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Asia in Perspective

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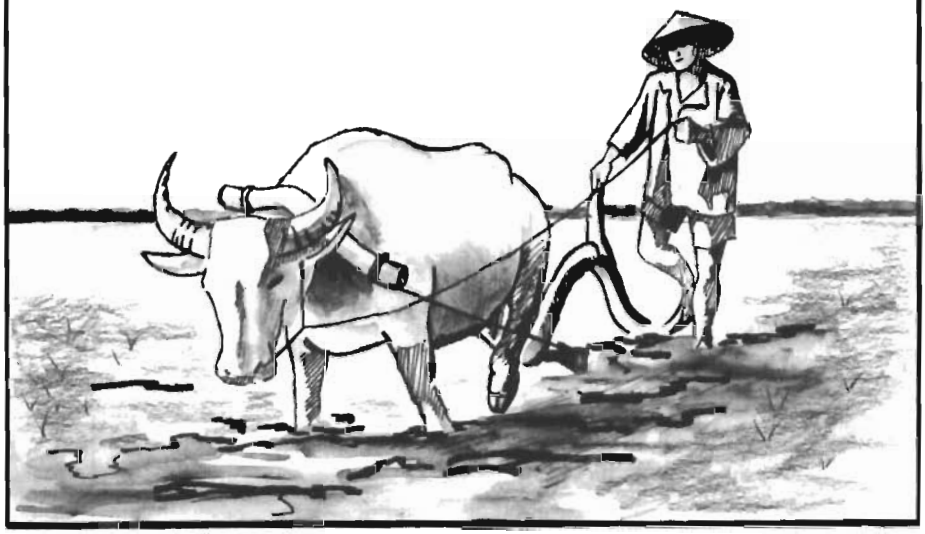

A lecture delivered at the Naval War College
on 12 December 1967
by Professor Richard L. Walker

It is important to put Asia in perspective, and the perspective one has depends on one's point of view. There are, for example, a number of myths that it is essential to escape if we are going to understand modern Asia.

Some of what we see today is not exactly as it is seen elsewhere in the world. Sometimes we're so bogged down with criticisms of our country and our desire to wear a hair shirt that we fail to put things in a historical context, and this is the subject at hand. There is a general failure to understand developments in long-range perspective and a failure to understand, particularly, those developments in that part of the world which I prefer to refer to as the Western Pacific or the Near West. Has it ever occurred to you that what we call the Far East is only looking at the area across the Atlantic and looking at it from a European point of view? We frequently forget to look at that area of the world as a Pacific power. Now there are a number of reasons why we are poorly and ill informed about the areas of the Western Pacific or of East Asia, and there are a number of reasons why we have not understood developments there. In the first place there has been an educational lag in the United States,

and it continues. The Western point of view is reflected in our college education, in the proliferation of so-called "non-Western" programs which almost every college and the Ford Foundation feel we should now have.

And then we have been inflicted with the items of American advertising techniques when it comes to understanding the areas of East Asia. Prestige transfer, for example, sometimes substitutes for solid knowledge. U Thant, the Secretary General of the United Nations, has now become a military expert propounding on the areas of the Western Pacific. A really remarkable civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, is now speaking as an expert on diplomacy in Vietnam. Or better yet, America's leading diaperologist, Dr. Benjamin Spock, has become a chief spokesman about the United States involvement in the Western Pacific.

Americans have also been very sensitive to critics in Western Europe where there are fears that the United States is expending strength at the expense of the Western Alliance. But as Robert Elegant, a very able correspondent, wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* of 19 November 1967, "Even the veteran observer of Asian affairs, however, is surprised when he surveys the attitudes of the arc of non-Communist countries on the periphery of Communist China from South Korea in the northeast to Burma and, even, India in the southwest. With the somewhat equivocal exception of Cambodia, all those nations support the American presence either openly or tacitly, and a number have contributed armed units to the war." For a number of reasons, therefore, if we are going to move into a perspective of understanding about this very important area of the world, we must get rid of some of the myths or illusions that becloud our thinking.

The first of these myths is the myth of Asia, or one might call it, as Eugene Staley has called it, the "myth of the continents." Attempts to generalize about the countries of Asia are belied by their diversity. There is no greater disparity on any continent than in Asia. The only thing that makes an Asian an Asian, as such, is the fact that he happens to live on this piece of land which is the largest in the world. The relations of the states in Asia with the Western World are far more intense than their relations with each other. In fact, it is difficult to draw any generalization that has any meaning about this vast and populated land. Dwight Cook wrote a book some 12 years ago, a good journalistic account, under the title *There Is No Asia.* This is probably an apt way to put the proposition. It is important that we come to realize this. We have had too much inaccurate commentary poured out about the "Asian peoples" feeling this, or the "Asian peoples" demanding that—generalizations about countries where there are no generalizations possible. How can we possibly generalize in the same breath about Japan and a country like Laos, or about Japan and India?

We do this in this country in a way reminiscent of the Chinese and their ethnocentric approach. A hundred years ago the Western World was impinging on China, and the Chinese were beginning to wake up to the fact that some decisions affecting China were going to be made outside of China. The outside world, to the Chinese in those days, was populated with people all alike. They shared one thing in common—they were "barbarians." And so the Chinese set up a whole number of institutes to study these culturally underdeveloped areas of the world, or "barbarian" areas. They set up programs in their, so to speak, institutions of higher learning to study the non-Chinese world on the sort of bland assumption that anyone different from them must be alike. In the same way today we are using these factors of technology and economy to draw generalizations about the under-

developed world. Generalizations which simply are not true, and generalizations which project our own view of the world onto these people.

A second myth is that of historical connections—somehow the fact that a few pilgrims went back and forth between India and China a thousand or 1,500 years ago is somehow supposed to give a certain identity between India and China. Somehow, because of Indian colonization, the country of the Khmers (Cambodia) can best be understood by going to New Delhi.

Next there is the myth about great numbers being strength—the population problems of India and China make for magnificent weakness in those two countries. Again, there is the myth of the "developing countries." The connecting idea that somehow economics determines everything, that cultural differences do not amount to a decisively significant factor once the impact of the West has been felt ignores, for instance, the significant point that village Buddhism is not necessarily a constructive force and is not necessarily a guarantee against organizational techniques pushed in or imported from the outside.

Certainly, a dominant feature of the whole area today is China. And may I suggest that we are equally burdened with a mythology about China. Some assert, for instance, that we in the United States are denied knowledge about China. In all likelihood the United States is in possession of more knowledge than any other country in the world, including the Soviet Union, about the People's Republic of China. But this does not necessarily mean that we can predict events in China with certainty or accuracy. In February-March 1966 our "intellectual" Senator from Arkansas convened his China hearings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Almost to a man the "China-watchers" from this country, which has the most knowledge on China, predicted that China would be characterized by unity, cohesiveness, continuity, and stability for the foreseeable future. Part of the failure in the forecasting by those who testified is related to our whole China mythology, for example, the belief that the regime is representative of the people. We have a wonderful American faith in democracy, and in relation to China it assumes that if the Communist regime were not popular it would be kicked out. But this is ignoring that the world's history, and particularly that of China, has been writ large in terms of long-enduring despotism.

Then there is the idea now being perpetrated that the Chinese are not aggressive. If that be so, then we have not yet faced up to the meaning of aggression by subversion. Even Prince Sihanouk, on 17 October 1967, said: "It is necessary to renounce Chinese aid because China has ordered the Khmer Reds to carry out subversive activities to undermine Cambodian unity, to sow discord and disunity, and to transform the Khmer people into Communists who will replace Buddhism with Mao Tse-tung's religion." Or better yet, let us ask ourselves how it is that the Chinese Communist state has more than 40 million non-Chinese peoples under its control in territories exceeding the territory of China proper. For too many years we have ignored the facts of history and of Chinese imperialism and claims on foreign territory which are as ill-founded as would be a continuing British claim to India in 1968.

But if we want to understand some of the political, military involvements of the United States in this area of the world, then we have to talk about some of the "givens," items in the Western Pacific, or, if you wish, the Far East, or East Asia in terms of long-range forces, long-range expectations, because whether we like it or not, our security as a nation, our society, and our future are going to be intimately bound up with this area of the world for the

foreseeable future because of the number of these "givens."

The first of these is frightfully important, yet we somehow tend to forget it again and again despite the lessons of the past: the United States is indeed a two-ocean power; we are a Pacific power as well as an Atlantic power. Perhaps our Secretary of State should put out a directive that wherever possible, from any platform, in any position paper the word "Asia" should be replaced by the word "Pacific." How is it that we have been able to accept the concept, with one "galling" exception, of the Atlantic Community and its meaning and relationship to U.S. security, but somehow we have not even begun to understand the concept of the Pacific Community and that this vast ocean, and it is vast, knits us together with the futures of the countries bordering on the Pacific? The United States has more coastline on the Pacific Ocean than any other country, and the simple fact is we are involved as a Pacific power. One of our states is, after all, completely surrounded by the Pacific Ocean. As a two-ocean power we ought to know from historical experience that we can no longer withdraw from this geographical double involvement. Perhaps this double involvement and its meaning for the present can best be understood by remembering a bit of history.

Thirty years ago, on 5 October 1937, President Roosevelt delivered an important address in Chicago which was to be criticized by all the American isolationists who were attempting to legislate the United States out of world affairs, legislate us out of an involvement which our power had already made necessary. Said Roosevelt, "It seems unfortunately true that the epidemic of world lawlessness is spreading. When an epidemic of a physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in a quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of the disease." This was the famous "quarantine speech." And an uprighteous howl went up all over the United States. The isolationists, and many of them were intellectually very sophisticated people, and indeed the Europe-firsters argued: (a) that Japan, China, and East Asia were beyond our concern; (b) that the United States was not directly endangered by Japanese totalitarianism; (c) that Japanese expansion had to be viewed within an Asian framework; and that (d) Japan had a natural sphere of influence. (This is the manner in which Professor Hans Morgenthau argues today about China.) And (e) if we could only try to understand the Japanese people, then we could have peaceful relations with them —the current argument for "bridge-building."

Actually the Japanese militarists drew great comfort from divisions here in the United States and were encouraged to believe that we did not have the necessary staying power or unity of control, particularly when we continued to trade and, indeed, give economic succor to the Japanese effort against Mainland China.

It may not be inaccurate to suggest that the United States is demonstrating today that perhaps it has learned the lessons of history. We have, in effect, since we woke up to our responsibilities in Korea in 1950 been imposing a quarantine on world lawlessness.

Now a second "given" in our involvement in the Western Pacific is that our policies have to be formed in the light of national security and national interests. They are unlikely to change with a change of Administration, because no matter who comes into an Administration, that group must operate within the framework of the number of inescapable factors related to national security.

The third of these "givens" is the matter of interrelationships which have us involved, interrelationships around

the periphery of totalitarian China. The Communists have themselves helped to make some of these interrelationships by linking their promotion of violence. One example so pressingly important that we overlook it is Vietnam. The interrelationships involving Vietnam are either dismissed by those who say, "That's just the domino theory!" or by people who do not understand the Pacific area. Vietnam is related to the prime Communist target in the area: Japan. Japan is the wonder country of this world. Next year or the following year it will probably surpass West Germany in gross national product. It has already moved into the third place among the industrial powers of the world. The *London Economist* recently headlined one of its articles on Japan "Third Superpower?" The productivity, the energy, the ability of Japan are prodigious. If Peking could gain political suasion over Japan, policy suasion, then the rest of the world would be presented with a serious problem indeed. But Japan, like Britain, has to trade to live. Of course, the United States is Japan's greatest trading partner. But last year 30 percent of Japan's trade was with Southeast Asia, much of it U.S. financed, to be sure. Political suasion over Southeast Asia would give Peking a stranglehold on the Japanese economy. It would be the quickest way to persuade the Japanese to move in that political direction which Peking advocates for Japan: (a) first toward neutralism, and (b) then toward a "people's government."

Now the trade relations of Japan with Southeast Asia are strategically related to the struggle in Vietnam today, yet one hardly sees reference to this type of consideration in our press discussions of the stakes in Vietnam.

Actually, what has been happening behind the quarantine which the United States has been helping to impose since 1950 is that a great number of the countries and different civilizations around the periphery of China have been searching for, and finding, some alternatives to the Communist model and some alternate new relationships. I refer, for example, to ASPAC, the Asian and Pacific Council of Foreign Ministers, which had its first meeting, at Korean initiative, in 1966 and its second meeting in Bangkok in 1967. Again, there is the Asian Development Bank which is helping to bring some of the European powers back at least into a U.N. or E.C.A.F.E.-supported concern for economic development in this whole area. I refer to the Association of Southeast Asian countries and indeed to SEATO which may, as a result of linked Communist violence, become a more meaningful organization in the future. All of these interrelationships are targets of Communist-inspired violence.

A fourth "given," which is one we should also bear constantly in mind, is the withdrawal of other powers from the Western Pacific. Whether we like it or not, by sheer process of elimination, we, the United States, are the only power capable of holding up a quarantine against a spreading virus of subversion and aggression in the Western and Southwestern Pacific. The British and the French have withdrawn from responsibility. Certainly the Australians and New Zealanders recognize this. And, in a way, our sensitivity to the criticisms that sometimes come from the British Labor Party or the criticisms that more frequently come from the French spokesmen is unjustified because, as we have learned in our own domestic policy, it is easy to sit back and criticize when there is no responsibility involved. We do have responsibility.

The withdrawal of Western colonialism and the creation of newly viable states have led to a fifth "given" which we have not seemed entirely to comprehend yet: the anticolonial phase, the so-called Bandung phase, has ended in the Western Pacific. After 20 years

countries like India and Burma and Ceylon or Indonesia, or even the Philippines, are aware that they have traded on anticolonialism long enough. The intense emotional anticolonialism of two decades ago no longer suffices to provide domestic unity and thrust in most of these countries. This is, incidentally, where the Chinese most misunderstand the developments around their borders. They tend to project that same intensity of anticolonialism which was present at the end of World War II and which moved the Chinese, particularly, because of their own superiority complex.

A sixth "given" within this area is the problem of nation building. In many respects, a great deal has been accomplished. Ten years ago we talked about the so-called "China model" for economic development and for political development. We all feared that it all depended on the rivalry between China and India how Asia would go. The Indians helped a lot on this. They sold this program to the U.S. Congress and our Department of State as a means of gaining American assistance for Asia's largest democracy. We were told that the decisive competition was between China and India, but it never really took place. The individual countries in the Pacific have been searching for and finding their own pattern of adjusting to the world of the nuclear armed missile and the jet aircraft. And, actually, behind this quarantine that the United States has imposed, it is perhaps not inaccurate to suggest that many have been finding their own solutions to the problem of development and that the real revolution in that part of the world has occurred on our side of the Iron Curtain.

The Republic of Korea is a good example. Someday, if I had time, I would write a book about it entitled *The Country That Found Itself.* The former "Hermit Kingdom" is composed of a people with a deep-seated complex about having been run by foreigners, subordinated to foreigners, for so long. Now no longer hermit, this country has moved in the initiative which created ASPAC. This is a country which has understood issues clearly enough to make a rather formidable commitment in Vietnam, a country which has reached the takeoff stage economically and where a U.S. economic as well as military investment in infrastructure has at long last begun to give the peasant a break.

A survey of some of the other areas around China reveals like phenomena. Japan has already been mentioned; Taiwan still has a great number of problems, but, nevertheless, a demonstration has been made that Chinese civilization can adjust to the world of the third quarter of the 20th century and do it in a meaningful and peaceable manner. Developments in Thailand, in Malaysia, auger rather well. The anticolonial Bandung period is over, but the real tragedy for this area is that it is being subjected to the violent approach to the problem of nation building, the Maoist solution. How easy it is to destroy and how hard to build. Nation building will remain the formidable problem.

This leads us, then, to a seventh crucial "given" in the area and that is the Maoist strategy of people's wars. But this formidable challenge needs to be put into perspective too. There are a great number of arrows in the quiver of the international Communist movement. Many of these are going to persist after some have been blunted or destroyed. Certain arrows in the Communist quiver present a constant danger—for instance, the organization and training of cadres from target countries of the third world, united front tactics still pushed in Europe, techniques of disruption and disorganization which can prove effective even here in the United States, propaganda, cultural diplomacy, and psychological operations. But a

number of the arrows in the quiver have been expended. Insurgency against countries with already developed national identities such as Greece and Turkey was blunted and defeated, thanks to the courage of a little man from Missouri. Military bluff and threat such as at Berlin have been met and defeated. Overt conventional military aggression, as in Korea, has been met and turned back. The ultimate nuclear confrontation, as in Cuba, has been met and outbluffed. The major remaining active arrow in the quiver is the Maoist strategy of protracted conflict, and it remains the single most serious problem we face and will likely continue to face in the immediate future. This does not mean that all insurgencies are Communist inspired. But those which are Communist inspired are linked together and constitute a single dimension of the world Communist threat today. Insurgency in Southeast Asia, has, for example, the moral, material, and directional support of Moscow, Peking, Hanoi, and Havana.

Guerrilla communism in Asia can be briefly put into perspective. One can date it as a formidable linked organizational thrust to the Calcutta Youth Congress in February 1948. Then it seemed that the Maoist strategy was indeed going to continue and succeed in China. The crucial battles had been fought up in Manchuria in 1947, and the Calcutta Youth Congress called by the Cominform gave impetus to the start of insurgency throughout Southeast Asia. Within 6 months, formidable insurgent movements had been started —some were already in existence, the Vietnamese Communist insurgency, for instance, was already in existence—in a number of areas where tragedy and waste and horror were to be visited on people as a way toward development. The Communists, accepting the direction of the Calcutta Youth Congress in 1948, launched an insurgency in Indonesia against that newly independent country. They were defeated, but some observers were bold enough to say that communism would never be a force again in Indonesia. The insurgency launched in Malaya in 1948 lasted 12 years before a newly established government could declare the emergency over. The insurgency launched by the White Flag Communists in Burma kept their base areas intact and has been going on ever since, although muted and toned down during the Bandung period and up until about a year ago. The Huk movement in the Philippines received its inspiration from the Calcutta Youth Congress, but thanks to the imaginative approach of Ramon Magsaysay it was basically defeated. But it, too, has been recently reactivated. The insurgent movement in Korea was sufficiently impressive and had torn that country apart so much that when the Communists did strike in June of 1950 they were convinced that they undercut the regime enough to make a rapid takeover possible. They almost did.

Communist China, shortly after its regime was proclaimed, bid to take over the direction of this movement in Asia, and for the most part since October 1949 the major direction and encouragement for Communist "wars of national liberation" have come from Peking. In November 1949, after coming to power, the Chinese Communists announced: "The path taken by the Chinese people in defeating imperialism and its lackeys and in founding the Chinese People's Republic is the path that *should be* taken by the peoples of the various colonial, semicolonial countries in their fight for national independence and peoples democracy." (Emphasis added.) From the outset, Peking staked out a leadership position, a new formula, if you will, and the conviction in the efficacy of that formula has continued to build and grow. Now the Maoist strategy of people's wars has been based upon: (a) cadre training; (b) then the necessity for

building a solid base area; (c) organizing the countryside; (d) terror and intimidation, and effective terror. Mao Tse-tung advised, in effect: "Do not wound an enemy. Cut off his finger. Do not get into an engagement with a force where you both suffer wounds, engage a small force that you can eliminate completely. Wounded soldiers come back to fight."; (e) destruction of political leadership in weak governments; (f) the purposeful promotion of inflation, corruption, and inefficiency so that it can be denounced; then (g) the creation of united fronts which trade upon just local grievances and hopefully encourage (h) foreign intervention, so that it can be denounced, and the local regime can be denounced as a tool of the imperialists.

It is interesting to note that this commitment to "people's wars" has not been abandoned by Moscow. It is necessary to recall that Tricontinental Congress held in Havana in January 1966 for the purpose of continuing to push and link "wars of national liberation" around the world. Eighty-two countries were represented by left-wing parties and circles, and they set up a 12-nation standing directorate, including China and the U.S.S.R., a permanent secretariat, and, far more important, a permanent "Committee for Assistance and Aid to National Liberation and Fighting Movements."

A survey of insurgency in Southeast Asia reveals that it has been given a major assist for a comeback, what might be termed "a resurgence of insurgency" in the last 2 years. An example is given in a recent issue of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, the 23 November 1967 issue. A Burmese writes as follows:

> The White Flags have based their whole revolution on Mao Tse-tung's essay 'Strategic Problems in the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla War.' They do not conceal their totally Maoist line. A Party broadcast said recently, 'While maintaining the correct idea of Mao's slogan that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun, we are carrying on our revolutionary struggle in accordance with Mao's theory of protracted war, relying on the rural areas as our base and encircling the cities from the countryside.'

He goes on to say, "The White Flag 'hard core' force—many of whom have recently returned from Peking carefully trained in the techniques of terror and subversion, well disciplined and totally committed to Mao's militant line—forms an indispensable nucleus in the present armed struggle." Thakin Than Tun, the leader of the Burmese White Flag Communists, and his associates spurn quantity and concentrate on quality. "Than Tun has boasted that he needs only 100 hard core activists to wage a successful revolution, and this attitude underscores the White Flag's basic policy toward recruitment."

As one surveys the very tragic case of Burma—and there is much more that could be said against the reactivation of the Huk movement, the continuation of the Communist insurgency in Indonesia, in Thailand, in Laos, and in Malaya: such items can help us understand why our Secretary of State does indeed believe that Peking is behind the problems in Vietnam, although those problems are also infinitely complex. The real meaning of Vietnam becomes clear.

But there are other meanings to Vietnam, and as a colleague of mine recently put it, "Could it be that Mao Tse-tung has achieved his victory in Vietnam, because the United States would never again go into another country on this scale in such an unclear war? Would the American President commit U.S. troops now to the defense of Burma?"

The Communists do not have everything on their side. There are a number of drawbacks for them. The first is that the United States has responded, re-

sponded responsibly. And secondly, the Communists made their own share of stupid moves. We do not necessarily have a monopoly on stupidity, though to listen to some of the critics of American policies one would think we do. The premature announcement by the Communists of the Thailand Patriotic Front was a key item in encouraging the Americans to make a stand they had to make in Vietnam. Stalin's stupidity in launching the war in Korea not only put teeth back into NATO but brought the United States back to responsibility in the Far East. And in what might be euphemistically called "China's Bay of Pigs," the Communists pulled a goof in Indonesia. What if that attempted coup in Indonesia had succeeded and the Communist policy of real confrontation with Malaysia had been realized? It was a dramatic, global, strategic attempt, and it flopped. Further, on the positive side there has been building of defenses around Communist China and mutual experiences in Vietnam. A great number of countries around the periphery of China are disillusioned by the heavyhanded interference on the part of Peking. Whereas during the Bandung period there was real attraction to Peking, it is safe to say today that nowhere around the borders of China does the Maoist version of communism have any sex appeal at all. Then it is important to note the disappearance of Communist units. Sino-Soviet disagreements and the schisms within local parties have robbed Marxism of much of its appeal in Asia where it was hardly relevant anyway.

Despite the drawbacks that the Communists face, however, there are indeed persistent dangers. And it would be nice to be more cheerful at the end of a very difficult analysis of major problems. There is the danger that the Mao strategy may, indeed, have succeeded in robbing us of our ability to face such a contest as Vietnam again. There is the persistent danger of irrationality. From any commonsense point of view the Japanese were irrational 26 years ago to believe that they could take on all of Mainland China, the United States, Britain, France, and the Netherlands in a major military confrontation. Pearl Harbor was an irrational decision. It was based on a misassessment of U.S. purpose and staying power. In the madness of the Red Guard frenzy in Peking today and in the power struggle we cannot rule out the possibility that some young man may rise to power and become the new Mao after the "Great Helmsman" has fled from the scene, a man who can reunite the country by some sort of external adventure. The young Japanese militarists did just that 30 years ago. Again, there is the fact that Mainland China is a nuclear power. And there is the danger of persistent instability in Southeast Asia. No one of

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Professor Richard L. Walker holds a B.A. from Drew University, an M.A. and Ph.D. from Yale University, and a Certificate in Chinese Language and Area Studies from the University of Pennsylvania.

After service with the Army in World War II, Professor Walker was a Rockefeller Foundation Fellow, a Chinese Government Cultural Fellow, and a Sterling Fellow. He was Assistant Professor of History at Yale University; Visiting Associate Professor at National Taiwan University; Visiting Professor, Far Eastern and Russian Institute, University of Washington, Seattle; and Professor of Political Affairs at the National War College. He has also served as a Consultant to the U.S. Government and was a U.S. Delegate to the XXV International Congress of Orientalists in Moscow. Professor Walker is presently Director of the Institute of International Studies at the University of South Carolina.

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the countries in Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, has the basis for a solid and consistent economic or political development today.

But perhaps the greatest danger on the horizon is the possibility of isolationism within the United States, just at the moment when we may be just at the point of demonstrating that wars of national liberation linked to an international movement are not a successful way for people who want to build their country.

In a situation where we are alone a great power, where we are the unpopular doctor putting up the quarantine sign, where we are likely to continue to be divided at home, it is, nevertheless, possible to look out another 10 years to the time when the Chinese model may well have disappeared entirely. At that time we may be able to look back with pride to the time when we called the bluff of the strategy of "people's wars," to the time when we said "No" and made it stick, and it is entirely possible that we may be able to survey those troubled and critical years of 1965 to 1968 and talk about a measured, responsible, restrained U.S. performance as a great power and say, as Winston Churchill once said, that this was our finest hour.

Ψ

A trained and disciplined guerrilla is much more than a patriotic peasant, workman, or student armed with an antiquated fowling-piece and home-made bomb. His indoctrination begins even before he is taught to shoot accurately, and it is unceasing. The end product is an intensely loyal and politically alert fighting man.

Brigadier General S.B. Griffith, USMC:
Introduction to Mao Tse-tung
on Guerrilla Warfare, 1961