiate is pretty small. It may be an ideal, but it isn't a very meaningful one.

Now how you bring about the enforcement would require having time and ingenuity to develop instrumentalities for improving enforcement prospects. What would those instrumentalities be? They could include a U.N. border control force or -- as a personal, and completely not-thought-out possibility -- even a Japanese participation in the border control and election control. Such participation is desirable by countries who are not directly involved in the Vietnam conflict but have sufficient technical capacity to do the job. There is a tendency to think of the sorts of functions -- like the international control commission -- by countries that are not involved. That's one criterion. But the second criterion, which is equally important, is

that they should be able to do the job. You just can't pick a country simply because it is not directly involved. Then the validity of the enforcement role is virtually nil, because there are some technical functions that have to be performed and some political credentials for performing such functions. You may have a deterrent -- if the enforcement does not work, you may return. This is a threat. But hopefully you don't have to use the threat. So the better the enforcement, the less likely you are to have to use the deterrent.

It would be very worthwhile for people to think more about the difficulties of the negotiations and relations between enforcement and negotiations. And to move the problem of negotiations from the realm of a kind of ideological principle -- negotiate or not negotiate -- to the realm of pragmatic operational problems: what you negotiate for, what you negotiate with, how you enforce what you negotiated for, what instrumentality you can bring in, what deterrent you can provide to support the enforcement mechanism, etc.

Let me conclude with a few general points. First, the GVN itself. There is a lot of criticism, often severe, of GVN: its unworthiness, its lack of capability, its corruption, etc. I am by no means intimately knowledgeable about, nor a supporter of, the GVN. When people talk about nonviability of the GVN, or the lack of popular support for the GVN, or why the war in Vietnam has been unsuccessful, it seems to me they are confusing two questions which ought to be clarified and separated. First, is the potential worthiness, reliability and capability of GVN. The other is the capacity of the GVN to meet the pressure that has been built up against it. Now, if you

try to think of some sort of index -- governmental capacity or viability -- what would be the ingredients of such index? You might think in terms of trained people, or the educational system, or an experienced government service, or the communication system, or a legal framework with a degree of compliance. If you took all those things together, you would be thinking of some sort of index of adequacy, capability or viability of a potential governmental structure. And if you compare that index with Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, I would think Vietnam -- with all its weakness, inadequacy, and problems -- is by no means the worst or at the lower part of that group of seven or eight countries. I would say it is probably one of the three better ones. Now that is not to say either that it is splendid, or progressive, or that its integrity is of the highest. But it is to say, when people talk about it, instead of condemning it, instead of demeaning it, instead of denigrating it, they ought to say: "Look, in this context and in this area of the world, it's a fairly creditable enterprise."

The real problem is that VC and NLF have become so extremely effective and ruthless and tightly organized, that GVN may or may not have the stamina to meet the pressure. But it makes a great deal of difference how the point is put, in terms of the self-confidence and chances of survival of GVN. In Japan I have heard it said -- also in the U.S. -- that the GVN is no good, corrupt, unworthy, inefficient... and so forth. If you make this comparison with other governments in the area, the GVN in fact isn't so bad. The problem is that it is up against such tough competition. It does make a difference how the

issue is put. And it does make a difference with respect to self-confidence and the chances of GVN getting anywhere. And the way the issue is oversimplified in the U.S. and Japan frequently tends to make it even worse.

Lessons of Vietnam:

First, what lessons of Vietnam would be. One lesson would be that in dealing with insurgent warfare, wars of national liberation, try to avoid turning such wars into conventional wars with the use of conventional forces, conventionally armed and trained. In other words, try to keep a small war small rather than turn it into a big war. In effect, try to wage an insurgency conflict as a conflict in which the main emphasis is on police and paramilitary forces, on intelligence and on targetting the leadership, the cadre, the organization of the emerging insurgency.

A second lesson would be to be tolerant but persistent in trying to exact improved performance on the part of the government under this pressure -- persistent in raising its effectiveness in recruiting people and rewarding people for good performance. But we must be tolerant of the difficulty in improving performance of any government, in particular under the pressure of an insurgent movement.

The two lessons are the ones that ought to be applied by the U.S. or Japan or to any other countries that might be involved in the situation in future.

Effects of the Vietnam War:

Its cost -- in lives and treasure -- combined with the uncertainty, if not the dismal quality of the outcome, may lead to a pulling back, or

to a withdrawal. There are two kinds of reasons that might push the U.S. to this direction. One is disenchantment, frustration and aggravation over Vietnam, the difficulty of making progress, and the high cost of trying to do so. And the other is the abundance of pressing, interesting, important urban problems in the U.S. -- poverty, housing, civil rights, and so forth.

What worries me is the combination of those two factors, both of which would pull into the direction of a turning inward -- or a link between an isolationist view of Fortress America, in terms of a heavy ABM and hardening, expanded nuclear capabilities, together with a liberal view of the need to concentrate on domestic problems.

This would be extremely unfortunate for many reasons, in my opinion. One reason is its effect on the international environment. The other reason has to do with its effect on domestic problems in the U.S. I believe there is a connection between solving problems of instability, backwardness, disorder, deprivation and poverty at home, and solving the same sorts of problems abroad. The same sorts of persistence, steadfastness, cleverness, and sensitivity that are needed abroad are also needed at home.

Looking at the domestic side, if we don't demonstrate the skill and will to solve the problems abroad, this may lead to a disenchantment in solving problems at home. There are connections between international and domestic problems. If domestic problems prove five years from now to be just as unyielding as Vietnam problems -- more riots, more difficulties in getting jobs, etc. -- then one result might be the building of barriers inside Fortress America.

