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Pres file

Wednesday, August 2, 1967
7:50 p.m.

Mr. President:

I hadn't realized that so much of
the world press had criticized
U Thant's last Viet Nam statement.
See pp. 1-4.

W. W. Rostow

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- ... U THANT'S VIEWS ON VIETNAM
- ... LESSONS OF THE U.S. RIOTS
- ... HAVANA "SOLIDARITY" MEETING
- ... MIDDLE EAST SITUATION

U THANT AND THE VIETNAM WAR

Editorials in West Europe and East Asia took strong exception to U Thant's weekend speech in North Carolina, especially his remark that the Vietnam conflict was "a war of national independence."

Moscow and East European media reported that Mr. Johnson had expressed disagreement with the Secretary General's statements about the war. They said the President indicated the U.S. would "continue the escalation."

As the Taylor-Clifford party headed for Seoul, Japanese and South Korean papers said the ROK would find it hard to refuse more troops for Vietnam.

"Why U Thant Is Wrong"

In London, the conservative Daily Mail asserted that U Thant's comments about the war in his Greensboro speech seemed "to typify the kind of boss-eyed comment of those who, in the words of the Irish judge, are determined to lean neither towards partiality on the one hand nor towards impartiality on the other..."

"The truth about the Vietnam war is that the leaders of North Vietnam, together with their southern column, the Viet Cong, seek to take over South Vietnam, whatever their 'explicit or implicit' objectives may be. And, on the other hand, the leaders of South Vietnam and of the U.S. do not seek to take over North Vietnam, explicitly or implicitly, or any other way: They do, however, wish to prevent the south from being taken over."

As for U Thant's statement that it was "a war of national independence," the paper declared that "one can only reply -- which Vietnamese?.... Have the South Vietnamese no right to 'national independence?'"

Under the heading "Why U Thant Is Wrong," a senior writer just back

from Vietnam said in the nationalist Daily Express of London that the West could not afford to lose in Vietnam, even though this meant supporting "an ugly and sour war."

"Britain's contribution so far is a pack of jungle-tracking dogs from Malaya and a good deal of largely unsolicited advice. The U.S., alas, is right in fighting for itself in South Vietnam, and in fighting for us too. And we, alas, are wrong in supporting that fight with words but not with arms."

Copenhagen's conservative Berlingske Tidende judged that U Thant's speech "bears the stamp of desperation.... His comparison of the Vietnam war with the American revolution... was, to put it mildly, an unfortunate simplification which is akin to distortion.... It must be bitter for a U.N. Secretary General to see a world plagued by the disagreements which the world organization should have rooted out."

The paper said that it was "particularly unfortunate that the denunciation of the Americans should be made at a time when Kosygin is attempting to bring forth a counter-gesture from Hanoi which might result in a realization of the U.S. offer to end the air war against North Vietnam."

Secretary General "Taking Sides"

Another Danish paper, conservative Jyllands-Posten of Aarhus, commented that "by taking sides so clearly" U Thant reduced the possibility of his acting as a mediator. It said that if he does not realize soon that the Secretary General must enjoy the confidence of both sides, the U.N. would have to "look for a new Secretary General who is willing to accept the natural limitations of the office."

In West Germany, pro-Christian Democratic Muenchner Merkur asserted that U Thant was "right" in stating that the national liberation front and Viet Cong were South Vietnamese organizations, but "even independent observers admit that the Viet Cong has little support among the people."

Furthermore, it said, North Vietnam supplies these organizations with weapons and "at least five regular North Vietnamese divisions are fighting in South Vietnam, with Hanoi generals conducting the operations."

Is this a war of national independence? What would U Thant say if five Bundeswehr divisions marched into the Soviet Zone?"

Tuesday's Paris and Tokyo papers carried reports of President Johnson's "rebuttal" of U Thant's views at his news conference. Earlier, Japanese papers had run summaries of the Greensboro speech, and Mainichi's New York correspondent reported that it was being taken to be an indication of the positions the Secretary General would take in the next General Assembly session in regard to Vietnam and U.N. membership for Communist China.

The Cloak of "Nationalism"

Kuala Lumpur's Straits Times asked whether "the Communist threat to Laos, Thailand and the rest of Southeast Asia" was "also nationalism trying to assert itself."

"There is not a non-Communist country in the area (including U Thant's Burma) which is not confronted by the barrel of the Communist gun."

The paper noted that "Communist leaders of twenty-seven Latin American countries were gathering at Havana to discuss and support the creation of several Vietnams in the new world. What are the governments of these states supposed to do? What advice has the U.N. Secretary General to give them?"

Saigon's Hoa Binh said that "by putting the Viet Cong under the cloak of nationalism, U Thant has turned into heroes a gang of aggressors, pirates, and murderers, and has served as their spokesman without pay in the world forum..."

Indian and African Comment

In India, Calcutta's influential Amrita Bazar Patrika said the Secretary General had once again told the "blunt truth" about the basic issues involved in the Vietnam war.

"If U Thant has now felt compelled to come out openly with his exposition of the obstructionist tactics of the U.S., it is presumably because of the frustration he

has suffered in the course of his peace initiatives, each of which was sabotaged by the uncompromising attitude of the U.S. State Department and the Pentagon."

Ghana's independent Kumasi Pioneer disagreed with the contention that the conflict was one of national independence rather than Communist aggression. It said the Viet Cong were "local elements of international Communism, being backed to force a Communist government" on South Vietnam.

Taylor-Clifford Mission

With the Taylor-Clifford party due today in Seoul, Joongang, Seoul Shinmun, and Hankuk Ilbo said it was "difficult to refuse the U.S." but the ROK couldn't spare troops for Vietnam "because of the current threat to national security" from North Korea.

Kyunghvang Shinmun asserted that in spite of Korean and U.S. statements that no troop request would be made, it was still certain that "the primary objective is to explore ways to have the ROK send more troops."

Tokyo's Nihon Keizai reported from Seoul that the ROK would be hard put to dispatch additional troops, "but if the envoy makes a strong request, Korea, partly for economic reasons, would be unable to refuse."

The paper's Saigon correspondent reported "reluctance of the Vietnam war allies to increase their share of troops." He cited Saigon sources as observing that "the prospect of a protracted war is giving the allies a sense of uneasiness."