



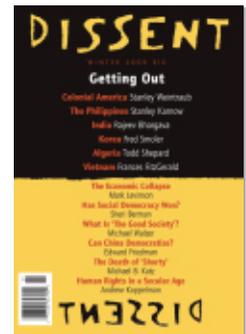
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Getting Out: The First Rule of Holes

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Getting Out

The First Rule of Holes

"Know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away, know when to run," the gambler says in a popular song. But in the aftermath of imperialism and war, walking away is not so simple. Dissent's editors asked several scholars and writers to look at British, French, and American exit strategies—and to pay special attention to the difficulties, above all, the need to protect friends and collaborators and to minimize violence. In these pages, the focus is on each particular case—the American colonies, the Philippines, India, Korea, Algeria, and Vietnam—but we are obviously looking toward an American withdrawal from Iraq. We will write about that in the Spring Dissent. Eds.

Stanley Weintraub: The American Colonies

HOW DOES ONE recognize the looming inevitable? In the 1760s, the British, having defeated the French in America and expanded George III's overseas empire, saw only profit and prestige ahead. A New England cleric, the Reverend Samuel Cooper, told his congregation that the colonists were indebted "not only for their present Security and Happiness, but, perhaps for their very Being, to the paternal Care of the Monarch." The legitimacy of royal rule was little questioned. In that future seedbed of sedition, Boston, Thomas Foxcroft declared, "Above all, we owe our humble *Thanks* to his Majesty and with loyal Hearts full of joyous Gratitude, we bless the *King*, for his Paternal Goodness in sending such effectual Aids to his American Subjects . . . when we needed the Royal Protection."

Fighting a seven-year war three thousand miles from home, when travel time was measured in months, had pinched the British economy. Why not, then, have the colonists, who had been rescued from the wicked French, pay something for their own protection? It was a petty stamp tax on printed paper, a bargain fee (a quarter of what Britons at home paid) on imported tea. It would go to quartering Redcoats to keep away marauding Indians, or to inhibit revengeful "Frogs."

This imperial logic escaped its beneficiaries. Outspoken colonists resented paying anything on their own behalf, claiming lack of

representation in Parliament, the tax-raising body in remote London. But that complaint was only the tip of the trade iceberg. Colonists by law could not manufacture weapons or ammunition (or much else) for their own defense. British industry at home was sustained by commercial barriers. Americans were to supply the raw materials for the making of goods they would have to buy as finished products.

Within a decade, objections about taxes, trade, and troops had plucked the gilded genie from the transatlantic bottle. Colonial farmers, craftsmen, and merchants began proposing a new concept, *liberty*, as a solution to their discontent. In Britain, complacent merchants, manufacturers, and landowners saw only ignorance, ingratitude, and greed motivating the radicalized handful of New England Yankees, who—despite a way with words—lacked arms and fighting zeal. In the seemingly tractable South, Tory planters—self-styled aristocrats—prospered alongside a noisy rabble and illiterate backwoodsmen. Samuel Johnson grumbled that deprivation of the "rights of Englishmen" was an unrealistic grievance. Americans were no less represented in Parliament than most inhabitants on his own side of the water, who lived in increasingly teeming districts excluded from seats in Parliament. Americans were "a race of convicts, and ought to be thankful for any thing we allow them short of hanging."

Did the Establishment foresee unwelcome

change? Could it maintain the imperial equilibrium by granting token seats—unlikely ever to be occupied—in the House of Commons, as London was an ocean away and members unsalaried, or by prudently tucking Redcoats away in obscure barracks; or by relaxing commercial restrictions, to forestall such outrages as a Boston Tea Party; or by proposing that prosperity be shared? Could a royal symbolic presence suffice? We will never know. Instead, what were called the Coercive Acts annulled most local rights granted under colonial charters, turning over elections, appointments, and the administration of justice to Crown officials.

Henry Laurens, a political moderate from South Carolina, later to become presiding officer of the Continental Congress, warned that the colonists, who until then saw little in common, “would be animated to form . . . a Union and phalanx of resistance.” In lonely opposition, a few Members of Parliament rose to urge that negotiation would have a better chance of resolving differences than coercion, although as mutual hostility grew, it became clear that any compromise short of some form of independence would not be accepted. The outgoing secretary of war, Viscount Barrington, predicted that pursuing a hard line, however popular at home, “will cost us more than we can ever gain by success.” Advising conciliation, the ailing William Pitt, the Elder, now Lord Chatham, warned, “We shall be forced ultimately to retreat: let us retreat when we can, not when we must.”

Royal supremacists failed the geopolitical test of maps. In the early 1770s, few recognized, as did Pitt, that the sprawling overseas colonies, more than 1,800 miles north to south, would become more populous than the mother country and would be impossible to subdue, oversee, and manage. At the start of the small-scale and unexpected rebellion, George III impatiently condemned the first risings as parricide—a conspiracy against the “parent state.” He was “unalterably determined,” he told a supine Parliament, many of its members bought off by the Palace, “to compel absolute submission.” Yet, as Ben Franklin observed, once hostilities began in 1775, “Britain, at the expence of three millions, has killed 150 Yankees this campaign, which is [£]20,000 a head;

and at Bunker’s Hill . . . gained a mile of ground. . . . During the same time 60,000 children have been born in America.” Anyone versed in mathematics, he posited, “will easily calculate the time and expence necessary to kill us all, and conquer our whole territory.”

From the vantage point of a Cabinet office under Lord North, the Earl of Suffolk saw no reason for alarm at early reverses in Massachusetts. “The stocks are unaffected, and the respectable part of the City is in very proper sentiments.” He deplored any “disinclination to persevere.” Nevertheless, Edmund Burke, MP for Bristol and an outspoken, if outnumbered, critic of colonial policy, warned of “iron tears” being shed—musket shot and cannon balls fired in helpless anger. The king reminded his subjects, rather, of national honor, by which he implied international embarrassment. But behind his rhetoric lay the feared economic repercussions of losing America. “No man in my dominions desires solid peace more than I do,” he claimed, “but no inclination to get out of the present difficulties can incline me to enter into the destruction of the empire.” Besides, his hawkish military advisers in Whitehall, preeminent among them Lord George Germain, the micromanaging secretary for America, saw “no common sense in protracting a war of this sort. I should be for exerting the utmost force of this Kingdom to finish the rebellion in one campaign.”

As Count Helmuth von Moltke would write in the next century, no strategy survives the first contact with the enemy. British generals recommended forcing the war to a conclusion, although one commander would replace another as each, in turn, failed. All were ambitious careerists, with promotions, titles, and parliamentary gratuities dancing in their heads. General John Burgoyne, who, before a shot was fired, advocated “persuasion rather than the sword,” now decried diverting “British thunder” by “pitiful attentions and Quaker-like scruples.” They possessed overwhelming military superiority. They were better equipped, better trained, more numerous, and more professional than the poorly equipped, ragged, undisciplined patchwork amateurs serving short enlistments and unlikely to stay on for further service. The London *Morning Post* published

a list of rebel generals ostensibly ridiculed for their prewar occupations—a boat builder, a bookseller, a servant, a milkman, a jockey, a clerk. It was a covert satire on British snobbery, implying that commanders of noble birth were overmatched by officers reaching the top by merit in classless America. Misguided generalship was compounded by civilian arrogance at Whitehall. “Rarely has British strategy,” Winston Churchill would write, “fallen into such a multitude of errors. Every principle of war was either violated or disregarded.”

Although the British had a surplus of brass, as the war dragged on it became frustrating to fill the ranks. When it became difficult to raise more Redcoats, Parliament obstinately authorized hiring thousands of mercenaries from German statelets (“Hessians,” although not all were from Hesse) and constructing warships by the dozen. The amphibious assault on Long Island and Manhattan employed an armada not surpassed in numbers until D-Day in 1944, yet in remote upstate New York in 1777, Burgoyne and his army, bereft of reinforcements, surrendered at Saratoga.

General William Howe took the rebel capital, Philadelphia, chasing George Washington into woeful winter quarters at Valley Forge. Still, Washington was winning merely by keeping his army alive while imperial overstretch took its toll. The insurgency thrived on British attrition. With more land to occupy and control than he had troops to accomplish the job, Howe scuttled back to New York the next spring, explaining later from London, once he had been replaced (and promoted), that professional soldiers lost to shot and disease would be difficult to replace from across an ocean, while the upstart Americans could recruit marginally trained militiamen close at hand. He would “never expose the troops . . . where the object is inadequate.”

IF THE OBJECT was not worth the effort, why not abandon it? Undeterred, other generals succeeded Howe. Never numerous, local loyalist volunteers were decreasing, while further foreign hirelings were largely unaffordable under dwindling budgets, captive now to the contagion of pessimism and new parliamentary parsimony. Even the country

landowners, the conservative backbone of the regime, were becoming disillusioned, as a wry “Dialogue between a Country Squire and his Tenant” suggested in the *London Gazetteer* in 1778:

Tenant: Pray, Squire, when do you think the war will end?

Squire: At Doomsday, *perhaps* sooner; but this is certain, the nation is almost ruined, and we country gentlemen are the greatest sufferers.

As an unbridled press revealed, returning casualties and the declining standards for enlistment made soldiering a grim option, largely for the jobless and the poor. “An Exact Representation of Manchester Recruits,” captioning a cartoon of weird, dehumanized volunteers, illustrated the increasing national pain. “The Master of the Arses, or the Westminster Volunteers” showed six motley recruits spurred on, front and rear, by bayonet-bearing Redcoats, one inductee stumbling with a crutch and stick, another on gouty, swathed legs. “The Church Militant” satirized an equally useless dimension of belligerence. In that broadside, a group of clergy, some lean and ascetic, others stout and gross, all led by obtuse bishops, sing “O Lord Our God, Arise and Scatter Our Enemies.” Desperation about the war was out in the open.

Decades later, Charles Dickens imagined a scene in *Barnaby Rudge*, in the aptly named Black Lion tavern in the late 1770s, in which the barkeep observes scornfully as a recruiting sergeant offers his spiel, “I’m told there ain’t a deal of difference between a fine man and another one, when they’re shot through and through.”

The sergeant suggests to potential enlistees a life of wine, women, and glory, and a timid voice pipes, “Supposing you should be killed, sir?” Confidently, the Redcoat responds, “What then? Your country loves you, sir; his Majesty King George the Third loves you; your memory is honoured, revered, respected; . . . your name’s wrote down at full length in a book in the War Office. Damme, gentlemen, we must all die some time or other, eh!” Pages later, the publican’s son, who fell for the sales pitch and has returned from Savannah, sits quietly in the tavern with one sleeve empty. “It’s been took

off," his father explains, "at the defence of the Salwanners. . . . In America, where the war is." To his listeners, it is all meaningless.

While losses, prices, and taxes fueled anxiety, no effective tactics surfaced to put down the rebellion. End-the-war adherents were an increasing yet still powerless minority. Since the "experiment" of putting the Americans down was failing, the *St. James's Chronicle* editorialized, Britain should "withdraw in time with a good grace, and declare them INDEPENDENT." Although the House of Lords remained firmly behind the king, in the Commons a former general and Cabinet minister, Henry Seymour Conway, moved that "this mad war" should "no longer be pursued." The motion failed by one vote. "We are not only patriots out of place," Sir George Savile, a Yorkshire MP, remarked gloomily to the Marquis of Rockingham, "but patriots out of the opinion of the public." Rockingham advised waiting "till the Publick are actually convinced of the calamitous State we are in." That would come only after the futile campaigns of Earl Cornwallis in the presumably safe American South. Not many months after, Rockingham would be the first peace prime minister.

Cornwallis busied himself evading defeat, but he ran out of alternatives late in 1781, once the French intervened by land and sea. Third forces are often crucial. Uninterested in American ideals about liberty and equality, the French were determined to give the British a black eye and arrived in Yorktown before a rescue fleet from New York. Abroad, few had been listening to radicals like Josiah Tucker, an Anglican divine and amateur economist, who in a pamphlet, *Cui Bono*, called for getting out. America, he charged, had become a "millstone" round the neck of Britain. "If we ourselves have not the wisdom to cut the Rope, and let the Burthen fall off, the Americans have kindly done it for us."

As Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, a British band played "The World turn'd Upside Down." After further weeks of national dismay, George Germain, pushed to resign, was rewarded for his sacrifice with a viscountcy. A broadside cartoon, "Three Thousand Leagues beyond the Cannon's Reach," portrayed him satirically yet realistically as unable to direct

military affairs from distant London. His office as secretary for America was soon abolished by Rockingham's reform government.

THE BRITISH HAD no exit strategy other than victory. Capitulation and a draft treaty negotiated in Paris the next year with the grudgingly recognized United States required evacuating troops from the few Atlantic seaports they still held and keeping faith somehow with loyalists still within British boundaries. There were also thousands of prisoners of war to be paroled, held hostage in vain by Congress for payment of their upkeep. The hard and possibly thankless decisions were left to the pragmatic last Redcoat commander, Sir Guy Carleton, who, with a mere knighthood, eyed a peerage for his services. (He would get it.) Fleets of transports would evacuate Charleston, Wilmington in North Carolina, and tightly held Savannah, taking with them prominent but angry loyalists who had to abandon their properties. Most were promised only a sailing to Halifax and resettlement in the sparsely populated Maritime Provinces. Die-hards were granted six hundred very likely untillable acres; officers choosing Canada were offered fifteen hundred acres; and men in the ranks could look forward to a meager fifty. Some troops opting for further duty were sent to the West Indies to garrison sugar islands against the French.

Under occupation beyond New York and Long Island were isolated frontier posts on the Canadian border held for payment of colonial debts acknowledged in the treaty. As the financial settlements were made unwillingly and late, Forts Niagara, Oswego, Presque Isle, Mackinaw, and Detroit would not be relinquished until the mid-1790s. The Treaty of Paris called for the British departure to be accomplished "with all convenient speed," but the major remaining enclave of New York was held by Carleton until he had confirmation of acceptable guarantees for withdrawal of his troops and local loyalists. About three thousand slaves within British lines were permitted to leave with owners who certified them. Others were reclaimed by Washington's "commissioners" (for lack of documentation) as "American property," while most aged, sick, and otherwise helpless slaves were

cynically abandoned to freedom as worthless for labor. Ironically, the chattels left behind were liberated for less than idealistic reasons, but Washington, after all, was a slaveholder.

For Carleton, getting out was a logistic nightmare. It had taken 479 vessels to bring the first 39,000 troops to New York in July 1776. Re-embarking the occupiers and their equipage required much more—several months and hundreds of sailings and return sailings through early December 1783, as frantic sympathizers by the thousands (29,244 evacuees from New York to gloomy Nova Scotia alone), along with their most prized goods, were assured accommodation. Few—only the wealthy elite and those closely associated with the royal government—were eligible for immigration to England, where Benedict Arnold had already arrived, to no acclaim, with his family. The British had no interest in housing, employing, or feeding their miserable and burdensome transatlantic cousins.

HUMILIATED, George III threatened to abdicate in favor of the playboy Prince of Wales, but prudently dropped the idea. Rather, in a rare attack of realism, the king belatedly recognized the first rule of holes: when you realize you're in one, stop digging. His second thoughts went into a draft memorandum now in the Royal Archives at Windsor. Getting out, he realized, had been the right course all along, although accomplished now for the wrong reason—defeat. "America is lost!" the king wrote. "Must we fall beneath the blow? Or have we resources to repair the mischief?"

Alternatives to the "Colonial Scheme," he contended, would sustain British power and prosperity while involving an independent American nation. "A people spread over an immense tract of fertile land, industrious be-

cause free, and rich because industrious, presently [will] become a market for the Manufactures and Commerce of the Mother Country." He conceded that the war had been "mischievous to Britain, because it created an expence of blood and treasure worth more . . . than we received from America." The more potent Americans became, the less they would be "fit instruments to preserve British power and consequence." Investing any effort to regain hegemony over the colonies would only contribute to "the insecurity of our power." Was an empire destined to be lost worth the price to preserve it? Through the global marketplace the lost lands could still promote British prosperity. Getting out, even accepting humiliation, he argued, could be an unforeseen boon if exploited wisely.

The king's document, based on the thwarted American experience, was a remarkable prophecy. Yet George conceded that the catastrophe had so weakened him at home that he had no clout with his ministers, reactionary or radical. He put the draft aside. Future governments would pour vast resources into subjugating, yet failing to assimilate, the successor jewel in the Crown—the subcontinent of India—and millions of square miles of indigestible Africa, eventually to relinquish them all at staggering cost to the home islands. It was always foolhardy to be tempted to stay, and always too late to get out. "Mutual interest," the Reverend Tucker had opined, was "the only Tie . . . in all Times and Seasons, and this Principle will hold good, I will be bold to say, till the end of Time." ●

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Stanley Karnow: The Philippines

HOWEVER MUCH their methods differed, the British, Dutch, and French intended to cling to their colonies forever. But, from its start in 1898, the United States meant to limit its control of the Philippines—and, to that degree, the American-Filipino experience was unusual in the annals of imperialism.

The conquest of the Philippine archipelago was initially masterminded at the swanky Metropolitan Club in Washington by a covert coterie of obdurate men—the highbrow senator Henry Cabot Lodge, the naval strategist Captain Alfred Mahan, and particularly the belligerent Theodore Roosevelt, then assistant secretary of the navy. The conquest of the Philippines was ancillary to their paramount goal of dislodging Spain from Cuba, but they realized that by propelling American power into the Pacific, businessmen could boost their lucrative trade with China and Japan and profit from tapping their thriving markets and rich sources of raw materials.

Pious evangelical clergymen of every denomination and sect lauded the endeavor as a unique opportunity to raise the “shining cross” of Christ on the hilltops of Asia. Walt Whitman acclaimed America’s actions for expanding the country’s horizons, and Rudyard Kipling composed his famous poem “The White Man’s Burden” as an appeal to the United States to share with Britain the strenuous, unrequited task of improving the blighted condition of ignorant pagans. The opponents of America’s new role in the Philippines included civil service reformer and former senator Carl Schurz, the steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie, and onetime patrician New York, Boston, and Philadelphia abolitionists, who equated the subjugation of peoples overseas with slavery and argued that annexation of the islands would blatantly transgress America’s lofty principles of “justice” as well as trigger an influx of “barbarous Asiatics” into the country.

At dawn on May 1, 1898, obedient to Roosevelt’s clandestine orders, Commodore George Dewey steered his minuscule squad-

ron into Manila Bay—and, within seven hours, sank the antiquated Spanish armada. The heroic triumph immortalized Dewey. Soon an American infantry brigade entrenched itself on the outskirts of Manila and plunged President William McKinley into a quandary.

Unable to identify the Philippines on a map, he was spoofed by Peter Finley Dunne for not knowing whether they were “islands or canned goods,” but McKinley famously explained that after nights of pacing the White House and kneeling to God for help, he decided to “take them all and uplift and civilize and Christianize them.” Thus Americans supplanted the Spanish—and, as the witticism went, “three centuries in a Catholic convent were replaced by fifty years in Hollywood.”

Xenophobic Filipinos challenged the U.S. presence in a bitter guerrilla conflict—oddly termed by Washington as the “insurrection”—that dragged on for five years. The atrocities committed by America and graphically reported in *Harpers Weekly* and other publications mortified the public at home—as Vietnam would generations later. Hindered by incompetent leaders and wielding antiquated Mausers and Remingtons, the ragtag Filipino militiamen were no match for the American forces, with their array of Gatling machine guns and Krag-Jørgensen carbines. They lost some twenty thousand men—five times the U.S. toll.

As many as three hundred thousand civilians perished, either caught in the crossfire or in cholera and typhus epidemics. A gruesome episode occurred in September 1901 on the Visayan island of Samar after guerrillas slaughtered thirty-seven Americans in the town of Balangiga. The U.S. commander, General Jacob W. “Hell-Raising Jake” Smith, insisted that “all persons over the age of ten be killed” and the region “turned into a howling wilderness.” A court-martial indicted him for butchering two hundred Filipinos, but, like Lieutenant William Calley, who perpetrated the notorious massacre of the Vietnamese My Lai villagers in 1968, Smith was treated leniently.

Appointed governor, William Howard Taft arrived in June 1904 and engaged the prominent architects and urban planners Daniel Burnham and William Parson to transform Manila into a clone of an American metropolis. They laid out mosaic plazas, verdant parks and capacious boulevards, their titles honoring Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln, and designed civic buildings, with their Hellenic columns to replicate those of Washington, D.C. Taft pursued a policy of “benevolent assimilation,” the concept vaguely espoused by McKinley. Reflecting the racist attitudes of the time, he regarded Filipinos as inferior. Yet, condescendingly captioning them “little brown brothers,” he cultivated the elite *illustrados*, as other U.S. presidents would subsequently, and launched a political tutelage program to prepare them for freedom.

AS EARLY AS 1902 Filipinos elected a parliament, and before long the nation’s bureaucracy was almost entirely indigenous. Dispatched to Washington, the astute, debonair Manuel Luis Quezon y Molina vigorously lobbied Capitol Hill on behalf of the Philippines, becoming a familiar figure in its marble corridors and smoky cloak rooms. Quezon even drafted much of the relevant legislation. As a result of his clout, Filipinos were classified “nationals” and, in contrast to other Asians, granted unchecked entrance into the United States, where hospitals coveted them as doctors and nurses—and do to this day.

The U.S. cultural impact was phenomenal. Precursors of Peace Corps volunteers, intrepid young Americans dubbed Thomasites, for the vessel that conveyed them, plunged into the remotest corners of the archipelago to teach English, turning it into the country’s *lingua franca*. Under their aegis kids learned to brush

their teeth and recite their prayers. High school bands, led by drum majorettes, belted out stirring John Philip Sousa marches at raucous fiestas. Gifted musicians imitated Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke, and Duke Ellington, and vaudevillians copied Fanny Brice, Al Jolson, and Sophie Tucker. Teenagers with cigar brand monikers such as Benedicto and Bonifacio tagged themselves Bernie and Butch. The passport to success for adolescents was an elegant Ivy League diploma.

Spurred by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, both chambers of Congress voted in 1934 to create a Philippine Commonwealth pending the declaration of independence a decade afterward. Independence was delayed by the Second World War, during which Filipino and U.S. troops fought together in horrendous battles. Even so, it was a graceful withdrawal.

Since then, dismayed by the corruption and mismanagement that scourge the islands, many Filipinos look back nostalgically on the American era as utopian. Some politicians even bluster openly that they were CIA “assets.” The populace overwhelmingly endorsed the presence of the U.S. bases at Angeles and Subic Bay, though under pressure from powerful factions determined to end what Filipino senator Teofista “Tito” Guingona called “the last shackles of the past,” they were closed by the Pentagon during the 1980s.

In the end, perhaps the best assessment of America’s role in the Philippines is that of America’s Vietnam foe Ho Chi Minh, who once remarked, “If the French had governed Vietnam the way the Americans administered the Philippines, our struggle against them would have been unnecessary.” ●

STANLEY KARNOW was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in history in 1991 for his book *In Our Image: America’s Empire in the Philippines*.

Rajeev Bhargava: India

SCHOLARLY WRITING explains British withdrawal from India in terms of a crisis of the colonial state precipitated by Britain's expansive involvement in the Second World War and the sustained anticolonial struggle of Indians led by leaders such as Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. This is not a complete explanation, but at least it nudges us in the right direction.

However, crucial questions remain unanswered. Why was their departure moved up by over a year—from June 1948 to August 1947? What explains the timing of the withdrawal? What were its moral costs? Could displacement have been averted and the mass killings prevented if withdrawal had been delayed? Did political actors taking these decisions foresee the looming moral disaster? Did the British have information about the extent and depth of violence once they announced the decision that the country would be partitioned? If they had adequate intelligence reports, what measures were taken to quell the violence? And finally, what lessons can be learned from the calamity that followed, during which an estimated one million people died and millions more were displaced? Here, I focus on these questions and limit myself to the period immediately prior to independence.

Let me at the outset state two truisms: *First*, no imperial power has been known to withdraw from a colony without securing its strategic interests. *Second*, an occupying power never leaves with egg on its face and must appear, at the very least, to exit on its own terms.

By the end of the Second World War, Britain knew that its exit from India was imminent. But the formal end of the empire did not mean that the British were prepared to relinquish substantive control over the region, and this consideration was to have a significant impact on the future. Fearful of burgeoning Russian influence in the area between Turkey and India, and worrying that the Indian National Congress might be susceptible to such influence, Britain felt that a concessive stance toward the demand for a separate state of

Pakistan would better protect British interests in the subcontinent. This tacit support for a new state served another purpose. It helped Britain to save face—to tell the world that it did not exit as a defeated power, with empty hands. Imperial self-esteem depended on the belief that the jewel was still somewhere in the crown. A divided, somewhat weaker subcontinent, with a potentially malleable Pakistan, helped sustain that belief.

The process of cementing a “two-state” solution to “the Hindu-Muslim problem” partially determined the timing of withdrawal, but several other factors contributed toward it. For one, American pressure on Britain—dictated by similar neo-imperial considerations but also by its own struggle for independence—made some difference. Winston Churchill's surprising defeat in the postwar elections seemed to have tilted domestic opinion away from those less favorably disposed to Indian independence. A Conservative Party in power probably would have delayed withdrawal, but the Labour Party hesitated less because independence rang true to its own values. Personal ambitions affected smaller but no less important details. Stanley Wolpert has argued that Viceroy Louis Mountbatten's strong disposition toward a speedy withdrawal was not entirely unrelated to his own professionally motivated desire to leave India.

Perhaps another important cause of the timing of withdrawal was that once the decision to have two independent nation-states was announced, the overall conditions in the entire region began to deteriorate rapidly. Unwilling to take responsibility for tackling the demons emerging in the subcontinent, Britain was keen to quit as soon as possible. As Sucheta Mahajan has noted, many British officials were happy to “pack their bags and leave the Indians to stew in their own juice.”

But what of the Indian leadership? What made Congress Party leaders accept the timing and the potentially costly and immoral outcome of the British withdrawal? Why did Indian leaders acquiesce to the withdrawal at

a time when the fear of collective violence was so pervasive? For some, economic reasons are crucial here. Business was declining, the manufacturing sector was affected by strikes, and landlords feared impending peasant uprisings. Under these conditions, both the Indian bourgeoisie and the landlords were eager to see a government more amenable to their influence. There is a grain of truth here, but this explanation is too general and misses out on the nuts and bolts of what we are after.

Perhaps the most important reason for the hasty transfer of power and for the relative insensitivity to its outcome was a substantive change in the structure of power within the Congress Party that brought Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel center stage and severely marginalized Gandhi. As the future wielders of power turned to issues of real politics, ethical considerations were steadily minimized. This is not a criticism of Nehru and Patel. Handling public power is difficult at the best of times. In times of transition, this difficulty multiplies a hundredfold and makes it tough for even ethically minded politicians to be steady and consistent. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, too, faced this problem. He had been initially against the partition of Punjab and Bengal on the ground that it might lead to large-scale collective violence, but as the prospect of power neared, these fears receded. Gandhi's distaste for power continuously and uninterruptedly made him morally sensitive. His presence in the political process at this time of transition would have been vital, but it was not to be, and this had profound and tragic consequences.

Focus on the ethical dimension of political actions requires—especially during moments of transition—uncluttered thinking, not gut reactions. Here the Congress leadership faltered—handicapped by a simplistic belief that a direct and clear announcement of partition would help reduce communal violence. They thought that anxiety and uncertainty about the future in the minds of ordinary people lay at the heart of intercommunal violence. A definitive announcement by the government and the leaders of the Congress Party would set minds at rest, and violence would automatically abate.

This proved to be wishful thinking at its worst. How on earth could a simple announce-

ment avert violence? In a state carved out along ethno-religious lines from a country where Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs had lived cheek by jowl for centuries, how could freshly invented minorities live without fear amid newly created majorities? A peaceful transfer of population was impossible unless the population was already segregated. The Congress Party leaders' view betrays an overly rationalist approach that failed utterly to comprehend the depth, complexity, and intensity of emotions unleashed by escalating uncertainty.

It is true, of course, that the primary concern at such times is life itself, but fear that one might die is not the only emotion that grips potential victims. There is the pain of losing a home, which is not the same as loss of material property. There is love, and attachment, for the city or village in which one has grown up—again, not translatable into security of livelihood and property. And, finally, there is resentment at the unfairness of being forced out of a place where one has lived for as long as anyone can remember and being cut off from one's ancestors—for some, a violation of what is most sacred. The complex chain of emotions triggered by the prospect of displacement and dispossession brought many to the brink of violence and barbarism.

The British government and the Congress Party framed the issue in terms of episodic communal violence—an outsider's perspective that hardly got to the heart of the matter. Neither had anticipated the spiraling violence sparked off by mutual fear. Assurances from the state about safety and security could not match the horror of seeing friends mutate into murderers. What was urgently needed here was not a view from nowhere—a reasonable, statist viewpoint—but an insider's perspective, which might have made it possible to foresee the brewing storm that would soon wreak destruction on a monumental scale.

HOW *COULD* anyone have failed to predict this outcome? The multi-layered, wishful thinking of the Congress Party needs to be probed. One cannot make a plausible and persistent claim for independence and then, when push comes to shove, not back it with self-confidence. In normal circum-

stances when there are reasonable prospects for peace, when the economy is on the upswing, and when one already has a fairly long experience of administration, effective governance by first-timers is not that difficult. However, when communal disturbances occur daily, the economy is completely destabilized, and there is palpable danger of civil war, one must take a giant leap of faith. One needs to show a tremendous belief in oneself and do so despite (or precisely because of) the uncertainty and lack of assurance from which one might also suffer. How could Congress afford to appear to lose nerve precisely when nerve was most required? Insisting that the situation was under its control was not just an external imperative but a crucial internal requirement. The more pushed to the wall it was, the more loudly its leaders had to say that things were or could be brought under control without any external help. Alas, the scale of the violence was to be so huge and the reality on the ground so bleak that any assertion that the situation could be managed was bound to be proved false immediately. It is surprising that Nehru was not hailed as a tragic hero during the process of partition.

A THIRD REASON why the Indian leadership accepted early British withdrawal was a mistrust of the British readiness and ability to stem intercommunal violence. Every Congress leader concurred with Nehru and Patel on this. Gandhi, too, had scant faith in the British. At a prayer meeting, Gandhi famously said that “it was not for the British to give India freedom. They could only get off our backs. That they are under a promise to do. But, for keeping it and giving it shape, we have to look to ourselves.” He added that in his opinion “we are unable to think coherently whilst the British Power is still functioning in India. Its function is not to change the map of India. All it has to do is to withdraw and leave India, if possible, carrying on in an orderly manner, but withdraw in any case on or before the promised date, maybe even in chaos.” Gandhi continued to believe that a joint statement from the Congress and the Muslim League would halt the violence.

This mistrust in the ability of the British to

handle the situation was not ill-founded considering the previous experience of riot management in Calcutta and Bihar. In Bengal during the Great Calcutta Killings, the government showed a complete lack of will to curb the violence. This connects with another issue. Did the British envisage the violence and the other consequences of their withdrawal?

Some writers suggest that Mountbatten did not have adequate intelligence reports of the scale and intensity of the violence. Others insist that he possessed requisite information to take preemptive action. However, everyone agrees that nobody anticipated the exodus of population—a massive cognitive failure. The British were unable to analyze the dimensions of the problem. It is true that many people, including Jinnah, imagined that only a minimal transfer of population was in the offing. But once widespread violence erupted, it was hard not to conclude that the two states were viable only when populations were ethnically segregated. This triggered fresh rounds of violence when people realized that the only way to ensure separate living was physically to remove the “other” from the neighborhood, even by eliminating him. More compassionate neighbors pleaded with friends to leave. Those gripped by anger and revenge turned to arson and brutal murder. Everything moved rapidly. Everyone became the “other.” All were unwitting cogs in a political machinery of violence.

But this argument does not fully wash. Though they had the ability to analyze at least some of the dimensions of the problem, the British appeared not to have put their mind to it. While the Labour government under Clement Attlee was gearing up for withdrawal and justifying its action as the only way of arriving at a workable solution, other voices within Britain and inside the British Parliament warned of the grave consequences of withdrawing much before the deadline of June 1948. Whatever his motivation, Churchill warned that an immediate withdrawal from the subcontinent would leave behind a legacy of war and devastation. Indeed, Churchill stressed the moral responsibility of the British Empire in helping to shape a stable and violence-free dominion. To suggest that the British weren’t able to foresee the impending violence is to exonerate them,

when a large body of written exchanges among British officials suggests the opposite.

Of course, the moral responsibility for anticipating large-scale destruction and displacement lay both with the government and with Indian leaders. Even so, one crucial difference remains. The government had both the intelligence and the resources to understand the complex situation on the ground. The Indian leadership had neither the resources nor the requisite experience to handle it. True, Congress leaders knew of the existence of private armies of political parties, hell-bent on creating unrest through planned and systematic onslaught. But the scale of the violence and the extent of damage by the organized groups could not be assessed by them—and there is nothing to suggest that the intelligence reports available to the British were shared with the Indians. Therefore, the responsibility of the British government to avert violence was far greater. It alone had the power to take preventive measures.

IF THE BRITISH had a sense of the coming violence, what preventive steps were taken, and were those steps enough to put down the violence? While the assurances from Mountbatten would suggest that the British were in a position to handle any situation, the reality was far from so. There appears to have been a huge gap between British rhetoric and the effective steps that were actually taken. This was evident in Mountbatten's dealing with the situation in Punjab. He decided not to implement martial law in the region and overall showed an attitude of resignation. On other occasions, he made some bizarre suggestions: if necessary, he said, even tanks and planes could be used to contain violence in the "rabbit warrens of the towns." Even the steps actually taken on the ground seemed ineffective; they were essentially dependent on the strength of the newly constituted Boundary Force, which was ill-equipped both in terms of manpower and resources.

Overall, it is fair to conclude that the British administration did not plan for a breakdown of civil authority; nor did it acknowledge that the Indian Civil Service in 1947 was in a tangle. Around 55 percent of the elite service was either retiring, uncommitted, or on the move. As Robin Jeffrey has shown, this was not considered by the British as an important problem to be addressed at the time of partition.

Finally, we must question whether the decisions of imperial powers on withdrawal can ever be based not just on specific strategic and political interests but also on a sense of moral responsibility for their (former) colony. On the evidence of the British withdrawal from the Indian subcontinent, it would be foolhardy to expect any imperial power to be collectively guided by morality. There might be individual cases of morally praiseworthy action, but it is hard to imagine that a system of power based on an ideology of occupation, exploitation, and superiority would incorporate moral considerations. Under the circumstances, it is left for the colonized people and their leaders to be cautious and perceptive in their understanding of the "real" and "actual" interests of the imperial power while negotiations for withdrawal are underway. ●

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Fred Smoler: Korea

ANY CLOSE ANALOGY between “getting out” of Korea and American withdrawal from Vietnam, French withdrawal from Algeria, or British withdrawal from India necessarily fails, because in the sense implied by those cases, the United States has not gotten out of Korea.

As recently as 2004, the United States still deployed 37,500 United States troops in Korea. That year the United States and the Republic of Korea (ROK) agreed to reduce the American deployment to 25,000 by 2008, so we are still in Korea, and likely to remain for some time. The reductions to date have never been intended to culminate in the withdrawal of all troops by a date certain, and their pace was for many years uneven. At the height of their wartime strength, American forces numbered 326,363, in the year following the armistice 225,590, and in 1955 the United States maintained a garrison of 75,328. After that, the numbers seasawed, in part according to the level of perceived threat, so that while in 1956 there were 46,024 American troops in the ROK, by 1964 U.S. troop strength had increased by almost a third to 62,596, and five years later it increased again, to 66,531.

While there are some suggestive benchmarks—for example, the 20,000 United States troops withdrawn in 1971, under the Nixon Doctrine, or the adoption by Congress of the Nunn-Warner Amendment to the 1989 Defense Appropriation Bill, which mandated a reduction in U.S. troop strength in Korea from 43,000 to 36,000 by the end of 1991—one cannot easily select a moment when the United States decided that it would never again have to fight in Korea. Leaving aside provocations—the occasional murder, kidnapping, and torture of American soldiers and sailors, any of which might have triggered renewed fighting—there were for many decades concerns that an inadequate American garrison would expose South Korea to very rapid defeat by a North Korean (DPRK) military both more numerous and better equipped than the army the ROK then possessed. The United States would have again

been compelled to make an ugly choice between acquiescence in a conquest, first use of nuclear weapons, or an immensely difficult re-invasion of the peninsula.

Those were the choices that the United States came very close to facing in both 1950 and 1951, first when the DPRK almost effortlessly shattered the ROK’s army and drove a U.S. intervention force into the Pusan perimeter, then again when the Chinese People’s Liberation Army crossed the Yalu, advanced over a hundred miles, forced the naval evacuation of the survivors of the U.S. X Corps, and appeared poised to drive the remainder of the U.S. Eighth Army into the sea.

Only recently has the deterrent power of the ROK’s military come to seem fairly persuasive, and even now the United States will still command all forces in South Korea in wartime, although the ROK may take over that responsibility this year. This means that any analogy to American withdrawal from the Philippines also fails. While a few U.S. combat troops are deployed there, there is a Philippine constitutional ban on foreign military bases, American troops are explicitly prohibited from joining Filipino troops on combat patrols or operations (although there are allegations that this prohibition has not been consistently enforced), and American naval and air power seem more than sufficient to discharge our obligations under the 1951 mutual defense treaty. By comparison, the United States retains its obligation to defend South Korea in the event of a cross-border attack by DPRK forces, which are said to number around 1.2 million troops, and which may now possess nuclear weapons. These considerations suggest that the question of how the United States got out of Korea has to mean how the United States secured the armistice of 1953, an agreement that at least suspended protracted and large-scale warfare on the peninsula.

There were attempts to get out of Korea even before the Korean War began. U.S. forces landed in Korea on September 8, 1945, but U.S. combat units had withdrawn by June 25,

1950, the date of the DPRK's invasion. On January 12 of that year, Secretary of State Dean Acheson seemed to exclude the ROK from the American defense perimeter: "The defense perimeter for the United States runs along the Aleutians to Japan and then goes to the Ryukyus. . . . These are essential parts of the defense perimeter of the Pacific and they must and will be held . . ." South Korea was supposed to defend itself from a DPRK army perhaps thrice the size of its own force and also much better equipped and trained (DPRK armor was not only technically superior but more than three times as numerous as the ROK's tank force, while DPRK combat aircraft were more than ten times as numerous as the ROK's, which numbered fourteen planes). This two-fold attempt to "get out" of Korea (a refusal to station a deterrent force and a parallel refusal to promise aid in the event of invasion) was a catastrophic failure.

It was also very far from the last attempt to get the United States out of Korea. On June 27, 1950, immediately after the invasion, President Harry Truman sent a message to Josef Stalin, hoping to secure North Korean withdrawal to the 38th parallel. This would have preempted American forces from getting back into Korea on the scale that subsequently occurred, but the offer was rebuffed. American allies and neutrals also attempted to secure various terms for an American withdrawal, some of which, had they been accepted by the communist powers, would almost certainly have been rejected by the United States. In early July, the United Kingdom linked DPRK withdrawal to the 38th parallel to U.S. withdrawal from the Taiwan Strait and the People's Republic of China's admission to the UN, and India also proposed a deal (PRC admission to the UN, DPRK forces' withdrawal, and creation of a "united and independent" Korea under UN auspices). These offers, which would have limited the scale on which America got back into Korea, were also rebuffed.

The subsequent course of the war saw the DPRK offensive halted at the Pusan perimeter, and on October 15, 1950, General Douglas MacArthur's very risky but brilliantly successful invasion at Inchon, which in combination with a drive by the U.S. forces deployed far-

ther south destroyed the DPRK invasion force. Perhaps 25,000 out of an original invasion force of 415,000 managed to flee back across the 38th parallel in late October.

At this point the United States probably could have secured partition at the 38th parallel—there was renewed Soviet interest in this solution—and subsequently at the 39th or even 40th parallels, but this did not seem an entirely attractive prospect, because the DPRK would very likely have revived as a military threat to the ROK, thus pinning a significant number of American troops in Korea (which is what eventually happened). In the fall and early winter of 1950, forcible reunification of almost all of Korea under an anticommunist government seemed more than feasible and possessed the (almost certainly illusory) appeal of possibly wedging the PRC away from a humiliated Stalin.

That never happened: MacArthur's subsequent advance to very near the Chinese border was followed by Chinese intervention culminating in a successful surprise counter-offensive that drove the UN forces back 120 miles and initially seemed likely to drive the Western intervention force (most of it American) off the Korean peninsula. That would have gotten the Americans out of Korea, although probably into a nuclear war with China.

The final result was much happier. The Western intervention force stabilized its lines, drove the Chinese back across the 38th parallel, and in several crucial, although now almost-forgotten battles crushed a series of subsequent Chinese offensives. At this point both sides began to negotiate an armistice, although the negotiations stretched out over two years.

WHAT HAD TO happen to achieve the armistice of July 1953? The terms finally agreed upon were recognizably close to those the UN first proposed in July of 1951. Documents released from former Soviet archives suggest that at some periods during the negotiations, time was lost because the Chinese and North Koreans were negotiating in bad faith: after the UN forces crushed the Chinese offensive, the Chinese needed time to stabilize their line and bring up new troops for renewed attacks. In this sense, the

halt to UN operations probably cost the future South Korea some territory; it is likely that had UN forces kept pushing north of the 38th parallel in the summer of 1951 and then stopped on a defensible line, they would have been able to hold most of that line, just as they managed to hold most of the position where they in fact stopped in July.

ALTHOUGH SEVERAL issues separated the American and Chinese negotiators—for example, the question of whether the armistice line would be the (indefensible) 38th parallel or the much more defensible line between the armies at the time of the truce, most of which was north of the parallel—the most contentious question separating the two sides was the repatriation of prisoners of war. Wars traditionally end with an exchange of all prisoners held by all belligerents, and under normal conditions prisoners are eager to be repatriated. In Korea, however, this was not the case: many of the prisoners held by the UN were former Nationalist Chinese soldiers unwilling to return to Mao Zedong's PRC and others were South Koreans conscripted into the North Korean army, similarly unwilling to return to Kim Il Sung's DPRK.

For a number of reasons the United States refused to agree to forcible repatriation. Although not the most important factor, tactical and strategic calculation did have a role in this refusal, for the UN held many more prisoners than did the Chinese and North Koreans (169,000 as opposed to a claimed total of 11,559, one-sixth of the number the communists had previously claimed to have captured, and only one-ninth of the UN force missing in action). Repatriation of all prisoners would have conferred a significant military advantage on the communist armies in the event that the armistice collapsed. Moreover, a considerable number of the soldiers the United States might face in any future European war might also be unwilling conscripts, and the precedent that defectors would not be surrendered might confer a real advantage in a hypothetical future conflict. But more than any of these factors, Truman's moral convictions carried the day. Having agreed to forcible repatriation of Soviet POWs after the Second World War, he had come to detest returning unwilling men to vicious tyr-

annies, and his refusal to do something he thought odious was the deciding factor. For the communist powers, the possible revelation that a significant number of their soldiers considered themselves prisoners within their own societies—who had made their escape by surrendering—was an enraging and threatening vision, and initially unacceptable, and the negotiations were clearly prolonged by Truman's stand.

With recent information from Soviet archives and Chinese memoirs, however, other factors have begun to seem more important than any of the issues that openly bedeviled the negotiators at Panmunjom. Stalin died on March 5, and within two weeks—on March 19—the new Soviet collective leadership seem to have told the Chinese and North Koreans to make the deal that was then swiftly struck. Within a very short time, the armistice line became the defensible line the Americans had demanded, and it was agreed that there would be no forcible repatriation of prisoners. So while the armistice required many things, what it required above all was Soviet acquiescence, and Soviet acquiescence required Stalin's death. Stalin had armed both the Chinese and the Koreans, who were incapable of arming themselves on a scale adequate to contend with Western armies, while his MiGs (and sometimes his pilots) had defended them against devastating American airpower. In the long run, fighting without Soviet support would have been impossible.

There is also evidence that the Chinese leadership had wearied of the war, while Stalin never did. He did not want North Korea conquered, but once it became clear that the UN forces no longer meditated such an end, Stalin thought he had much to gain from protracting the war, which exacerbated strains between Americans and Europeans and tied down American forces that otherwise could have deployed to Europe, where they would have eroded the Soviet military advantage, bled the Americans, and bought time for Soviet and Eastern European rearmament.

The armistice had other prerequisites. Above all, it required the crushing defeat of the People's Liberation Army on the battlefield in the summer of 1951; there had been no serious communist interest in an armistice when either the

North Koreans or the Chinese were advancing. But the UN's success in the smashing of the Chinese Spring Offensive, also known as the Fifth Phase Offensive, which had aimed to regain the initiative on the battlefield after the successful UN counter-offensive in March 1951, changed Mao's thinking. The armistice also required, however, a demonstration of Chinese ability to defend most of what became North Korea, or at least to inflict serious casualties on any UN offensives that sought to recover any large amount of territory north of the parallel—or else the Americans might have considered once again fighting their way north.

The agreement of the Koreans on either side was not necessary, because it could not be withheld: South Korean president Syngman Rhee sought to sabotage the negotiations, and Kim Il Sung was thought to be bitterly disappointed by their outcome, but when their backers agreed to stop the war, the war stopped. The willingness of Dwight D. Eisenhower, by then president, and his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, to escalate the war if an armistice was not forthcoming may have mattered, but it is hard to measure the degree that it mattered on the evidence of the available documents.

Stalin, who gave Kim Il Sung permission to start the war, and several times kept the war going when he could very easily have stopped it, was acting on what in retrospect seems a debatable conception of his strategic interest, since the consequences of the protracted war included massive American rearmament, German rearmament, and the transformation of NATO from a meaningless paper coalition to a real and powerful military alliance. Mao also kept the war going for years—without Chinese intervention it would otherwise have ended in the winter of 1950—at least in part out of a calculation of strategic interest, and is sometimes assumed to have miscalculated less grossly than did Stalin. Mao did win the glory of having stalemated the Americans, but his policy also resulted in the death of a very considerable number of Chinese—and an American commitment to the independence of Taiwan, an American military alliance with Japan, the denial of UN membership for the PRC for a generation, and the survival of South Korea—again, the reverse of the intended results. The protracted war initially

deepened and strengthened the ties between the PRC and the Soviet Union, but also produced strains within the communist bloc and the foreshadowing of the Sino-Soviet split. While the war is often considered a strategic draw, the reasons for this judgment seem elusive; even ignoring the resulting balance of advantage, the war was initiated to destroy the ROK; the United States intervened to preserve the ROK, and the ROK survived.

INDEED, IT DID more than that. When the war began, South Korea was one of the poorest societies on earth, and when the war ended it was even poorer: in 1953, South Korean per capita gross national income was \$67. Last year it was \$20,045, and South Korea was the thirteenth largest economy in the world. When the war ended, South Korea was, with good reason, considered a corrupt and brutal authoritarian regime, and would remain so for decades. It is now a functioning democracy, in some important senses more democratic than the United States was in the middle of the twentieth century.

In terms of current (and some older) catchphrases, this result is something of a puzzlement, for there is no historical and cultural tradition of democracy in South Korea. The North Koreans, by notorious contrast, live in a famine-wracked tyranny governed with extraordinary cruelty. By the lessons often drawn from common convictions about how the United States ought to get out of wars (as quickly and completely as possible), and about which wars it should avoid (other people's civil wars or contests with antagonists who might be considered the postcolonial forces of national liberation), the Korean War should have been an unmitigated disaster. Instead, it yielded one of the most startling successes of American foreign policy, achieved not only by stumbling (with no exit strategy) into a fight in Korea, but by staying there for more than half a century. ●

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Todd Shepard: Algeria

IN MARCH 1962, in the eighth year of the Algerian War, the French government signed off on the Evian Accords, which established a ceasefire as well as a process that led to the July 5 proclamation in Algiers of independence—one hundred and thirty-two years to the day after the Ottoman ruler of that city had surrendered to French invaders. Few people were surprised—the only surprising thing was that ending the French occupation took so long. The end was, after all, inevitable, or so it can seem in retrospect. But the war was long, and its violence was shocking to contemporaries both in its forms—the French Armed Forces’ systematic use of torture on suspected nationalists and the embrace of terrorism by the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN)—and its effects: the dead numbered some 17,000 French soldiers, about 3,500 French civilians, and (according to current estimates) between 250,000 and 578,000 Algerians, the vast majority of whom were noncombatants.

Two of the most well-known windows into this moment—the on-screen events in Gillo Pontecorvo’s film *The Battle of Algiers* and the account and analysis in Frantz Fanon’s book *The Wretched of the Earth*—stop in 1961, just before the FLN’s final victory. Looking out from the mountain top, just before the promise of independence has been achieved, gives the undeniable pleasure of being certain of what will happen. Comparing that promise with the ledger of post-independence disappointments (the economic, political, and ideological failures; the still-present threat of terrorist violence; the intense desire of so many North Africans to emigrate to Europe) provides grounds for commentaries, both smug and despairing. Such reflections can seem particularly meaningful because, in today’s history books, the Algerian revolution often stands in for the era of decolonization writ large, with the war’s exceptional violence magnifying the hopes inspired by “Third World revolutions” as well as the doubts about the West’s “civilizing mission.” Focusing on how the French withdrawal from

Algeria actually happened offers a different perspective.

Skipping over the messy details, it turns out, was an impulse widely shared at the time. Already in early 1962, though few French people could imagine how the Algerian conflict would finally end, they knew that it would. All the better, as most of them had other things to do. In the photo-weekly *Paris-Match*, the year’s first editorial, “Snow and Fascism,” noted that “between Christmas and these first days of January, 900,000 Parisians put on hold their rendezvous with History and rushed off to the slopes!” In the final months of 1961, French politicians hesitantly had begun to prepare their country for Algerian independence. The minimal coverage the mainstream press now accorded Algeria was occupied by a fierce debate over the merits of splitting Algeria into mini-states, one “francophile,” one “nationalist,” with a third for the Sahara. Left-wing protests drew few into the streets. Algerian civilians as well as French soldiers and nationalist fighters continued to die in what the French government still insisted on calling the “events in Algeria.”

On December 29, 1961, President Charles de Gaulle broke this silence in his New Year’s address. He told those listening that the year ahead would see the end of French Algeria “one way or another”; 1962, he intoned, “will be the year the army will be regrouped in Europe.” The quiescence de Gaulle shattered gave way to an intense period of activity and argument on both sides of the Mediterranean. In Algeria, those who wanted the French to maintain control over their homeland responded with anguish and outraged protest, strikes, and blockades; the most extreme, those who joined the Secret Army Organization (OAS), led by officers who had deserted from the French Army, accelerated their terrorist attacks against suspected FLN sympathizers; random Muslim civilians; and even, occasionally, French soldiers. Working-class neighborhoods in the cities of Algiers and Oran that had remained somewhat mixed, with “Europeans” and “Mus-

lims” living together, were hurriedly and urgently segregated—the exodus of one group or the other driven by pressure from local thugs (“European” and “Muslim”) or by fear. In numerous French cities, around Paris and in the provinces, OAS members turned from collecting funds via bank robberies and extortion attempts (a tactic that one angry target, Brigitte Bardot, loudly brought to public attention in late 1961) to a bombing campaign that targeted left wingers. Terrorist attacks on French civilians succeeded—in ways that reports of officially sanctioned torture, obscene numbers of civilian deaths, and international reprobation never had—in mobilizing the forces of the French left. Hundreds of thousands marched on February 13, 1962, to protest the government’s violent response to an anti-OAS rally. These were the months when the “Algerian events” no longer appeared as a fight between the French government and the FLN but between two visions of France, between (in the shorthand of the left) the “Republic” and the “fascists.”

It was in this context that the government announced the Evian Accords. There was loud criticism, but almost all of it came from the very small number of ultras, who still insisted that Algeria remain French. The usual critics of de Gaulle’s government, among Communist and Socialist politicians, public intellectuals, or far-left militants, had little to say, except to complain that peace had not come earlier. Focused on the OAS menace to France, they paid little attention to the details of their government’s plan for getting out of Algeria.

OFFICIALS HAD organized their pullout, it soon became clear, on the basis of two wrong-headed assumptions. On the one hand, the authorities were sure that they had done what was necessary to convince the substantial minority of Algerians who still wanted a French Algeria to stay put. On the other hand, their plans for how to deal with Algerians eager for independence, the FLN in particular, assumed that they would be able to propagate the illusion that the French had decided on their own to leave Algeria and that, rather than a nationalist victory, the independent state-in-waiting was the result of a French

plan. But between April and July 1962, the vast majority of pro-French Algerians fled across the Mediterranean, a mad rush that contemporaries termed “the Exodus.” In those same months, the provisional authority the French had established gained no traction, although their efforts undercut the authority of those nationalist groups most amenable to cooperating in the transition and discredited individual Algerians who actively cooperated. Subsequently, the intra-nationalist civil war, which broke out almost as soon as independence was declared, left the most vocally anti-French forces in control. Plans for a pluralist democracy were in tatters.

The most immediate victims were two groups of pro-French Algerians. The most well known were the Europeans, more colloquially named *pieds noirs* (black feet), who made up some one million of Algeria’s nine million inhabitants. This was a diverse group, most with family ties to Algeria dating back two or more generations, mainly immigrants from Spain, Italy, and Malta, with smaller numbers coming from mainland France. About 120,000 “Europeans” were Jews, the vast majority with ancient family ties to Algeria, dating in some cases to 600 B.C.E. With a few wealthy exceptions, these *pieds noirs*, although better off than their Muslim neighbors, were poorer than French people living in Europe. Most were deeply attached to their French citizenship, which laws since 1889 had guaranteed. To keep the *pieds noirs* in Algeria the government had pursued a two-track strategy. First, intense negotiations leading up to the Evian Accords aimed to provide them extensive and ironclad guarantees: in independent Algeria they would be able to hold on to French nationality; to opt for dual citizenship; to use the French language in all public affairs; to have civil questions judged under French law and by French jurists; their representation in local government would be assured, their property rights protected. Second, in December 1961, a measure establishing a special status for “repatriates,” which was aimed specifically at *pieds noirs*, became law. As French archives make clear, officials designed this project with the counterintuitive goal of convincing Algeria’s Europeans that, since their right to come to France

was guaranteed, they should stay in their North African homeland.

Another group, its outlines a bit less obvious, was made up of a minority of Algeria's Arab or Berber inhabitants (rather than call such people Algerians, official French terminology spoke of "Muslims"). This group of French loyalists came to be called the *harkis*. A *harki* was a man who belonged to one of the many self-defense units or *harkas*, which the French government had organized in their attempts to crush the nationalist uprising. By war's end, the term *harki* meant all those—male or female—who had worked with the French and failed to distance themselves effectively and in time. Potentially, this was a lot of people, as the numbers of Algerians who served in French uniform or worked for the French state during the war dwarfed those who had directly supported the FLN or other nationalist groups.

According to the Constitution of the Fifth French Republic, ratified in October 1958, all Algerians were full French citizens, with (legally) the same political rights as their compatriots across the French Republic, whether Parisians, Breton peasants, or Europeans in Algeria. While trying to counter international support of Algerian nationalism, French officials constantly pointed to this fact, highlighting not just Algerian electoral participation, but all the other social and economic reforms that aimed to make life in Algeria better, more modern. Indeed, about 10 percent of all French deputies and senators serving in 1962 were, to use the official terminology, Muslim French citizens from Algeria.

When French officials announced the Evian Accords, they repeatedly affirmed that, as with repatriate status, most of the guarantees they had negotiated for Europeans would remain available to all French citizens from Algeria, including the "Muslims." Already in February, officers had received instructions to let their Muslim troops know that "their legitimate interests as soldiers and citizens will be guaranteed." If they wished, they could remain French citizens, stay in or join the French Army, even repatriate to France. More emphatic instructions, however, laid out the generous bonuses they would receive if they demobilized; explained the protections that the FLN and

French government would provide and the opportunities they would have in the new Algerian military and police forces.

Many *harkis* believed government promises. Most *pieds noirs* did not. Starting on April 21, 1962—the day after soldiers captured the head of the OAS, Raoul Salan, thus deflating *pieds noirs* fantasies that the OAS's violent methods would triumph—waves of departures began, heading from Algeria to mainland France. No one in France had predicted the exodus of almost all the *pieds noirs*, although some had thought large numbers would leave. The subtitle of a magazine article in the summer of 1962, "From Predictions (400,000 Repatriates in Four Years in 90 Departments [across France]) to Reality (400,000 repatriates in Four Weeks in Four Departments [around Marseilles])," gives a sense of the distance between the most prescient estimates and what happened. Unprepared, the government quickly cobbled together a plan that provided some support for every *piéd noir* who sought refuge in mainland France. They did so against the headwinds of French opinion, which had come to see the *pieds noirs* as only dubiously French, even un-French (as de Gaulle himself opined in private). Indeed, many French people, quite conveniently, came to see the *pieds noirs* and the violent OAS, which murdered some two thousand people, as wholly responsible for the war's horrors (rather than the French themselves, their leaders, and their army). In the end, several hundred *piéd noir* civilians died during the French retreat from Algeria, some at the hands of French troops, others killed by Algerian neighbors or by armed bands, FLN or not. Most went through difficult departures and uncomfortable arrivals in the metropole. Many became—and some remain—quite bitter about the hostility they encountered from other French people. The experience of the *harkis* was incomparably worse.

IN LATE MAY, a journalist reported witnessing a horrifying scene: two jeeps wheeled up to a ship docked in Oran, full of civilians fleeing to mainland France. Officers jumped from the jeeps and led those huddled in back, a group of *harkis*, onto the docks and

up the gangway, as the klaxon announcing imminent departure rang out. Rather than let them board, however, sailors separated them from their Army guardians and sent the Algerian men back to the dock. As the ship pulled away, the journalist described, another jeep pulled up; a group of “Arabs” jumped out; the *harkis* were killed, their throats slit as the ship’s passengers looked on. Days earlier, in fact, a Top Secret note of 23 May from de Gaulle’s office had ordered officials in Algeria to “cease all initiatives linked to the repatriation of *harkis*.” In mainland France, meanwhile, prefects received instructions to report all “irregular arrivals of Muslims in their department.” Several days later, an officer directed that “Muslims” who were “too old, physically handicapped, or too young” as well as “single women” should not be transported. Such people, he explained, “are destined effectively either to live off public charity or, with the young women, to turn to prostitution; all will become dead-weights.”

UNTIL THE exodus began, French politicians and officers endlessly repeated that “Muslims” would have the same rights as “Europeans.” When “Muslims” tried to exercise these rights, however, French attitudes changed. While French authorities simply stopped talking about “French Muslims” in their public declarations, among themselves they stopped referring to their legal status as French citizens, “repatriates,” and began to refer to them as “refugees”—people who might be aided out of French charity. Popular opinion encouraged such an approach. An editorial entitled “Return of the *Harkis*,” in the left-leaning weekly *France-Observateur*, highlighted the dangerous role they might play in “reconstituting the OAS in certain regions” in France. The article detailed the numerous ways the government could restrict and monitor *harkis*’ arrivals and “reported” on numerous clandestine landings of *harkis*, supposedly “controlled by the OAS.” On the same page, another editorial described “those [Europeans] who are leaving Algeria” as acting “despite the OAS” and “in fear of the OAS.” When it came to the *harkis*, however, *France-Observateur* cautioned, “As normal as it is that France should

shelter and protect the lives of the French Army’s Muslim soldiers who consider themselves menaced by the FLN, it would be dangerous to allow the return to the metropole of veritable Muslim commandos of the OAS.” No Muslims, it is worth noting, participated in subsequent OAS attacks in France; a number of *pieds noirs* did.

In the end, according to official estimates, between 25,000 and 27,000 *harkis* arrived in France by June 1963; in an official census from 1968, 138,000 were living in France. (Many were confined to camps, parked in rural corners of France, where they had been consigned upon arrival; some families remained in these camps into the 1990s.) The numbers of those who were killed in Algeria remains unclear, with estimates ranging from 10,000 to 100,000. What is clear is that many (probably tens of) thousands died, many more were tortured, and that, while this retribution was occurring, French officials in decision-making positions did little to intervene.

This happened in large part because neither military nor civilian officials expected it; nor did they give much credence to reports from French officers on the ground. The reasons were double: a widespread suspicion that such officers were trying to undermine the peace process and an unwillingness to grapple with the fact that neither the Provisional Authority, which the Evian Accords had established, nor the FLN and its allied organizations had much control over what was happening. Government responsibility here is substantial: under direct instructions from de Gaulle, who rejected his advisers’ suggestions to the contrary, French officials impeded every FLN effort to assert authority within Algeria. De Gaulle insisted that no action, however symbolic, that might suggest that the FLN had any measure of sovereignty within Algeria was permissible—until a French-run referendum, held on July 1, could legitimate French claims that they had decided to leave Algeria, rather than been forced out. Nationalist leaders were thus in no position to stop the so-called “Martians.” In French, of course, the word *mars* means both the month of March and the planet Mars: “Martians” were those who, in March 1962, loudly and often brutally proclaimed their un-

dying (if previously invisible) attachment to the nationalist cause. Scenes reminiscent of some that took place at the liberation of France, killing “collaborators”—the often defenseless *harkis*—or attacking their families, seemed a compelling way to demonstrate such a commitment. For some men whose service to France had lasted a bit too long striking out at those whose French connections had lasted even longer proved particularly tempting. Ever since, Algerian leaders have called opponents *harkis*, members of the “French camp,” in order to reject challenges to their incompetence or their authority.

EVEN BEFORE the post-independence civil war, then, the assumptions guiding the French pullout from Algeria created conditions that invited violence (against the *harkis*) and chaos (the mass exodus), although the evi-

dence is clear that no one on the French side and almost no one among the nationalists planned for or wanted either to occur. French eagerness to get out, which was quite intense among average French people as well as among those on the left who had long called for Algerian independence, gave the French government *carte blanche*. Where de Gaulle’s ministers focused most of their attention, of course, was not on Algeria, or on people from Algeria, but on French politics. That history is beyond the scope of this article. ●

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Frances FitzGerald: Vietnam

IN THE WAKE of the Tet offensive, on March 31, 1968, President Lyndon Johnson announced a partial halt to the bombing of North Vietnam, initiated peace talks with Hanoi, and declared he would not run for a second term. In that election year, Richard Nixon called for “peace with honor” and defeated Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who could not attack Johnson for waging what had become a hugely unpopular war. Many Americans assumed that peace would come in short order. But, though the peace talks had begun, fighting in Vietnam continued for another seven years. In those years, Nixon gradually withdrew American troops from Vietnam but expanded the war to Cambodia and Laos, and with extensive bombing campaigns wreaked more destruction on the Indochinese than had been visited upon them in all the preceding years of war. More than twenty thousand American troops died, and upheavals in the United States tore the country apart, creating divisions that remain with us today.

The reason for this was simple: Nixon, as he said, had no intention of becoming “the first president of the United States to lose a war.” To him, that meant that he had to sustain the anticommunist government in Saigon at least through his own term in office. On the other hand, the Vietnamese communists, north and south, who had fought a nationalist and a revolutionary struggle against the Japanese, the French, and the Americans since the Second World War, would not abandon their cause.

During the 1968 campaign, Nixon ruled out a U.S. “military victory.” The only strategy the military planners had figured out was the attrition of enemy forces, and the Tet offensive had convinced the American public that attrition wasn’t working and that the only prospect was for more American casualties with no end in sight. A withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam had thus become a political necessity.

But how to withdraw and maintain the Saigon government? Created by the United States after the French withdrew in 1954, that government, the Republic of Vietnam, never

gained political legitimacy. Since the fall of Ngo Dinh Diem to a military junta in 1963, it had been merely an administration and an army held together by American aid, with no politics except anticommunism. Johnson had sent U.S. troops to Vietnam in 1965 because it was disintegrating under political and military pressure from the southern revolutionaries, the National Liberation Front. Later, regular North Vietnamese troops had joined the battle. However, the three years of the American war had taken a toll on the NLF’s guerrilla forces and driven much of the rural population that supported them into the garrisoned cities and towns. In the Tet offensive, the NLF suffered crippling casualties; the North Vietnamese army was less affected, but it could not undertake a major new offensive soon. Nixon determined to press the military advantage while slowly withdrawing the American troops.

Under the rubric of “Vietnamization,” Nixon launched a program of military aid to Saigon that permitted the junta, led by General Nguyen Van Thieu, to draft a million men into its military forces and to acquire the fourth-largest air force in the world. In addition, he initiated the Phoenix program in an effort to eliminate the NLF’s civilian political cadre through enlarging and centralizing the government’s secret police forces. Then, in 1969–1970, the American forces went on the offensive; they conducted major sweep-and-destroy operations in central Vietnam, entered the densely populated Mekong Delta for the first time, pursued local NLF units, and bombed the villages with B-52s. In support of these operations, Nixon authorized a secret bombing campaign against NLF and North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia. The raids, which went on for fourteen months, encouraged the Cambodian prime minister, Lon Nol, to overthrow Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the monarch who had long tried to keep Cambodia out of the war. On April 30, 1970, Nixon announced he had ordered U.S. and ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) troops into Cambodia to find and destroy the enemy’s cen-

tral command base. The base, as it turned out, had been evacuated weeks before, but the U.S. campaign succeeded in disrupting North Vietnamese supply lines.

By 1971, these military operations and the Vietnamization program had achieved one important U.S. objective: they had destroyed the NLF as an effective military force and given the Saigon government control of most of the population. But the cost was extremely high. U.S. combat units took devastating casualties, and morale among the GIs collapsed: drug use became common, racial tensions erupted, individual units refused combat, and officers were murdered by their troops. At home, the antiwar movement grew, and huge demonstrations erupted in cities and on campuses across the country. Not all of them were peaceful, and, sensing a reaction, Nixon and Vice President Spiro Agnew, called upon “the silent majority” for support against the media and academic “elite” that they blamed for the demonstrations. Passions flared on both sides. After the invasion of Cambodia, over a third of U.S. colleges and universities shut down, and an Ohio National Guard unit, ordered onto the campus of Kent State University, fired on a group of protesting students, killing four of them. Cambodia fell into anarchy, from which the murderous Khmer Rouge emerged.

For Nixon, there remained the problem of the North Vietnamese Army. Foreseeing a major offensive in 1972, U.S. commanders in Saigon determined to thwart it by cutting the Ho Chi Minh trail, a network of roads and paths through the mountains of the Laotian panhandle that the North Vietnamese used as their logistical corridor to the south. A congressional amendment passed after the Cambodian incursion barred American forces from entering Cambodia and Laos, but the ARVN were not so constrained, and on February 8, 1971, some thirty thousand ARVN troops attacked across the border with American air support. The operation was foolishly conceived (the Ho Chi Minh trail could be “cut” only for as long as the ARVN remained as a blocking force) and badly executed. The ARVN units, finding themselves attacked by North Vietnamese artillery and ground troops, began a retreat that soon turned into a disastrous rout—calling the

whole Vietnamization program into question.

NIXON HAD ALWAYS understood that U.S. gains against the NLF were only tactical and temporary. His hope was that he could convince Hanoi to back down by threatening to bomb North Vietnam into extinction—and the bombing of Cambodia was meant to signal his resolve. He also hoped to persuade the major communist powers to bring the North Vietnamese to heel.

Since 1965, the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China had furnished Hanoi with significant quantities of military aid and with rice to feed its population. Disputes between the two powers had complicated these aid programs. Nixon judged that at some point both countries would develop priorities more important to them than the support of the Vietnamese revolution. To the Soviets, he held out the promise of a strategic nuclear arms agreement and to the Chinese the promise of a rapprochement with the United States. These initiatives had their own rewards—and they produced the astonishing spectacle of Richard Nixon and Mao Zedong smiling for the television cameras in Beijing—but they did not persuade either power to abandon Hanoi.

In March 1972, the North Vietnamese launched a major three-pronged offensive, using tanks and heavy artillery for the first time in the war. In all three sectors, the ARVN, though similarly equipped, fled before them. The North Vietnamese advanced so rapidly they outstripped their planning; they hesitated, and B-52 raids pulverized their positions. Their advance was stopped, they took huge casualties, but their offensive permitted the southern revolutionaries to establish new bases and to lay the groundwork for a renewed political struggle. An intense U.S. bombing campaign against the North failed to halt their support for that struggle.

By June 1972, there were only 47,000 American troops left in Vietnam, and the time had come for a peace agreement. In secret talks with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in Paris over the years, the North Vietnamese negotiator, Le Duc Tho, had consistently called for a complete withdrawal of American troops in exchange for a ceasefire and the return of pris-

oners of war. He had rejected Kissinger's proposal for a "mutual withdrawal," that is, a simultaneous withdrawal of North Vietnamese from the South, and he had insisted on a condition that Nixon found unacceptable: the replacement of the current Saigon regime with a coalition government. But with the new balance of forces in South Vietnam, both sides saw the outlines of an agreement. In a speech on May 8, Nixon promised to pull out all American troops following a ceasefire and the release of prisoners of war; afterward, he said, an internal political settlement could be worked out "by the Vietnamese themselves." Conspicuously, he made no mention of a "mutual withdrawal," thereby removing a major obstacle for the North Vietnamese. After further talks between Kissinger and Tho in Paris, the North Vietnamese, on October 8, issued a nine-point draft agreement that removed a major obstacle for the United States. The draft did not insist that Thieu step down in advance of an armistice; rather, it proposed that the Republic of Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government (the governmental structure of the NLF) be recognized as "administrative entities" and that they should appoint a council of national reconciliation that would hold democratic elections for a new government. Reunification would take place at an indefinite date in the future through "peaceful means." Meanwhile, military assistance to both sides would be limited to replacements.

Kissinger was elated. With minor modifications, he accepted the draft and made plans to fly to Hanoi in late October to initial the agreement. The formal signing was to take place the following week, just before the U.S. presidential election. In Saigon, however, he found Nguyen Van Thieu adamantly opposed. This was hardly surprising, as Thieu's position had always included "Four Nos": no recognition of the enemy in the South, no neutralization of the South, no coalition government, and no surrender of territory. Kissinger promised Thieu that if the other side violated the agreement, U.S. retaliation would be swift and severe, and went so far as to threaten him with a cutoff of U.S. aid, but Thieu would not budge. Nixon was furious, but, deciding that he couldn't afford to scuttle the Saigon regime or

to sign a separate peace, he backed down. Ductifully, Kissinger cabled Hanoi and once again raised the issue of North Vietnamese troops in the South. Hanoi responded by publishing the text of the agreement and a history of the secret talks.

IN A PRESS conference on October 26, Kissinger acknowledged that the text was essentially correct and said that while certain technical issues remained, the problems were not very great. Peace, he declared, was "at hand." It was not. Returning to Paris on November 19, Kissinger demanded that Tho reopen a number of the major issues and threatened "savage" bombing of the North if he wouldn't. Tho refused and returned to Hanoi. On December 17, Nixon authorized a renewed bombing of the North, and for eleven days B-52s and other American aircraft flew three thousand sorties, mainly over the heavily populated corridor between Hanoi and Haiphong, attacking power plants, shipyards, and other installations that had been off the target list until then. The "Christmas bombing" was the most concentrated air offensive of the war; some thirty American planes were lost, and the public reaction was negative. On January 8, Kissinger and Tho resumed their meetings, and on January 27 the Paris Peace Agreement was signed. Nixon and Kissinger claimed that Hanoi had been bombed back to the negotiating table, but the text of the agreement was essentially the same as the draft Hanoi had published in October. This time, however, Nixon told Thieu he would sign the agreement without him, and Thieu, reassured that Nixon would bomb the North again if necessary, cooperated.

Once American troops had been withdrawn and prisoners of war exchanged, Thieu launched operations against the zones of enemy control in the Delta and along the Cambodian border. The PRG kept calling for a ceasefire and a political settlement as specified in the agreement. Thieu, however, could not have survived in a political struggle, and the war continued, as Nixon and Kissinger assumed it would. The U.S. Congress rebelled against Nixon's promise to re-intervene if the communists violated the truce and passed bills

blocking funds for any U.S. military activities in Indochina. But U.S. military aid to Thieu continued as before.

At the end of 1973, the Thieu government held a strong military position. With a million men under arms, its army controlled most of the country and most of the population. Its difficulties were internal. The American troop presence had pumped billions of dollars into the civilian economy, and U.S. troops had, directly and indirectly, employed hundreds of thousands of people. With the Americans gone, unemployment soared and inflation rates climbed so high that ordinary soldiers could not afford to buy rice for their families. Corruption had always been pervasive, but in the declining economy it gave rise to protests against Thieu and his circle of generals, who were seen as the major war profiteers. ARVN morale plummeted. Two hundred thousand soldiers deserted in 1974. Faced with this crisis, all the American embassy and the White House could think of was to pressure the Congress for more aid to Thieu.

In later years, Kissinger maintained that the Watergate scandal spelled the end for the Saigon government. True, as the scandals were progressively revealed, Congress gradually reasserted its powers over foreign policy, and in August 1974, when Nixon resigned, rather than face impeachment, Congress reduced military aid to Saigon from the billion dollars that had been requested to \$700 million. But the decrease might have come anyway, given the unpopularity of the war. In any case, the argument raises the question of whether Nixon's aid program would have been enough to save the Thieu regime.

The North Vietnamese spent much of 1973 and 1974 building an all-weather highway network from the demilitarized zone to a base camp north of Saigon. Meanwhile, the leaders in Hanoi debated strategy and timing. In late 1974, it was decided that the commanders in the South could launch attacks in 1975, but should not expect a final victory until 1976 or 1977. A successful attack on a provincial capital in January accelerated the schedule. In early March, North Vietnamese regular divisions attacked across the demilitarized zone and through the central highlands, scattering

the ARVN troops as they went. Thieu called for a retreat and ordered the highland divisions back to defend Saigon, but their commander fled, and a rout ensued. In the northern sector, Hue fell almost without a fight, and Danang, full of panicked troops and civilians, fell five days later. Once again, the North Vietnamese forces could not keep up with the collapse of the ARVN, but this time they did not hesitate; they moved swiftly on Saigon. On April 29, their lead units entered the city, and the last American helicopter lifted off the roof of the American embassy.

THE WAR WAS over, but not the suffering. Since 1969, over a hundred thousand ARVN soldiers and half a million North Vietnamese and NLF troops had died in combat—along with uncounted numbers of civilians. The economy of the country was shattered, the southern cities filled with refugees and former soldiers. Distrustful of the southerners, even those who had worked for the revolution, the North Vietnamese appointed their own officials and moved swiftly to reorganize the society and economy on the model of the North, paying no heed to local conditions and customs. Hundreds of thousands of former government officials, military officers, and members of the intelligentsia were sent to re-education camps, while millions of the metropolitan jobless were sent to “new economic zones” in the border areas to reclaim poor land with rudimentary tools. A million South Vietnamese fled the country on whatever vessels they could find, and many of them spent years in refugee camps in neighboring countries.

As president, Nixon never promised to win the war. By 1969 there was no reason to believe that it could be won. Certainly, as the record shows, both he and Kissinger understood that without American troops and B-52s, a communist victory was at some point inevitable. Had they decided to end the war in 1969 or in any subsequent year, they could surely have prevailed upon the North Vietnamese to give them the “decent interval” between the withdrawal of American troops and a communist victory that Kissinger thought necessary to preserve American credibility in the world

and to uphold American honor. The North Vietnamese leaders might have seemed indifferent to the loss of lives and the destruction of their economy, but they were not. They desperately wanted American troops out of Vietnam. Under the threat of a renewed bombing of the North, they would have been willing to wait at least two years with a neutralist coalition government in the South. Such a solution would have been more than acceptable to the southern revolutionaries, who had been almost wiped out, and it would have given the non-communist South Vietnamese alternate possibilities. Those who wanted to leave the country could have done so in an orderly fashion. Those who stayed could have organized politically—Buddhist and Catholic parties might have emerged—and made an accommodation with the communists, as many had in 1964-1965. Reunification would have come eventually, but the South Vietnamese would have had a voice in determining the future of their country—and all this with far fewer casualties. ●

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