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February 19, 1965

President Lyndon B. Johnson
The White House
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

I was one of the group of members of the President's Club of New York who had the privilege of meeting you in your study at the White House last October.

I now write to express my sympathy with you in the Vietnam crisis you inherited and my grave and deepening concern at our actions there. We are, in my view, disregarding or perilously underestimating intangible factors. One of them is the willingness of the Chinese people to support the Chinese Government in any action it may take to drive us out of what they regard as their backyard.

During travels on foot and by sampan in South China under the regimes of Chiang Kai-shek and his predecessors I saw most of the Chinese peasants living on the verge between starvation and existence in conditions beyond the comprehension of the average American - the victims of corrupt, inefficient, national governments and the prey of ruthless landlords, rapacious generals and marauding soldiers and bandits.

During recent years I have read all the reports I could find by non-communist foreigners who had been in Communist China and I have spoken at length with long-standing Chinese friends who had just come out of

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China - all anti-communists and members of the former capitalist class. What I have learned has convinced me that the Chinese Communist Government, for all its faults, has for the first time in China's history given its people security of life and an honest central government. Regrettably that government is Communist and ruthlessly totalitarian. But it has earned a certain loyalty from its subjects and they will back it up.

As to the dangers our withdrawal may hold for Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, it seems to me that we place far too little reliance on the inherent nationalisms of these peoples and on the difficulties China would have in digesting them. The same applies even to Vietnam, where it seems to me we have merely succeeded in diminishing the traditional aversion to Chinese domination.

The Chinese are instinctively xenophobic - not without cause. They will never tolerate us in Vietnam; and for the first time they are becoming strong enough to make life there impossible for us.

As an admirer of yours, Mr. President, I strongly urge that you, with your unusual insight and diplomatic skill, promptly initiate negotiations to bring about our early withdrawal on the best obtainable terms.

Respectfully yours,

Original signed by
H. K. Hochschild