

THE CAMBODIAN CRISIS

Rotunda, University of Virginia

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W. H. Harbaugh

Members of the Committee, students, tourists, faculty, Billy and Rickey and guests from the Charlottesville chapter of the FBI:

We meet in a time of despair. We have witnessed worse tragedies than the one at Kent State University Monday. We see them on TV every night -- the wanton destruction by our troops and by our allies of the moment, the South Vietnamese, of the innocent peasant men, women and children of Vietnam and now Cambodia. But not until we saw on TV Monday the slaying of four of our kind did many among us finally perceive the real nature of the violence to which this nation has been committed in South East Asia for a decade and against which some among us have been protesting ever since the first teach-ins five years ago.

We are told by the alienated that all has been done that can be done within the "system" to stop the mindless violence of our political and military leaders. And so, following the example of three successive presidents of the United States, the alienated in turn resort to violence and acts of irrationality. I am not convinced that all that could be done has yet been done. Two years ago this institution sent less than one hundred students, faculty, and faculty wives on the March on the Pentagon. In the summer of 1968 perhaps no more than one hundred out of nine thousand were active in the peace movement then led by Senator McCarthy. Last fall no more than one thousand participated in the moratorium rally on the other side of this building and no more than 500 went to Washington. Today at least three thousand have come out to bear witness against the mindless action of a squad of panic-stricken civilian soldiers whose commanding officers should be courtmartialled for issuing them live ammunition.

If the traumatic flash of empathy that the massacre of the Kent State Four induced in all of us makes most of us finally realize that a human being is a human being, be he a college student, a Black, Birmingham, Alabama Sunday School child, or a peasant Vietcong youth with no more understanding of the real issues than the average American soldier -- and I regret to say, officer, as well -- possesses then, clearly, the Kent State Four will not have died in vain.

And if that same flash of empathy also results not in the radicalization, but in the political activation of that complacent, apathetic ninety per cent of the student body which has given to date only lip-service, if that, to the great causes of our times -- then, surely, the Kent State Four will have died in triumph. For the plain truth is that no political party could possibly survive the concerted, active, peaceful opposition of the youth of this nation. The fact that an insignificant minority of students -- not one per cent of the college population -- forced the President of the United States out of office and then came reasonably close to taking over the Democratic party with a reluctant, indifferent candidate -- McCarthy -- is testament, to that. It is also cause for hope and renewed activity, not cause for copping out.

Yet if there is reason for hope, there is even more reason for fear. We meet at what may well be the most critical juncture in the history of the United States, and, indeed, of mankind. The crisis which prompted the

designer of this architectural complex -- this testament to that which is sensitive, beautiful, and creative in man and which makes the struggle to live worth sustaining -- the crisis, to repeat, which prompted him to write the Declaration of Independence was nothing as compared to the one that now confronts us. Nor was the Civil War, nor World Wars I or II of comparable magnitude to the one that confronts us now. For not until our times has man possessed bacteriological and nuclear weaponry in sufficient capacity to destroy mankind.

One would think that that harsh truth would have long ago inspired a reordering of the assumptions on which our foreign policy is based. But it has not. For ten years now policy scientists in the Rand Corporation and the highest councils of government have grounded their tragic advice to John F. Kennedy, Lyndon D. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon on assumptions that are rooted in the misuse, rather than the understanding, of history.

They have transformed the Munich analogy, the domino thesis, and the idea -- not of national interest -- but of national prestige into a kind of Holy Trinity of foreign policy making. They have not told us that for every Munich there were nine rational compromises which averted war. They have not told us that it was the failure to compromise that precipitated World War I. They have not told us that the chip-on-the-shoulder diplomacy of Cordell Hull destroyed the viability of the peace party in Japan prior to Pearl Harbor. (Nor, parenthetically, have they told us -- presumably because they have not bothered to reflect on the matter -- that the Asia we went to war to protect in 1941 was not even an Asia ruled by Asians. It was an Asia owned or dominated by Europeans -- by Britons, Frenchmen, and Dutchmen -- and run by them in the interests of their fellow Europeans. It was, moreover, an Asia which was not then, and is not now, within either the vital or the legitimate sphere of influence of the United States.)

But that is not all the policy scientists have not told us. At the time of Korea, to be sure, they did tell us that we had to fight there in order to prevent the dominoes from falling in Southeast Asia. But when the domino which is Vietnam fell anyway in 1954 for the simple reason that the Vietnamese people were fighting a war for independence against French rulers who were far more oppressive, far more exploitative, than the British rulers in absentia who provoked us to declare our independence in 1776, then the advocates of that new, universal theory, the domino thesis, fell silent -- for the moment.

Meanwhile, in their predilection for tactics instead of strategy, in their penchant for a kind of mechanistic gamesmanship instead of statesmanship, in their obsession for black and white solutions to gray-tinted problems, they have distorted history. Specifically, they have convinced most of middle America that communism is monolithic, that it is centrally inspired, and that the puppets fall into line ail over the world whenever Moscow -- or is it Peking? -- pulls the strings. Indeed, Dean Husk was unwilling to believe that Moscow and Peking had split three or four years after every informed observer in the world knew that they had split. (That, incidentally, is one reason why I use the word obsession so freely in this speech.)

Let me quote the eminent Christian historian, Arnold Toynbee:

The current American picture resembles the medieval Christian picture of the church's struggle with heretics, and the Roman

picture of the Roman Empire's struggle with the Christian Church. . .

During the 20 centuries of the Christian era up to date, Christianity has not come near to...converting the whole of mankind; and, in the second century of the Communist era, the prospects for communism do not look any more promising.

Communism has never been the paramount ideology of any government that has subscribed to the Communist faith. Among all the Communist statesmen since 1917...Trotsky has been unique in putting the ecumenical interest of communism above the national interests of his country.

All over the world today, the predominant ideology is neither communism nor free enterprise: it is nationalism. Today, the nationalism of the non-western peoples is pitted against the nationalism of the western peoples. The revolt of the native majority of mankind against the domination of the Western minority - this, and not the defense of freedom against communism by the leading western country, the United States, is the real major issue in the world today.

America, without realizing what she has been doing, has made herself the heir of British, French, Dutch, and Japanese colonialism and consequently has drawn upon herself all the odium that the European and Japanese colonialist formerly excited. This is a formidable heritage; and even America's military might well not be mighty enough to shoulder it for long.

Toynbee, I think, is right. The tragedy of it all is that if our policy makers had not been men obsessed, we could today have at the base of China a Tito-like Vietnam. And is there any rational person who would not agree that we, and especially the innocent Vietnamese peasants, would be better off for it?

Nor are those the only illusions the policy makers have imposed upon us. Endowing our adversaries with superhuman wickedness, they have endowed our allies with superhuman virtue. Persuaded that democracy, the life-blood of which is a dominant middle class, is exportable to the most remote jungle in the world despite its historic failures in the Russia of the Tsars, the Germany of the Kaisers, and the Greece of the Colonels and billionaire shipowners persuaded, as I say, that democracy is truly exportable, they have covered up the failure of our allies to accept our gift. And so -- our government failed to protest the massacre by the forces of our Nationalist Chinese ally, Chiang Kai-Shek, of several thousand leaders of Formosa in March 1947 when Chiang's crowd took over that island. And so -- our government failed to protest the massacre of between 250,000 and 400,000 Indonesians three or four years ago by our ally of the moment in that land, Suharta. And so -- our government failed to protest the massacre of hundreds of Vietnamese by our still newer ally of the moment in Cambodia, General whatever his name is. No wonder some of the most idealistic and sensitive youths this nation has ever produced have been driven to radicalism.

Nor does that exhaust the list of our policy makers' acts of dissemblance and duplicity. Lyndon B. Johnson and now Richard M. Nixon have

assured us, not once, not twice, but again and again that we are in Vietnam to guarantee the right of the South Vietnamese people to elect and sustain a government of their own choosing. That, as everyone knows, is patent nonsense. The Geneva Agreement, that political football which we run with when there is an opening off tackle and punt right back to the opposition when there is not, provided for all-Vietnamese elections within two years of their signing in 1954. Well, those two years came and went, and the elections with them. Why? Dwight D. Eisenhower tells us why in his Memoirs, volume I, page 372: "I have never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgeable in Indochinese affairs who did not agree that had elections been held as of the time of the fighting, possibly 80 per cent of the population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader."

And finally almost without exception, our leaders have flouted their own logic and their own rhetoric. In calmer days hardly any one in Washington except Richard Nixon believed that Asia had any relation whatever to the vital interests, and especially the security, of the United States. That is even more true today than it was in the 1950's. The Russians have the capacity to destroy us; we have the capacity to destroy them. The Chinese, if they don't already have it, soon will have it. What difference then, militarily speaking, does it make who controls the rice paddies of Vietnam or the rubber plantations of Cambodia? What relevance, in these circumstances, can the domino thesis possibly have? As former Secretary of Defense McNamara said in one of the few sane statements made during the Cuban missile crisis, "A missile is a missile, it makes no difference whether it is launched from Cuba or Moscow." Let me call the roll of rational men during the debate over Richard Nixon's proposal that we launch an air-strike against the Vietnamese in 1954 to bail out the French -- the same crowd of whom FDR said near the end of World War II: "The Native Indo-Chinese have been so flagrantly down-trodden that they thought to themselves: Anything must be better than to live under French colonial rule. Should that land belong to France? By what logic and by what custom and by what historical rule?"

Dwight D. Eisenhower, Feb. 10, 1954, shortly before the debate:

"I cannot conceive of a greater tragedy for America than to get heavily involved in an all-out war in. . . (Southeast Asia)."

Senator John F. Kennedy in the U.S. Senate, April 6, 1954, in the debate over Nixon's call:

"I am frankly of the belief that no amount of American military assistance in Indochina can conquer an enemy of the people which has the sympathy and convert support of the people. . . For the United States to intervene unilaterally and to send troops into the most difficult terrain in the world, with the Chinese able to pour in unlimited man-power, would mean that we would face a situation which would be far more difficult than even that we encountered in Korea."

Senator Lyndon B. Johnson in the same debate:

"The United States is in clear danger of being left naked and alone in a hostile world. This picture of our country needlessly weakened in the world today is so painful that we should turn our eyes from abroad and look homeward."

General Douglas Mac Arthur, -- ten years after he had called for the atomic bombing of China during the Korean war and had presumably done a little rational reflecting -- this in a conversation with President Kennedy in 1961:

"Anyone who wants to commit American troops to the mainland of Asia should have his head examined."

President John F. Kennedy in 1961 after listening to Walt Rostow and General Maxwell Taylor urge him to send troops to South Vietnam:

"They want a force of American troops. They say it's necessary in order to restore confidence and maintain morale. Then we will be told we have to send in more troops. It's like taking a drink. The effect wears off, and you have to take another."

Well, as you know, Kennedy took several drinks and his successor, Johnson, swam in it.

Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, were right in the 1950's. What we who are now being called traitors by the purblind right and the automatons in the military who support them demand is that we recapture the clear vision they had then.

Nothing, I submit, has happened since to alter the logic of what those men said in 1954. We are told by the obsessed and in some cases, there is reason to suspect, psychotic, hawks, that we have a commitment to the South Vietnamese to honor. I say that by any rational standard that commitment has been paid in full, and should be so signed and certified. We have spent 100,000,000 billion dollars fighting the war, not of the Vietnamese peasant, but of the South Vietnamese power structure -- of General Xavier Cugat Ky and the whole crowd of former French mercenaries he and Thieu have surrounded themselves with. More than that, we have lost 40,000 of the cream of our youth -- and every last one in vain.

And so, against that tragic background, I close with an appeal and a call.

I appeal first to my generation. It is given to all men to grow intellectually even after they are in their forties. A few use this great gift; most do not. Franklin D. Roosevelt was one who did; Herbert Hoover was one who did not. Adlai Stevenson was one who did; Hubert Humphrey one who did not. It devolves on us to understand the values and attitudes of the youth of this nation. For in the absence of understanding we can only indict. And in the act of indicting we lose the power to shape and guide. The record is clear. Our whole Asian policy has been since 1898 what some forty years ago the historian Samuel Flagg Bemis labelled the decision to acquire a Far Eastern empire at the end of that war -- a "Great Aberration." If we are to hold this nation together, if we are to prevent revolution, we have to recognize this overriding fact and repudiate all the cold war conventions that we have mistakenly and tragically assumed were universal principles. We have, in short, to assume leadership in the reconversion of the United States from an illegitimate Far Eastern to a legitimate Pacific power.

I appeal next to that great silent majority of college students who have contributed nothing at all to the resolution of the problems of our times. It is your world no less than my generation's world or the radical's world. Because you have failed to act, you have let my generation -- the convention

ridden establishment -- rule it, and you have let a minority of your generation bring it to the verge of revolution. You can continue to cop out, or you can, through the very force of your numbers, create a new society -- one that conserves that which is worth conserving and which disposes of that which is not conserving -- racism, poverty, and militarism.

And I appeal last to the radicals. History will decide what your role has been. I have my own view, but I shan't elaborate it here. But I do think that we have come now to the point where we must establish priorities and adapt our tactics to them. Vietnam is the preeminent issue. The middle class is willing at long last to pull out. As a tactical proposition alone, it is utterly absurd to flout their conventions and drive them back to the hawks. Yale has set the tactical example. I implore you to follow it.

Finally, we call --

We call -- for Richard Nixon to declare a national day of mourning for the four students who were killed in the aftermath of his mindless expansion of the war. And we call on Richard Nixon to attend their funerals as an act of atonement for that mindless action.

We call on the fathers and mothers of America to rise up in defense of their sons and daughters -- to cease contributing to the election of more hawks, to activate themselves in the pursuit of reason and peace.

We call -- on Richard Nixon to reverse a policy the inner logic of which dictates that we drive farther and farther into, today, Cambodia, tomorrow Laos, the next day North Vietnam, the day after that Thailand, the day after that Burma, and the day after that China.

We call -- on that wise and humane gentleman, the present governor of Virginia; to disassociate himself from the mindless policy of the leader of his party.

We call -- for the removal of General Westmoreland who misled us in Vietnam and who has now misled our policy makers in Washington.

We call -- on Minority Leader Hugh Scott (those of who have lived in Pennsylvania know that he is a man of many sides -- some would say faces --) -- we call on Hugh Scott to put, finally and irrevocably, his country above his party.

We call -- on Hubert Humphrey, who failed us as Vice President, who failed us at Chicago, who failed us during the campaign, who has failed us in the current crisis by saying nothing, absolutely nothing, and who gave his name to Richard Nixon's Vietnamization program -- a program which envisages a residual American commitment of more than 200,000 American troops to South Vietnam and which presupposes that the South Vietnamese Army can do what Westmoreland's and Abrams' American troops failed to do -- we call, to repeat, on Hubert Humphrey to resign forthwith his titular leadership of the Democratic party on the grounds that he has defaulted, through his actions and his inactions, his right to that leadership.

And finally, we call -- for an end of Agnewism and of Mitchellism, both of which are nothing less than synonyms for Nixonism.