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No Halfway House Between Victory, Defeat in Vietnam

IN THE PREVAILING fog of gloom and uncertainty, there are only two things that can be said with perfect certainty about the war in Vietnam. The first is bleakly simple.

There is in fact no comfortable, easy halfway house between defeat and victory.

No one who has studied North Vietnamese policy, labored to read the captured documents, and followed on the spot the development of Hanoi's war plans, tactics and strategy, believes for one moment that such a halfway house exists today, or will ever exist in the future. The well-intentioned people who offer theoretical blueprints for such halfway houses are as ignorant of the realities as the people who used to peddle the view that Josef Stalin was really a nice guy at heart.

THE NORTH Vietnamese leaders are men with a tenacity and courage that seem all the more admirable in the present climate in Washington. They are also men endowed with the most steely ruthlessness. In the month of February, they expended their troops at a rate of more than 10,000 men a week and in the week of March 2 to March 9, they were still expending troops so lavishly that their losses exceeded 6700 men—and this is without counting their wounded!

Take as their population base the 16,500,000 people of North Vietnam, plus the 5,000,000 plus-or-minus under V.C. control in the south. Make the appropriate conversion. You find that the Hanoi leaders are in fact accepting losses which, if accepted by the United States of America, would run from 60,000 to 100,000 men a week in killed-in-action alone.

They are accepting these

quite unprecedented rates of loss—10 times as high as the average in the recent past—because they are going for broke—trying to win the war in a short time—because they know they cannot stand the strain of greatly prolonged war. And they are ready to make such appalling sacrifices because they want to get their grip on South Vietnam.

TO GET THEIR grip on South Vietnam at cheaper cost, the Hanoi leaders might well accept one or another of the crazier halfway house solutions that have been proposed in this country. But if that is ever permitted to happen, Saigon will be ruled from Hanoi in a very short space of time.

All the millions of Vietnamese who have put their faith in the United States will then suffer cruelly for this misplaced faith. The U.S. will also have experienced its first defeat in war since this Republic was established. And that leads to the second certainty in the present situation, which is also bleak and simple.

Feeble, needless acceptance of defeat in Vietnam will poison American political life for a generation or more.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES that produced the terrible McCarthy-time were downright trivial, compared to the hideous circumstances that will confront this country after acceptance of defeat in Vietnam. The resulting outcry about "stabs-in-the-back," the search for scapegoats, the accusations of disloyalty and worse, can in truth be expected to make the McCarthy-time seem downright cozy in retrospect.

Considering how obvious this ought to be, one is all but driven to conclude that the American Left has gone collectively insane. As any-

one should be able to see, there is already acute danger of the most frightening sort of a turn to the right in this country. The extreme postures of the Negro racists and the trouble in the cities are quite enough to provoke such a rightwards turn.

The President's riot commission was no more than realistic, when it warned of the possibility of American apartheid. That risk, God knows, will be hard enough to circumvent, and that problem will be hard enough to solve, without the added poisons that are sure to be engendered by the first defeat in war in American history. Add these other poisons to the present mix, and the American future hardly bears contemplation!

WITHOUT REGARD to the wisdom or unwisdom of past decisions, there is therefore only one safe course to take. That course is to make the needed effort to win the war. Winning does not mean crushing North Vietnam, and it does not demand the measures proposed by men like General Curtis LeMay. Winning means no more than forcing the Hanoi leaders to call home their troops, and to cease threatening their neighbors in Laos and South Vietnam.

As any rational man should be able to see from the loss rates and population figures cited above, the Hanoi leaders cannot imaginably sustain the kind of effort they are now making for a very long time. If you go for broke and fail, the failure leaves you broken. Hence there is nothing hopeless in the present situation; but because of the American advocates of defeat-at-any-price, there is profound danger for the American future.