

# PUBLIC INFORMATION SERIES

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BUREAU of PUBLIC AFFAIRS

## AN EXPLANATION OF THE WAR IN VIET-NAM FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

Many young school children have written to the President or to the Department of State about Viet-Nam. We have prepared the following explanation for them:

Viet-Nam is a very old country in Asia, about 8,000 miles away from the United States. About 16 years ago, part of the Vietnamese people called Viet Minh were fighting against France which had ruled Viet-Nam for many years. Many of the Viet Minh wanted Viet-Nam to be a communist dictatorship rather than a free country. The Vietnamese communists are especially dangerous because they believe in the use of armed force and terror.

The Viet Minh finally won a big victory over the French forces. The French and officials from some other countries who were interested in Viet-Nam sat down to talk with the Viet Minh in the city of Geneva in Switzerland. They agreed to make peace and to divide Viet-Nam into two parts. The northern part is held by the communists and is called North Viet-Nam. The southern part is held by those Vietnamese who do not want to live under communist rule. It is called the Republic of Viet-Nam or simply South Viet-Nam. Many people in the North went to live in the South to get away from the communists. Many more wanted to go too but the communists broke the rules of the agreement made at Geneva and would not let them go.

### North Viet-Nam Attacks the South

A few years went by. The North Vietnamese were planning to take over all of South Viet-Nam by elections because there were more Northerners to vote than Southerners and because the communists would make sure, by force if necessary, that more people would vote for the North than for the South. The leaders of South Viet-Nam refused to take part in elections that they knew would not be fair. This made the communist leaders of the North very angry, and they decided to take over South Viet-Nam by force. When the country was divided into two parts, the communists had left some men in the South who pretended to be like the Southerners. These men received orders to dig up the guns which they had hidden and to kill people in the South so the men in the South would be afraid to fight against the communists. These communists in the South, called guerrillas, would often go into villages at night and kill important people such as the mayor and the school teacher. This would make the villagers afraid to tell the South Vietnamese soldiers where the guerrillas were hiding. The guerrillas did not wear uniforms and it was easy for them to hide in the jungle or to pretend they were villagers. During this time we were sending guns and supplies to the South Vietnamese so they could fight back. We also sent some soldiers to advise them how to fight.

### South Vietnamese Want to Decide Own Future

As time went on, the North Vietnamese sent more and more men from the North into South Viet-Nam. They began to send soldiers who

attacked the soldiers of the army of South Viet-Nam and soon there was a real war going on. The soldiers from the North and the guerrillas were well trained to fight. Things were going badly for the people of the South. They wanted to be able to decide how to run their country for themselves. So they asked us to help them fight the North Vietnamese. The South Vietnamese had showed that they were brave people and we knew that if the North Vietnamese were not stopped from trying to take over another country by shooting and killing, the other countries in Asia would be in danger too from the communists. So we decided to help the South Vietnamese people, and some other countries also decided to help. That way we hoped to keep the war in Viet-Nam from becoming a big war that might put the whole world in danger.

#### America and Other Countries Help South Viet-Nam

America promised to help the South Vietnamese and we sent soldiers, ships and airplanes to Viet-Nam. Five other countries also sent soldiers. Over 30 countries gave food, medical supplies and many other things to help the South Vietnamese. We have been fighting very hard for five years to help the South Vietnamese soldiers. Together we have done well and the soldiers from the North are not winning any more. They are still trying to take over the South but they know that the South with our help is stronger than they are. The South Vietnamese are becoming such good soldiers that we are bringing some of our men back to America. In May and June of this year American and South Vietnamese soldiers destroyed the communist bases in the next-door country of Cambodia.

We did this because the bases gave the communists a chance to attack our men in South Viet-Nam and then to run and hide in Cambodia. Our action in Cambodia made it safe to go on bringing our men home.

We and South Viet-Nam do not want to take over the North and we do not want to make the war bigger. All we want to do is to stop the communists from taking South Viet-Nam. President Nixon has said that if the communists go back home to the North and leave the South alone, the war will end. We are having talks with leaders from the North in the city of Paris in France. At these talks, we are telling them that if they will take all of their soldiers out of South Viet-Nam, we will too. But if we take all of our soldiers out of South Viet-Nam before peace is made or before we are sure that the South Vietnamese can take care of themselves, we would be breaking our promise to them. Other countries which are our allies would then believe that our word was no good and they would not respect us.

We Believe a Just Peace Is Possible

We are sorry the North Vietnamese are not ready to pull back their soldiers, but we think they will come to see that peace is better than to go on killing. President Nixon and all of us believe that a good and just peace is possible. Until the North Vietnamese agree, we must have lots of patience and grit to go on with the talks in Paris and with the fighting in Viet-Nam.