

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF VIET NAM

Address

By

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To National Press Club

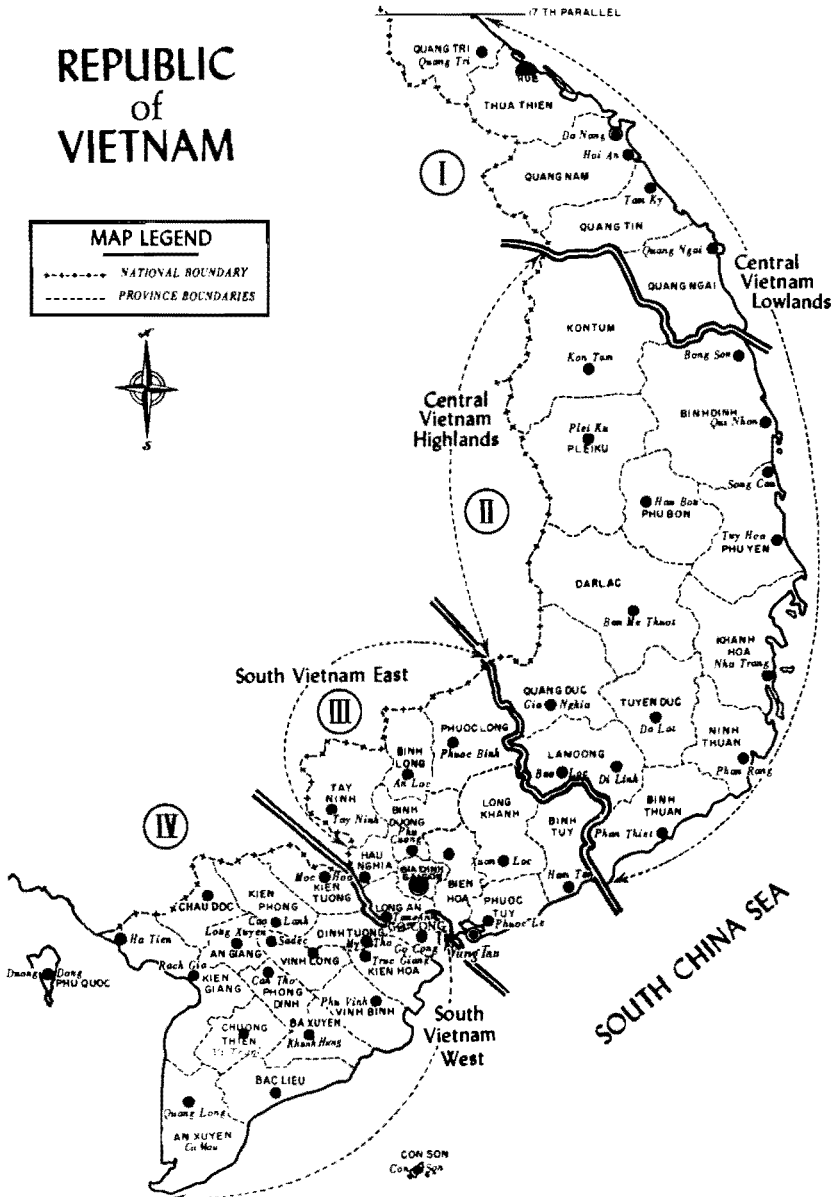
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"The Vietnamese government, with our support, is pressing the 'other war' with vigor—the war against poverty, hunger, disease and ignorance. This is the theme of the 'Declaration of Honolulu'—and I believe that the Honolulu Declaration could be a milestone in the history of our policy in Asia."



As you know, I returned a few days ago from a mission on behalf of the President to nine Asian and Pacific nations. Today I would like to share with you some of my conclusions about what is happening in that part of the world and about our policy there.

I will begin with words from Confucius: "If a man take no thought about what is distant, he will find sorrow near at hand."

The war in Vietnam is far more than Neville Chamberlain's "quarrel in a remote country among people of whom we know nothing."

It is the focus of a broader conflict which involves the whole Asian continent. It also involves basic principles of international conduct.

I will return to this later.

OUR PURPOSES IN VIETNAM

Why are we in South Vietnam?

We are in South Vietnam to repel and prevent the success of aggression against the government and the people of that country.

We are there to help assure the South Vietnamese people the basic right to decide their own futures, freely and without intimidation.

We are there to help those people achieve a better standard of living for themselves and their children.

We are there to help establish the principle that—in this nuclear age—aggression cannot be an acceptable means either of settling international disputes or of realizing national objectives. If aggression is permitted to go unchecked, we cannot in good faith hold out much hope for the future of small nations or of world peace.

This is why we are in Vietnam.

We are not there to build an empire . . . to exercise domination over that part of the world . . . to establish military bases. We are *not* there to impose a government or way of life on other peoples.

THE NATIONAL LIBERATION “FRONT”

The last point is worth dwelling on. The National Liberation Front claims to be an authentic nationalist movement, representing the overwhelming majority of the South Vietnamese people.

I agree with only one part of the NLF's contention:

That it is a *front*.

There was a time, in the colonial days, when the old Viet Minh movement contained authentic nationalists. (Many of them are now, I might add, members of the South Vietnamese government.)

Today there are a few non-Communists in figurehead Viet Cong posts. The nominal leader of the NFL, for example, is not known as a Communist. But most of the Viet Cong soldiers—at least those defecting or captured—don't even know his name. (It is Nguyen Huu Tho.) But they all know Ho Chi Minh.

There are in the NLF leaders of alleged non-Communist parties. But they are parties without any apparent membership.

ALL LEADING NATIONALISTS OPPOSED TO VIET CONG

There are a good many well-known and recognized nationalists in South Vietnam outside the present government. Quite a few of them opposed the late President Diem and suffered in prison for their opposition.

To this day not one of these people has identified himself

with the National Liberation Front. Yet it would be easy for any one of them to slip into Viet Cong territory and do so.

None has. And you can be sure the National Liberation Front would tell the world if any one of them did.

The same is true of religious leaders, Buddhist and Catholic alike . . . of trade union officials . . . of student leaders. They differ widely among themselves—the Vietnamese are an articulate and argumentative people. But on one thing at least they are agreed: They don't want to live under Communist rule.

Contrary to what many people believe, you do not have to have overwhelming, or even majority, support to wage a guerrilla war. A determined, highly disciplined, trained and well-organized minority can do that.

PREVIOUS TRIUMPHS OF MILITARY AID AGAINST COMMUNISM

Without massive American aid to the Greek government after the war, Communists would have taken over that country. Yet subsequent elections have shown them to be a small minority.

Without the aid of British and Gurkha troops over a period of many years, Communists would have won in Malaya. But subsequent elections have shown them to be an even smaller minority than their Greek comrades.

Without outside aid, the overwhelming majority of the South Vietnamese people would not have hope of self-determination. They would be ruled by force and coercion, as they are today in areas under Viet Cong control. We are giving aid: military aid and political/economic/social aid.

RECENT VIETNAMESE MILITARY ACHIEVEMENTS

On the military front, the Vietnamese, together with American and allied troops, have made substantial progress in the past few months.

A series of defeats have been inflicted on main force units of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers.

Allied forces have been able to move in on Viet Cong strongholds which had previously been immune to attack.

We have been able to open up stretches of highway and

railroad which the Viet Cong had long controlled.

Mobility and firepower of allied forces is impressive. Co-ordination among allied forces has markedly improved.

Viet Cong and North Vietnamese casualties are difficult to determine. But the best available figures show that they have doubled over 1964 and are now running several times current allied casualties.

INCREASE IN VIET CONG DEFECTORS

The defection rate for Viet Cong has also increased—partly because of a special South Vietnamese program to encourage defection. Defectors were being received at a rate of about 2,000 per month while I was in Saigon.

Defectors report shortages of food and low morale.

They report that the accuracy and impact of our artillery

"There is no substitute for the use of power in the face of determined attack.



and bombing have been devastating.

But we don't have to rely on the word of defectors alone.

An article published in the January issue of the Viet Cong theoretical journal and broadcast over its radio complains of difficulty and confusion in the ranks.

It says that Viet Cong agents, having organized a protest movement in the villages, sometimes lose control of it, and even allow it to be transformed into an anti-Communist demonstration.

It warns that, although its agitators must use all sorts of people "partially and temporarily" in carrying out the struggle, they must wipe out the "influence of reactionary elements belonging to various religious organizations" and "beware of trade union leaders."

VIET CONG FEAR OF "DEFEATISM"

A number of articles and broadcasts warn against defeatism and "pacifism" in the ranks.

General Giap has publicly complained from Hanoi that the American commitment to Vietnam has given rise to "an extremely serious situation."

And an article recently published in Hanoi denounces "a small number of comrades . . . (who) see only difficulties and not opportunities (and) display pessimism, perplexity, and a reluctance to protracted resistance . . ."

Peking, in more general terms, has acknowledged that "in some lands, revolutionary struggles have temporarily suffered reverses, and in others the political situation has taken an adverse turn."

It blames these setbacks on "imperialists, colonialists, and neo-colonialists, headed by the United States."

We have been subject to some harsh words by Asian Communists. But, as President Johnson has said:

"We can live with anger in word as long as it is matched by caution in deed."

Things are better in Vietnam, militarily, than even a few months ago. Though we must be prepared for military setbacks and disappointments ahead, I believe we have reason for measured encouragement.

There is no substitute for the use of power in the face of determined attack. There are times when it must be used.

A BETTER LIFE FOR THE PEOPLE

But the use of power, necessary as it is, can be counter-productive without accompanying political effort and the credible promise to people of a better life.

The peasants of Vietnam—and, indeed, of all Asia—are rebelling against the kind of life they have led for ages past. They want security. But they also want dignity and self-respect, justice and the hope of something better in the future.

The Communists—in their drive for power—seek to use and subvert the hopes of these people. If they succeed, we could win many battles and yet lose the war.

The struggle will be won or lost in rural areas.

We have said this so often it has become a cliché. But it must now be proved by programs of actions.

The Chinese have a saying “Lots of noise on the stairs, but nobody enters the room.”

There have been, as I am fully aware, many promises made to the peasants over many years—but painfully little performance.

THE DECLARATION OF HONOLULU

The hour is late. The need for deeds as well as words is urgent. That is why the Vietnamese government, with our support, is pressing the “other war” with vigor—the war against poverty, hunger, disease and ignorance. This is the theme of the “Declaration of Honolulu”—and I believe that the Honolulu Declaration could be a milestone in the history of our policy in Asia.

They are beginning in earnest the struggle to win and hold the allegiance of the people who live in rural South Vietnam, in more than 2,600 villages and approximately 11,000 hamlets—subject to years of Viet Cong subversion and terror.

This is hard and dangerous work. In 1965 alone, 354 of the people engaged in it were assassinated, and something like 500 wounded. I do not for a moment minimize the practical difficulties of carrying out the social revolution to which the Republic of Vietnam is now committed.

Vietnam has experienced a quarter of a century of almost

constant warfare, generations of colonial domination, and a millenium of Mandarin rule.

History has endowed it with no full and ready-made administrative apparatus to undertake such a monumental task. It will have to be carefully built. But there are a number of well-trained and educated high and middle-level officials to form the nucleus for this effort.

NUMEROUS IMPROVEMENTS IN VIETNAM

The important thing is to begin, and this the present government has done. Responsibility has been fixed, a spirited attack upon inertia and corruption has begun. There is determination that the whole chain of social and political action will be conceived and administered with hard-headedness and efficiency—beginning in the ministries in Saigon and going right down to the village and hamlet level. High standards of performance have been set and are expected. And we are work-

"In the countryside, schools and hospitals are being built."



ing with the South Vietnamese government at each level to help see that the product matches the expectation.

South Vietnamese cadres in hamlets and villages will be doubled to more than 45,000 by the end of this year. Today, they are still outnumbered by Viet Cong activists. But the gap is steadily closing.

Today the South Vietnamese government—late in the day, it is true—is trying to meet the pressing needs of the country. Prime Minister Ky was candid with me when he said, “Our social revolution is 12 years late—but not too late.”

Some 800,000 people have fled to government-controlled areas in South Vietnam during the past year-and-a-half. Almost 300,000 have already been resettled. The South Vietnamese government, with allied help, is working to house, feed and clothe these refugees.

In the countryside, schools and hospitals are being built.

In Saigon, a new constitution is being framed and the government is working toward a goal of national elections by the end of the year.

In short, a forced-draft effort is being made to create a new society to replace the old. It deserves and requires our support.

MANY ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Meanwhile, the country faces staggering economic problems—the most severe of which is the problem of inflation.

Despite today's inflation, the long-term economic prospect is good. There is new business investment in new industries. South Vietnamese land is rich and productive. The people are industrious, ambitious, and quick to learn new skills—and they are learning. Communications, port facilities, and transportation are being expanded.

But full economic development certainly will not take place until an environment of violence and conflict is replaced by one of stability and peace.

NO INSTANT SOLUTIONS TO COMPLEX PROBLEMS

My observations of Vietnam are not the product of a week-end visit to Saigon.

To be sure, my visit there was informative. It gave mean-

ing to what I had read and to the deliberations of government in which I had participated.

As student, professor, Senator and Vice President, I have been intellectually and directly involved in matters of national security and foreign policy. I have read too many books, attended too many hearings and meetings, and participated in too many discussions at the highest levels of government to arrive at any instant solutions to complex problems or to be naively optimistic about a troubled world.

Having said this, I have reason to bring home a message of encouragement about Vietnam.

I know that our opponents are diligent and determined. They are well-organized, and in many areas have a long head start on us.

MANY PEACE APPEALS TO HANOI

Thus far they have not responded to our unconditional offer of negotiation—an offer which still stands—nor have they responded to the good offices of other nations, of the United Nations, of the Pope and other religious leaders who seek to bring the conflict to the conference table.

And they have not responded, I am sure, because they still believe that time is on their side . . . that we will ultimately tire and withdraw, either abandoning South Vietnam *or* accepting a settlement which will give the Viet Cong an open road on one of its three publicly declared routes to victory.

The first two routes—a general uprising and the famous Mao-Giap three-stage guerrilla war—have been stymied by resistance of the South Vietnamese government and her allies.

WE SEEK GENUINE FREE ELECTIONS

The third declared route to power is through a coalition government.

Should there be any doubt in Hanoi, let me make it once more clear: We will neither tire nor withdraw.

We will remain in Vietnam until genuinely free elections can be held.

If the Viet Cong, in those elections, gain honestly a voice in the government, so be it. But prior to elections, this government will not be a party to any settlement which amounts

to a pre-election victory for Communists which cannot be won at the ballot box.

I, for one, doubt that the South Vietnamese people will give that victory to the Communists. No Communist government has ever come to power through free election, and I doubt that one ever will.

We will pursue, with patience and persistence, the difficult course we have set for ourselves—the course neither of withdrawal nor of massive escalation, but of measured use of strength and perseverance in defense both of ally and principle.

As the President has said: “. . . the pledge of Honolulu will be kept, and the pledge of Baltimore stands open—to help the men of Hanoi when they have the wisdom to be ready.”

ASIAN NATIONS' CONCERN OVER COMMUNISM

At the beginning today I said the conflict in Vietnam was the focus of a wider struggle taking place in Asia.

During my recent mission I was struck by the depth of feeling, among almost all Asian leaders, that Asian communism had direct design on their national integrity and independence.

Almost all cited examples of subversion, and in many cases direct military involvement by Communist troops, within their countries.

And none—without any exception—questioned our involvement in Vietnam. There were questions about aspects of our policy there, but none concerning the fact of our presence there and our resistance to aggression.

THE RIGHT OF DISSENT

Among the leaders with whom I spoke, there was repeatedly expressed a deep concern as to whether our American purpose, tenacity and will were strong enough to persevere in Southeast Asia. Public debate in America was sometimes interpreted as a weakening of purpose. I emphasized the firmness of our resolve but also our dedication to the rights of free discussion and dissent.

For we know that John Stuart Mill's advice remains valid: “We can never be sure that the opinion we are endeavor-

ing to stifle is a false opinion; and if we were sure, stifling it would be an evil still."

ASIAN COMMUNISM: A CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER

Asian communism may be a subject for discussion here. In Asia, it is a clear and present danger.

No single, independent nation in Asia has the strength to stand alone against that danger.

I believe that the time may come when Asian communism may lose its fervor . . . when it may lose some of its neuroses . . . when it may realize that its objectives cannot be gained by aggression.

But, until that time, I believe we have no choice but to help the nations of Southeast Asia strengthen themselves for the long road ahead.

I also said, at the beginning today, that some very basic principles of international conduct were under test in Vietnam. Some people think not.

Of them, I ask this: Were we to withdraw from Vietnam under any conditions short of peace, security and the right of self-determination for the South Vietnamese people . . . what conclusions would be drawn in the independent nations of Asia? In Western Europe? In the young, struggling countries of Africa? In the nations of Latin America beset by subversion and unrest? What conclusions would be drawn in Hanoi and Peking?

AMERICAN NATIONAL INTERESTS

I have heard it said that our vital national interests are not involved in South Vietnam as they are in Europe.

I heard it said 30 years ago that our vital national interests were not involved in *Europe* as they were in the Western Hemisphere.

This time we cannot afford to learn the hard way. No continent on this earth is any longer remote from any other.

And, may I add, the principles of national independence and self-determination should be no less dear to us in Asia than they are in Europe.

MAN'S HISTORIC CHOICES

We live in a time when man has finally achieved the ultimate in technological progress: Man today possesses the means to totally destroy himself.

Yet our time also offers man the possibility, for the first time in human history, of achieving well-being and social justice for hundreds of millions of people who literally live on the outside of civilization.

Being an optimist, I have some faith in the ability of man to see this safely through.

And I, for one, believe that it will not be seen safely through if those who seek power by brute force have reason to believe that brute force pays.

Finally, may I add two additional observations.

ASIAN DESIRE FOR SELF-DETERMINATION

First, Asia is astir with a consciousness of the need for Asian initiatives in the solution of Asia's problems. Regional development and planning are increasingly being recognized as necessary for political and economic progress. The power of nationalism is now tempered by a growing realization of the need for cooperation among nations. Asians seek to preserve their national identity. They want gradually to create new international structures. But they want to pursue such aims themselves. They want foreign assistance when necessary, but without foreign domination.

WE MUST LEARN MORE ABOUT COMMUNIST CHINA

Second, the American people, as well as their leaders, need to know more about Asia in general and Communist China in particular; the relationship of that nation with her neighbors in Asia and the Pacific; the nature of Chinese Communist ideology and behavior; and the operational apparatus of Communist parties under Peking leadership or influence. The intellectual and political resources not only of the United States, but of the entire free world, should be mobilized for this effort.

In this regard, I want to commend the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for its hearings on China.

OUR TASKS AHEAD

We have not set ourselves any easy tasks. But the tasks, and responsibilities, of the most powerful nation in the history of the earth are not . . . cannot be . . . will not be easy.

Let me close by making this prediction: Ten or twenty years hence, historians will mark Vietnam as a place where our nation—and free peoples—were faced with a challenge by totalitarianism . . . and where they met the challenge.