

The Stake in Viet-Nam

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ADDRESS BY SECRETARY RUSK¹

There are many subjects which I would be tempted to discuss this evening. Many of these would be the basis for encouragement and confidence, for the free world abroad is getting on with its job. Others would cause concern and anxiety because they remain difficult and dangerous.

I could skip rather lightly over a number of subjects, but I would rather, if you will permit me, speak in my opening remarks, before your questions, on one particular subject, partly to illustrate the fact that each one of our serious problems has a history of its own and an anatomy of its own, is related to an important purpose, and involves the relationship between ends and means. But in this foreign policy business, there is no free-lunch counter. You select your policy, you pay the cashier, and if you will the end, without being prepared to furnish the means, you haven't got a policy. You simply have an illusion.

And therefore I should like to address myself to a seemingly remote sector of the great world-wide struggle between freedom and coercion, a sector often poorly understood if not sometimes deliberately misrepresented, but a sector of vital importance to the future health and security of the free world. And I refer to Viet-Nam.

Viet-Nam is a narrow strip along the South China Sea, nearly as large as California, with a population of some 30 million people—about 16 million in the North and 14 million in the South.

With Cambodia and Laos, Viet-Nam formed what was formerly known as French Indo-

china. During the Second World War, the Vichy regime yielded control of French Indochina to the Japanese. In the spring of 1945 the Japanese proclaimed the independence of Viet-Nam. And in August of that year they permitted the Communist-oriented Viet Minh to seize rule.

In the Indian subcontinent and in Burma and the Philippines, Western countries recognized at war's end that national demands for independence would have to be met promptly. But this was not the case with Indochina. Instead, we ourselves were somewhat at a loss for a policy with regard to that particular part of the world. So our people in charge of war plans in 1944 sent a colonel out there who sent a cable back to the Joint Chiefs of Staff saying, "Request policy guidance on American policy toward Indochina, because we are beginning to get military access to that country and we need direction."

Well, there ensued a vast silence which lasted for months. We sent staff officers back to try to find the answer. We sent cables out there, and after about 6 months the reply came and it said, "When asked by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for a statement of American policy toward Indochina, the President"—that was President Roosevelt—"replied, 'I don't want to hear any more about Indochina.'"

Well, now the result of no significant Allied policy at that point was that the French did return and take over where they left off at the time of the Japanese occupation, and they encountered therefore a militant resistance movement. For 8 years, with material help from the United States, they sought to pacify the country. At the same time they granted increasing autonomy to non-Communist Vietnamese. But the Viet Minh,

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with help from the Chinese Communists—help which was augmented after the cease-fire in Korea—managed to maintain and strengthen their military capabilities.

It is worth remembering that we, Britain, France, and others had agreed since 1945 that the security of Southeast Asia crucially depended upon the security of the Red River Valley of North Viet-Nam. The inability of the leading Western Powers to concert a course of action to prevent the loss of that valley in 1953 and 1954 cast a long shadow across the future. The fall of Dien Bien Phu in the spring of 1954 led to the Geneva Agreements ending hostilities and to the end of French rule in Indochina. Viet-Nam was partitioned at the 17th parallel, with a Communist regime entrenched in the North.

Neither South Viet-Nam nor the United States signed the Geneva Agreements of 1954. However, we made it clear that, while we would not use force to disturb the agreements, we would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of those agreements as a serious threat to international peace and security. As a further deterrent, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization was formed. And by protocol, its protective umbrella was extended over the newly independent states of Laos, Cambodia, and South Viet-Nam.

In South Viet-Nam much of the countryside was controlled by armed Communist cells or by armed religious sects. Thousands of peasants had sold their stock and moved into the cities. Vast areas of rice land in the Mekong Delta were untended. South Viet-Nam was not producing enough food to feed its own people. Rubber production had declined drastically. Railway bridges had been dynamited and railway tracks torn up by the retreating Viet Minh.

The capital city of Saigon was largely under the control of a secret society of pirates and gangsters who ran the opium dens, gambling houses, red-light districts and exacted protection money from legitimate merchants.

Nominally, the leader of South Viet-Nam was the Emperor Bao Dai, absent much of the time from his country. The Prime Minister was a Vietnamese nationalist, Ngo Dinh Diem. He was not well known at the time to most of his own countrymen, at least compared with a name

like Ho Chi Minh. He had to build a government and create a national administration out of almost nothing. And he was surrounded by enemies. The Communists hated him. So did many of the local French, who had not yet become reconciled to a genuinely independent Republic of Viet-Nam. So did some of the South Vietnamese politicians. Rejecting both Communists and collaborators with the former colonial regime, his political base was narrow and able assistants were not easy to find.

Very few observers either in the West or in Asia gave either Prime Minister Diem or the Republic of South Viet-Nam much chance of survival. Many expected the Communists to take over within a few months.

Into this chaos poured nearly 1 million refugees from North Viet-Nam. Many were diseased, many suffering from starvation; some bore scars from Communist torture. They brought nothing but the clothes—or the rags—on their backs and the will to work and to live in freedom. These were the intrepid people of whom Dr. Tom Dooley wrote so movingly in *Deliver Us From Evil*—who led him to devote the rest of his all too short life to helping the peoples of Viet-Nam and Laos.

In that book Dr. Dooley said of the people of Viet-Nam: "Americans never fail to like the Vietnamese when they get to know them. It is impossible not to respect their driving compulsion for freedom. . . ."

Despite the long odds against success, President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles wisely resolved to assist South Viet-Nam. The United States provided economic assistance, a military training mission, and weapons.

History of the Republic of Viet-Nam

What happened in South Viet-Nam during the next 5 years deserves to be listed near the top of the success stories of the postwar period. By plebiscite, the Emperor Bao Dai was replaced by a Republic, with Ngo Dinh Diem as President, with an elected National Assembly and a written Constitution. The independent armies of the religious sects were dissolved. The nearly 1 million refugees from the North were resettled and resumed earning their own living. A land-reform program, patterned on the land

reforms in Japan and on Taiwan, was pressed forward—123,000 heads of families became small landowners. A comprehensive system of agricultural credit was set up. Thousands of Vietnamese were moved into the highlands to raise industrial crops. Rubber production rose, and new plantings of better varieties promised still higher production for the future. Sugar production doubled in 1958. South Viet-Nam was soon producing enough rice to resume exports on a rising scale. Various small industries were established. Textile production rose from near zero to near self-sufficiency. Electric power nearly doubled. Per capita national income rose by 20 percent.

Thousands of new schools were built. Between 1956 and 1960, enrollment in the elementary schools rose from 400,000 to 1,500,000. The expansion of health facilities included new hospitals and 3,500 village health stations. Rail transportation was restored. Roads were repaired and improved, and three new major highways were built.

The Communists were not completely eliminated—especially along the land and sea frontiers, where they could be supplied—but most of South Viet-Nam became, for a period, safe for travel.

Although North Viet-Nam inherited most of the industry of Viet-Nam, and although its population is larger, it fell rapidly behind South Viet-Nam in food production, the number of children in school, and in standards of living. While per capita food production rose 20 percent in the South, it fell 10 percent in the North.

This was competition which the Communists apparently could not endure. Very likely it was one of the reasons why they decided in 1959 to renew their assault on South Viet-Nam. And in 1960 the Lao Dong Party—that is, the Communist Party—ordered the “liberation” of South Viet-Nam.

According to Communist propaganda, the war in South Viet-Nam is a civil war, a local uprising. The truth is that it is an aggression organized, directed, and partly supplied from North Viet-Nam. It is conducted by hardened Communist political organizers and guerrilla leaders trained in North Viet-Nam, who, upon their arrival in the South, recruit local assistance. This has been done in a variety of ways,

including terror and assassination. School-teachers, health workers, malaria eradication teams, local officials loyal to the Republic—these were the first targets of the assassins. But many ordinary villagers who refused to cooperate with the Communist guerrillas likewise have been ruthlessly killed.

Strategic Importance of South Viet-Nam

This assault on South Viet-Nam was a major Communist enterprise, carefully and elaborately prepared, heavily staffed, and relentlessly pursued. It made headway. In 1961 President Diem appealed for further assistance and President Kennedy responded promptly and affirmatively.

The strategic importance of South Viet-Nam is plain. It controls the mouth of the Mekong River, the main artery of Southeast Asia. The loss of South Viet-Nam would put the remaining states of Southeast Asia in mortal danger.

But there are larger reasons why the defense of South Viet-Nam is vital to us and to the whole free world. We cannot be indifferent to the fate of 14 million people who have fought hard against communism—including nearly 1 million who fled their former homes to avoid living under Communist tyranny. Since we went to the aid of Greece and Turkey 16 years ago, it has been the attitude of the United States to assist peoples who resist Communist aggression. We have seen this form of attack fail in Burma, Malaya, and the Philippines. The South Vietnamese are determined to win their battle, and they deserve our help.

Critics have complained that South Viet-Nam is not a full constitutional democracy and that our aid has been subject to waste and mismanagement. Let us be clear that these criticisms are not merely alibis for inaction. For in passing judgment, let us recall that we are talking about a nation which has been responsible for its own affairs for less than a decade, about a people who have had no peace since 1941 and little experience in direct participation in political affairs. Their four national elections, their thousands of elected hamlet councils, and their forthcoming village council elections show steady movement toward a constitutional system resting upon popular consent.

But let us also recall that Viet-Nam is fighting a war—a mean, frustrating, and nerve-racking struggle—and fighting it with courage and determination. The overriding unfinished business is to achieve public safety in order that the country can resume its march toward peace and prosperity. This in itself requires the utmost effort in good administration, in the effective use of available resources, as well as dedicated leadership of an aroused people. I do not defend mistakes or failures which can be put right; but I do wish to enlist your understanding for an effort which includes perseverance and gallantry and sacrifice. And I have no doubt about the ability of South Viet-Nam to take an honored place among modern nations as it rids itself of the enemies gnawing at its vitals.

Development of Winning Tactics

Our role in South Viet-Nam is a limited and supporting role. We provide technical, logistical, training, and advisory assistance. We have no combat units as such in South Viet-Nam, although many of our military personnel—and some civilians—come under fire in combat situations and we have suffered some casualties. The some 12,000 men we have there are among our finest; their skill and courage and dedication make debtors of us all.

I would point out that we are not alone in assisting the Republic of Viet-Nam. Ten other nations are helping in one way or another in this struggle. We hope that they will do more and that many other non-Communists will contribute. For the whole free world has a vital interest in the defeat of this Communist aggression against South Viet-Nam.

Understandably there are occasional differences of view between the Government in Saigon or Vietnamese officers in the field and their American advisers. But they and we are all committed to success for the Republic of Viet-Nam. It is the Vietnamese who are waging the war. Some 4,000 Vietnamese soldiers were killed and some 6,000 wounded in action during the past year. And they exacted nearly 30,000 casualties in return.

Colonel Serong, the Commander of the Australian advisers in Viet-Nam, has said: "The

typical Vietnamese soldier is as good as you will find. He is brave and he is tough."

We believe that the Vietnamese, with our help, have developed winning tactics.

With the assistance of helicopters, airplanes, and radios the Government forces are able to maintain the initiative and, increasingly, to achieve the advantage of surprise.

The "strategic hamlet" program is producing excellent results. A strategic hamlet is a hamlet with a defensive perimeter and a trained and armed militia. Usually it also has a radio with which to call for help if it is under attack.

As the Communist attack is political and economic as well as military, so is the response. The Government of Viet-Nam—and we—attach the greatest importance to the civic action side of the strategic hamlet program. The hamlets are governed by councils elected by secret ballot. In addition—and not least important—the Government is supplying the hamlets with schools, medical aid, cheap fertilizer from Government-supported cooperatives, low-interest agricultural loans, and other agricultural extension services.

Already approximately 7 million Vietnamese live in well over 5,000 strategic hamlets. The program calls for the completion of another 3,000 by the end of this year. Morale in the countryside has begun to rise. An estimated half a million people formerly under Viet Cong control now have increasingly effective Government protection.

The strategic hamlet system provides strength against the Communists in the countryside. The Communists are no longer, in Mao's figure of speech, fish swimming in a sea of peasants. Every bush is no longer their ally. They are getting hungrier. To the Vietnamese peasant they look less and less like winners.

The villagers are fighting when attacked and are volunteering all-important information on their own initiative to the Government forces.

Thousands of the *montagnards*—the hardy mountain tribesmen—have been armed and trained to fight.

Rice production is up, and rice exports have been resumed. Defections from the Viet Cong have risen—though these are mostly locally recruited auxiliaries, not the hardened Commu-

nist cadres. The Viet Cong is losing more weapons than are the Government forces. Viet Cong attacks are running at less than half the rate of January 1962. Several Viet Cong strongholds have been penetrated and supplies and installations destroyed. The Viet Cong has been unable to carry out its plan to escalate to larger military units and to more conventional warfare.

The Communists have a lot at stake in this struggle and will not quit easily. But the men and women who were deceived, exploited, or enrolled by force by the Communists now have a chance to rally to the side of the national government. Last week, on the first anniversary of the initiation of the strategic hamlet program, President Diem proclaimed "Campaign Open Arms." This is an offer of clemency and assistance and jobs to all who desert the Communists. And even those who have trespassed against the law and have already been condemned, or who are subject to court trial, may redeem themselves by "meritorious patriotic acts."

We applaud this statesmanlike offer. It is similar to the one the late great Ramon Mag-saysay used with such good effect in breaking the power of Huks in the Philippines a decade ago.

Laos and the Geneva Accords

Communist aggression against South Viet-Nam is, of course, intimately related to the refusal of the Communists to give full support to the Geneva Accords on Laos. Although it was not my intention to speak of Laos this evening—and anything I might say about that country might be disproved by the tickers which you will read on the way out of the hall—the most recent events in that unhappy landlocked country call for brief comment. The Pathet Lao, with strong backing from Hanoi and other Communist countries, have refused to give Prince Souvanna Phouma and his coalition the support and cooperation which were pledged at Geneva. The international machinery established by those accords has not been allowed to function with full effect. The writ of the Central Government has not run in Pathet Lao controlled areas. Viet Minh mili-

tary personnel have not, we believe, been fully withdrawn.

We are making every effort to ascertain whether all signatories of the Geneva Accords are prepared to support those agreements or whether some are moving to destroy them. If those agreements collapse, most serious and dangerous issues will arise and once again we shall have to determine what steps can be taken to insure that the Laotian people are left alone in peace and not overrun and exploited by those who would commit aggression.

Returning to Viet-Nam: We cannot promise, or expect, a quick victory there. The enemy is elusive and determined, and relatively small numbers can disrupt the normal processes of a going society. It took 8 years to wipe out the Communist terrorists in Malaya—and they were far from a major Communist base.

But there is a good basis for encouragement. The Vietnamese are on their way to success and need our help; not just our material help—they need that—but our sympathetic understanding and comradeship. I can understand the discontent which surrounds any important task still unfinished. I cannot understand anyone who would quit, withhold our resources, abandon a brave people to those who are out to bury us and every other free and independent nation. That we cannot and will not do.

Because this is a battle to the end between freedom and coercion. There are many signs that the other side is involved with difficulties and disappointments. This is no time for us to relax our effort. There are many ways to quit: by refusing us the defense budgets we need; by refusing us the foreign aid resources we need; by refusing to pursue energetically our own great private enterprises abroad; by withdrawing our full support from the United Nations and from our several alliances. There are many ways to quit.

But this is no time to quit, because it is being demonstrated right around the world that this great international community of independent states has seized the commitment of peoples in the most unsuspecting places and that those who have become independent are stubbornly resolved to remain so. And as we work with them toward that kind of a decent world community, of independent states cooperating

across national frontiers, we shall find allies right around the world; in moments of great crisis there are not nearly so many neutralists as you might have supposed.

Thank you very much.

QUESTION-AND-ANSWER PERIOD

General Kenneth Royall: Mr. Secretary, no comment is really needed. The response of this audience and their enthusiasm, their intense interest while you talked, would be enough. But I cannot help feeling that this statement you made today is an important one, not only as to the countries you referred to but it's a call to the courage and stability which has rarely been equaled in these recent years. And we all thank you again for your presentation.

We now come to the question period, for which we have about 28 minutes. Questions will be asked alternatively by Mr. Armand Erpf, partner of Loeb, Rhoades and Company, who will question Mr. Hayes,² and from Mr. J. Wilson Newman, chairman of Dun and Bradstreet, who will question Mr. Rusk. Mr. Erpf, will you first proceed and be followed by Mr. Newman?

[Question by Mr. Erpf and answer by Mr. Hayes.]

Mr. Newman: Mr. Secretary, first is a preliminary inquiry to my main question. In these troubled times, when all of us have become very mindful of the importance of the public interest, and being aware of the seriousness of the talk which you have just delivered, I would like to know first, sir, if I should raise a few selective questions, is there any risk that I may say something prejudicial to national security?

Secretary Rusk: There is nothing embarrassing about questions. The answers might be embarrassing. [Laughter.] But you leave that to me. You go right ahead.

Mr. Newman: Well, now, Mr. Secretary, in view of the fact that you have devoted practically all of your remarks to Viet-Nam and Laos, does this mean that these subjects rank highest in importance facing this nation? Or

does it mean that such matters as Cuba, Berlin, and South America are further down the line, or you would rather not talk about it?

Secretary Rusk: No, not at all. I indicated earlier that I do not wish to inhibit the questions in any way. I elected to use my 20 minutes to talk about a particular subject because I think that it's too easy to skip right across an entire range, and I wanted to dig into at least one of them and one that is far away and not very well understood in this country, in order to get into some of the anatomy of the problem. But I would welcome questions on any of these subjects you would want to get into. You shoot the questions.

Mr. Newman: Well, obviously I thought I would have a few minutes to think it up, sir. [Laughter.] But, to begin with, I wonder if you would state, sir, your understanding of the Monroe Doctrine and what the policy of the United States is just now with respect to it.

Secretary Rusk: Well, I think all of us know the tradition behind the Monroe Doctrine. We are more interested in half of it these days than we are in the other half, because we are deeply involved in European and other affairs which were eschewed by the Monroe Doctrine. But what is even more important today is the treaty structure of the hemisphere, the security arrangements of the hemisphere and such things as the Rio Pact.

Now, as a matter of policy, as a matter of policy objective, the hemisphere has unanimously agreed that a Marxist-Leninist regime in Cuba is incompatible with the institutions of the Western Hemisphere and that the aim must be to welcome a free Cuban people back into this hemisphere.

Now, as I pointed out just a few days ago in another place,³ the actions that are now being taken fall into three main categories. The first has to do with the commitment of the Armed Forces of the United States and other armed forces of this hemisphere to accomplish certain purposes: one, to insure that there not be introduced back into Cuba offensive weapons which will threaten the security of this hemi-

² Alfred Hayes, President of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, spoke before Secretary Rusk on "Strengthening the U.S. Balance of Payments."

³ For text of remarks made by Secretary Rusk before the American Society of Newspaper Editors at Washington, D.C., on Apr. 18, see BULLETIN of May 6, 1963, p. 679.