



## **HOW U THANT VIEWS THE VIETNAM WAR**

One man in the world probably knows better than anyone else what the issues are in the Vietnam war, and how it can be ended. He is U Thant, a Burmese national, and Secretary-General of the United Nations. These quotations are gathered from his recent press conferences and public statements, and correspondence with U.S. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg.

## **Threat of Wider War**

The world has been watching the inexorable escalation of the war in Vietnam with increasing anxiety. Little by little, larger forces and more powerful armaments have been introduced, until an anguished and perplexed world has suddenly found that a limited and local conflict is threatening to turn into a major confrontation.

## **Issue at Stake - Survival**

What is really at stake in Vietnam, unless an early end to the hostilities is brought about, is the independence, the identity and the survival of the country itself . . . (My preoccupation with the question of Vietnam) is influenced . . . by my deep sympathy, and indeed anguish, over the untold suffering of the people of Vietnam who have known no peace for a generation, the tragic loss of lives on all sides, the increasing number of civilian casualties, the appalling destruction of property and the vast and mounting sums being spent on the prosecution of the war. . . . [The Secretary General called the war "one of the most barbarous" in history.]

The present plight [of the Vietnamese people] should be the first, and not the last, consideration of all concerned. . . . I see nothing but danger in the idea, so assiduously fostered outside Vietnam, that the conflict is a kind of holy war between two powerful political ideologies. The survival of the people of Vietnam must be seen as the real issue. . . .

The increasing intervention by outside powers in the conflict . . . has tended to alienate the people of Vietnam from their own destiny.

## **Justification for War**

As the war worsens, its justification in terms of a confrontation of ideologies is becoming more and more misleading. For democratic principles, which both sides consider to be at stake in Vietnam, are already falling a victim to the war itself.

In Vietnam there is growing evidence that the so-called "fight for democracy" is no longer relevant to the realities of the situation. Twenty years of outside intervention and the presence of a succession of foreign armies have so profoundly affected Vietnamese political life that it seems illusory to represent it as a mere contest between Communism and liberal democracy. . . .

## **U. S. Security Interests**

I do not subscribe to the view that South Vietnam is strategically vital to Western interests and Western security, whatever its political or ideological pattern may be, in the same way as — to give an extreme example — Yugoslavia, for in-

stance, does not pose a threat to international peace and security.

### **Non-Alignment**

I think I know the mood of the leaders in Vietnam. I think that the leaders in Vietnam are very independent. They are obsessed with the principle of nonalignment, which, as you know, is one of the twin objectives of the Geneva agreements. If Vietnam is independent and militarily nonaligned, as I have been advocating, preferably with the guarantee of the big powers, including the U.S., then I do not see how this could pose a threat to international peace or security or how Vietnam could be strategically vital to the interests and security of the West. . . .

### **The Domino Theory**

I do not subscribe to the generally held view that if South Vietnam falls, then Country X, then Country Y, then Country Z will follow. I do not agree with this so-called domino theory. In my view, the destiny of every country is shaped by its own peculiar circumstances, its national background, own political philosophy. What is true of Country X is not necessarily true of Country Y or Country Z.

### **Hanoi-NLF Relations**

I do not subscribe to the generally held view that the National Liberation Front (NLF) in South Vietnam is a "stooge" of Hanoi. . . . In my view the NLF, although receiving perhaps very substantial help from the North, is an independent entity in the same way as the National Liberation Front of Algeria in the late 1950's was receiving very substantial help from Tunisia or Morocco or the United Arab Republic.

### **Role of the NLF**

The President of the U.S. has been saying all along that the participation of the NLF in any projected conference is not an insurmountable obstacle. I think it is a very wise move on the part of the U.S., since in my view a meeting of Washington and Hanoi alone . . . would not solve the whole Vietnam problem. . . . But the problem of South Vietnam must be solved primarily by the South Vietnamese people themselves. This is the basic issue. . . .

(U Thant wondered) whether the time has come to raise such practical questions as to what type of government in South Vietnam — representative, as far as possible, of all sections of the South Vietnamese people — would take over the responsibility of organizing the exercise by the people of their right to decide their own affairs.

## **Three Point Program to End War**

Let me take the opportunity of reiterating my three-point program, to which I still firmly adhere:

1. The cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam;
2. The scaling down of all military activities by all sides in South Vietnam;
3. The willingness to enter into discussions with those who are actually fighting.

I strongly believe that this three-point program, of which the cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam is the first and essential part, is necessary to create the possibility of fruitful discussions leading to a just and honorable settlement of the problem of Vietnam on the basis of the Geneva Agreements of 1954. . . .

First of all, in my view, it is absolutely necessary that the bombing of North Vietnam must stop without conditions. . . . I still feel very strongly that there will be no move towards peace so long as the bombing of North Vietnam is going on. . . .

## **How Hanoi Sees Bombing**

The other side maintains a totally different approach from that of, for instance, the U.S. They maintain that, apart from the peculiar circumstances . . . there are questions of principle involved. They maintain that the U.S. has no right to bomb an independent, sovereign country. They make the following argument for instance. . . . Should India bomb Pakistan on the basis of the accusation that Azad (Pakistani) Kashmiris are crossing the cease-fire line? . . . I am not trying to justify their position. . . . That is how they look at this problem. . . .

## **U. S. Must Take Initiative**

It is a situation in which a powerful nation like the U.S. should take the initiative in the quest for peace and show an enlightened and humanitarian spirit. I believe that, in the circumstances, only action deliberately undertaken in such a spirit which, because of its power and position, the U.S. can afford to undertake, can halt the escalation and enlargement of this war, and thus bring about a turning of the tide toward peace.

The survival of the people of Vietnam must be seen as the real issue, and it can be resolved not by force but by patience and understanding, in the framework of a willingness to live and let live. . . .



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