

We Can Solve the Vietnam Dilemma

By SENATOR GEORGE McGOVERN

IT NOW APPEARS that the United States is faced with the distinct possibility of a major land war in Asia. Seventy-five thousand U.S. troops are already there, and it is reported that this number may reach 200,000 by the end of the year and perhaps many more than that by next spring. That would be a force on the scale of that in the Korean War, with the added dimension of a much more elusive enemy. We do not know whether or not such a major American campaign would draw in the main body of the North Vietnam army—a well-equipped, disciplined force of 350,000 men. If that army were to become involved in the war in the South, a much larger commitment of American forces—perhaps 1,000,000 men—would be required if our side were to prevail. Also unpredictable is the reaction of China and Russia. Neither do we know what kind of political system would emerge even if we were somehow able to wear down the guerrillas and their allies.

We are talking here, however, of a major war involving thousands of American casualties, the expenditure of billions of dollars, vast bloodshed and destruction for the Vietnamese people, and an uncertain outcome. There are other possible side results of such a war that may be even more serious in the long run than the war itself, including:

1. The worsening of relations between the world's two major nuclear powers, the Soviet Union and the United States.

2. The strengthening of the most beligerent leadership elements in the Communist world and the weakening of the moderate forces.

3. The growing conviction in Asia, whether justified or not, that the United States is a militaristic power with a low regard for the lives of Asians and an excessive concern over other people's ideologies and political struggles.

4. The derailment of efforts toward world peace and the improvement of life in the developing countries, to say nothing of its impact on our own hopes for a better society.

The proponents of a large U.S. military effort in Vietnam base their case on the "domino theory" and their fear of the "paper tiger" charge.

The domino theory, first propounded by the late John Foster Dulles more than a decade ago, has been the guiding light of the foreign policy establishment ever since. According to this theory, if South Vietnam goes Communist, this will topple Thailand or Cambodia, which will then topple Burma, Malaysia, and so on through the list of Asian powers including the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. It is not always made clear whether the dominoes are expected to fall because of Chinese aggression or because each country in turn infects its neighbor with the virus of Communism. Be that as it may, as the theory goes the United States must stand firm in South Vietnam, no matter what the cost, to prevent the dominoes from falling.

The related paper tiger theory holds that unless the United States stands firm, we will lose face in the eyes of Asians and American power in the Pacific will collapse. This was the rationale that led Mr. Dulles and President Eisenhower to take up the French mantle after France was expelled from French Indochina by Ho Chi Minh in 1954 and offer U.S. aid to President Diem to build an anti-Communist barrier in South Vietnam. Despite the fact that numerous governments have come and gone in Saigon since the fall of Diem in 1963, we have been holding on to that bastion at a steadily mounting cost ever since, until today we stand on the brink of a major land war in Asia.

The questions now before us are: Do we continue to accelerate the struggle toward a major war? Or do we call it off and withdraw our forces? Or do we consolidate our present position, keep our casualties at a minimum, and hold out indefinitely for a negotiated settlement?

I strongly recommend the third course. I urge that we stop the bombing attacks in both North and South Vietnam. Bombing is largely ineffective in a guerrilla war and more often than not kills the wrong people. We should also stop the jungle land skirmishes that sub-

ject our soldiers to ambush. Instead, let us consolidate our troops in a holding action in the cities and well-defended enclaves along the coast. We can hold the cities and the coastal enclaves with few casualties and with little likelihood that the Vietcong will attack frontally. Such a plan would provide a haven for anti-Communist, pro-government citizens, including the religious groups. It would demonstrate that we are not going to be pushed out, thus giving consolation to those who hold the "domino theory" and fear the "paper tiger" label. We would be keeping our commitment to the various governments in Saigon. It is the best device for saving both lives and political face—the two most sensitive factors to be considered now.

Furthermore, it is based on the realities of the present political and military map of Vietnam. While we are in control of the cities and the coast, the guerrillas control most of the rural and village areas. To dislodge them would be to destroy in the process thousands of the innocent civilians we are trying to save.

A recent news report described the despair of American officers who arrived in the village of Bagia, which our forces had recaptured from the Vietcong after three days of U.S. bombing and machine gun and rocket attacks. What the officers found were weeping women holding their dead children or nursing their wounds and burns. The village church and the school had been destroyed; the people who had been considered pro-government were filled with bitterness toward their rescuers. Meanwhile, the handful of Vietcong guerrillas had melted into the jungle and were never found. Surveying the human tragedy in this village an American officer said, "This is why we're going to lose this stupid damn war. It's senseless, just senseless."

A policy of restricting our military efforts in Vietnam to a holding action in the cities and the coastal enclaves would avoid this kind of self-defeating jungle warfare. We can supply, feed, and defend the urban and coastal areas with a modest effort and minimum loss of life. This is a strategy that calls primarily for restraint and patience until such time as the Vietcong get it through their heads that we will not be pushed out. I have been critical of our unilateral Vietnam involvement, and I think the original commitment and its acceleration was a mistake. But we made the commitment, and I would be prepared to support the kind of holding action outlined here for as many years as is necessary to reach an acceptable settlement of the struggle.

Such a policy, involving political patience and military restraint, requires that we put the issue of Vietnam in more reasonable perspective. We must stop



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talking about it as though the honor of America and our stature in the world depended upon South Vietnam. Our top officials ought to quit preaching that the fate of the human race and the cause of all mankind centers in Saigon. In the first place, it isn't true. American military power in the Pacific is largely in the firepower and maneuverability of our Seventh Fleet plus our island air bases. That enormous firepower, the mightiest military force in the Pacific, will remain no matter what goes on in Vietnam.

Secondly, exaggerated talk, front-page news reports of bombing missions, B-52 raids, and daily jungle forays focus excessive public attention on the Vietnamese issue both at home and abroad. This diverts attention from much more important issues related to our national interest, such as the strengthening of the Atlantic Community, the Alliance for Progress in Latin America, Soviet-American relations, the control of nuclear weapons, and other steps toward peace that promise a better life for the people of the earth. It also wastes energy and talent and planning that we need to concentrate on such crucial countries in Asia as India and Japan.

Furthermore, the constant talk about American honor resting on the future of Vietnam is a hazardous political foundation for the Administration. It invites the American people and the world to watch most closely the very area where the chances of a happy outcome are most questionable. This not only distorts an issue of secondary importance beyond its real significance, but it is poor diplomacy and even poorer politics. If we keep insisting that the image of America in the world depends on the politicians and generals of Saigon, we are going to be in bad shape.

President Johnson has a legislative and administrative record that is virtually unprecedented in American history. It ought to be the pride of our country and the envy of the world. But unless members of the foreign policy establishment who do not have to face the electorate quit making Vietnam the top concern of the Administration, they will create grave political hazards for a great President and his supporters in the Congress—to say nothing of weakening our country in the eyes of the world.

The Korean War, rightfully or not, destroyed the confidence of millions of Americans in the peace-keeping capacity of the Truman Administration. General Eisenhower capitalized on that anxiety and wrecked the Presidential bid of Governor Stevenson by pledging to go to Korea and negotiate a settlement. Those opposition politicians such as the minority leader of the House who are now urging the President to step up the bombing attacks may be speaking with sincere motives. But it is not with-

out passing interest that President Johnson rolled up a landslide victory over Senator Goldwater last fall in considerable part because the overwhelming majority of Americans favored the policy of restraint advocated by the President. The voters rejected Senator Goldwater's prescription for bombing raids and a stepped-up war in Vietnam. It is hardly a political favor to the President at this point to urge him to appease the minority and disappoint the majority by a still larger war effort. Yet recent public opinion polls indicate that the minority who supported Senator Goldwater last fall are more pleased with our accelerating war effort in Vietnam than is the majority who voted so enthusiastically for the President.

Stopping the bombing raids and the daily battles in the jungles, quietly consolidating and holding the enclaves along the coast and in the cities, and reducing the number of exaggerated statements about the importance of Vietnam—these steps will help to quiet much of the clamor and publicity associated with the issue and put it in a more reasonable perspective.

The beneficial results of such a policy of moderation and restraint, combined with patience and firmness, are these:

- It will demonstrate to friend and

foe alike that we have the staying power to keep our commitments without needless fanfare and bloodshed.

- It will enable us to conduct our commitment according to the guidelines that are most practical for us rather than playing the game according to guerrilla rules that include the jungle ambush.

- It will take the Russians out of a dilemma that is pressing them back into a more belligerent alliance with the Chinese.

- It will ease the pressures on such friendly allies as the Wilson government in Britain.

- It will remove much of the diplomatic and political hazard for the Administration both at home and abroad.

- It will reduce the necessity of calling up our Reserves and stepping up the draft, while saving countless millions of dollars that can be used to improve our society and our economy.

- It will reduce the danger of World War III and improve the chances for further steps toward peace.

- Most significant of all, it is the practical way of saving political face while at the same time holding to a minimum the loss of human life—the lives of our soldiers and the Vietnamese people.



"If the tourist trade gets any worse, Existentialism will be doomed."

Resnik as a Regal *Pique Dame*—Freni

AS THE LAST new production to be presented by the Metropolitan Opera in its present home, Tchaikovsky's *Pique Dame* could be the summation of many things—experience, judgment, taste, even quality. It turns out, however, to be the summation of what has been at fault with a number of works as unfamiliar to the recent repertory as this one: no central authority from which a style flows, taking in not only conductor Thomas Schippers, designer Robert O'Hearn, and stage director Henry Butler, but almost all the performers save the regal Regina Resnik as the Countess, from whom the present version takes its title of *Queen of Spades*.

Putting on *Pique Dame* in immediate succession to the Barrault-Dupont-Prêtre *Faust*, placed it at a disadvantage in more than one way. It did not possess anything like the same human resources, and those it had did not seem to be ready for public scrutiny and critical evaluation. On balance, however, what was best about the production would have been even better a few days or a week later, but what was at fault could not have been improved very much.

This was all to be regretted, for *Pique Dame*, which has not been performed at the Metropolitan in decades, is a more stimulating work than the better-known *Eugene Onegin*. This is not so much a matter of what, but when. It does not suggest that Tchaikovsky, in the twelve years that separated them, had mastered the art of writing operas (as Puccini had, by the middle of *Manon Lescaut*), but, rather, that he had developed other resources that served him almost as well. It chanced to be written immediately after what many consider to be his finest work in any form—the *Sleeping Beauty* ballet score—and Tchaikovsky carried over into *Pique Dame* many of the same melodic impulses, orchestral resources, and gifts of characterization. This alone makes *Pique Dame* something to hear and rehear whenever possible.

Not too much of this emerged from the musical outline drawn by Schippers or in the vocalizing of Jon Vickers as the unhappy hero Gherman, Teresa Stratas as the irresolute heroine Lisa, or any of the others save the redoubtable Resnik. Even the version that was used was open to question, for it eliminated a cheerful chorus of children in the first act and another interlude in Act II which also makes for a welcome touch of lightness amid the prevailing gloom. The mere fact that Tchaikovsky knew what he was

doing when he wrote these episodes counted for little, apparently, against the "convenience" of using a version previously performed (by official word) in San Francisco.

Whether this also affected the scenic conception of O'Hearn is hard to say, but it probably did. Altering the first scene from its proper place "In a park" prompted him to create, instead, a pavilion whose pillars and arches provided a frame for all that followed. With some scenes it worked fairly well: with others, such as the barracks and the embankment of the Neva, it was plainly out of place. Most damaging of all in this heavy, brooding scheme was the lack of flexibility: scene changes were slow, causing a forecurtain with a card motif to be lowered and raised six or eight times during the performance, and also disrupting Tchaikovsky's intent of immediately following the doleful conclusion of Scene I with the bright, cheerful episode in Lisa's room, or the gayety of the ball with the gloom of the Countess's quarters. By the time the change was affected, the prior mood was all but dissipated.

Thus the performers were contending not only with the creation of believable characters, but also against the disadvantage of unsuitable surroundings. Some, no doubt, will like the heavy, Early Imperial opulence with which O'Hearn has dressed the stage. My complaint is with the way it didn't work. For such a characterization as Resnik's of the Countess (who might have been the prototype of her Baroness in *Vanessa*) it didn't matter. She was "in" the part from the moment she first stalked on the stage, the ugly wreck of a beautiful woman, topped by a mighty wig, even beyond the moment of her striking death scene, when she reappears as a "spirit." What she had to sing (including the air borrowed from Gretry's *Coeur de Lion*) she sang beautifully, with poise, authority, and a relevant kind of vocal quality.

By and large, these were the qualities most lacking in the work of her younger associates: Teresa Stratas as Lisa, Jon Vickers as Gherman, Rosalind Elias as Pauline, William Walker as Prince Yeletsky, and the new John Reardon as Tomskey. Each had sound reason for being chosen to perform the part enumerated, but each needed much more molding and shaping than Schippers provided. Vickers, for example, poured out sound in abundance, but too much of it was of the same timbre as his Sieg-

mund. A little more shading, nuance, and coloration would have been much to his, and Tchaikovsky's, advantage. The diminutive Stratas qualifies as a believable Lisa in physique and age, but she does not, as yet, project the vocal "presence" to support so prominent a part. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it was not drawn out of her, any more by Butler's superficial direction than it was by Schippers's too metronomic, insufficiently flexible conducting. A bigger voice than Reardon's would have been useful in his big scene in the first act, but he performed capably at this debut. A good sound could be credited also to Gene Boucher, another newcomer, as the Master of Ceremonies. The ballet interlude on the subject of *The Faithful Shepherd* provided by Alicia Markova for the ball in Act II will doubtless count for more when it is better performed than it did at this first showing.

What struck me as most remiss in this effort with *Pique Dame* was the lack of awareness that the big love theme of Act I, which is heard three times with increasing urgency, might accompany a great *pas d'action* in a ballet, as the duet of Yeletsky and Lisa in Act II might be a *pas de deux*, or the aria of Gherman in Act III might be a long solo for a male dancer. I don't cite this as a key to the musical "secret" of *Pique Dame* anymore than the formula delivered by the ghost of the Countess was the "secret" of the card trick. But it is two-thirds correct, which is more, by much, than the musical solution provided by Schippers.

MIRELLA FRENI'S debut as Mimi in the season's first performance of *La Bohème* qualified her for inclusion among a small but distinguished group of Metropolitan notables—those who have sounded even better in the large theater than they have in some smaller ones abroad. She belongs to the small or Bori-Albanese-Sayo kind of Mimi, which takes in eloquence and credibility as well as vocal distinction.

Like them, Freni dresses the part simply, acts it with unaffected sincerity, and ventures nothing not sanctioned by the score. Her first act reached a proper climax of artistry in a beautifully controlled "Mi chiamano Mimi" but the quality was a little spread and edgy. It was better focused in Act II, on the way to an "Addio" in Act III which was full, resonant, and affecting. Here is a singer who should have years of success before her, a good part of them, let it be hoped, in New York.

With her as Rodolfo was Gianni Raimondi with whom she has often sung at La Scala. His is not a sound distinguished by richness or warmth, but it is very well produced, with a secure top
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