

STATEMENT BY RUFUS PHILLIPS, A DIRECTOR OF THE AMERICAN  
FRIENDS OF VIET-NAM AND FORMER ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF THE  
U. S. AID MISSION IN SAIGON, BEFORE THE DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM  
COMMITTEE, CHICAGO, AUGUST 22, 1968

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I appear before you as a member of the Board of Directors of the American Friends of Viet-Nam, an organization founded in 1955, to support a free and democratic Viet-Nam. I have also been personally involved in Viet-Nam for more than fourteen years, having first served as a military advisor in that country just after the Geneva Accords, from 1954 until 1956; and then from 1962 to 1963 as the first administrator of American aid support for the pacification program. I have since been back several times as a consultant to the U. S. Embassy and most recently as a private citizen. I am no longer connected with our Government. I am, therefore, speaking to you freely as someone who has come to know the Vietnamese people in a personal way, and to develop some firm convictions about our involvement there.

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The latest polls confirm the fact that most Americans are against a dishonorable peace in Viet-Nam, despite their frustration over the war. *Yet, a number of leading politicians and others continue to believe that the Democratic Party, instead of offering unrealistic solutions (which are based on a number of underlying premises for peace), should use straight talk to help our people better understand what the war is really about, to show them a realistic road towards an honorable solution, and to ask for their patient understanding and support.* If we are to get at the truth, and thereby ~~develop~~<sup>follow</sup> a realistic but honorable program for peace in Vietnam, we must examine these premises.

You have already heard a number of solutions for peace in Viet-Nam, many of which use certain basic premises as justification for essentially abandoning our commitment there. I would like to examine these premises.

2. The first premise is that the war is diverting attention and resources from more important needs at home, and that this is morally wrong.

That the war is costing us heavily is undeniable; but that it is wrong to spend money on this war, while we could be spending it on urgent social and economic needs at home is a dubious argument, morally and ethically. If our basic reason for helping our fellow man at home is because we care about people, because we love our fellow man; is it then ethical to abandon one set of people who are in more desperate straits than any Americans,

for another set of people even though they be our fellow Americans? *Do we must ask ourselves, do we* we really care about people, or are we only interested in soothing our guilty consciences over our own neglect of those of our fellow Americans who happen to be black?

By changing the way in which we are fighting the war, we could reduce its cost which would begin to free money to be used at home; but even if the war were ended tomorrow serious economic studies show that significant amounts of additional funds would not become available for several years. More important, if we as a nation think we are going to cure the social and economic problems of a neglected minority at home with money alone,

*I predict that*

*we will be no more successful than we have been in Viet-Nam, where we have relied too much on the use of material resources, and too little on understanding and caring about the Vietnamese people.*

**3** A second premise is that the war has impaired our prestige in the world.

Europe is not the whole world, but Asia is an important part of it. Our firm stand against a communist take-over of Viet-Nam, has enhanced our prestige in Asia. Convincing evidence of this comes from Asian leaders, whose statements are on record and should be heeded.

Our prestige problems exist mainly in Europe where many believe we are neglecting them for Asia and Viet-Nam. Asia is easier to forget or to write off for nations who do not border on the Pacific. We cannot escape either our geography, or the historical lessons of World War II and the Korean War.

**4** A third premise is that military victory is our objective and there is no hope of a military victory or a satisfactory solution under present policy in Viet-Nam.

It is absolutely true that a military victory is not possible in Viet-Nam, short of an all-out attack on North Viet-Nam which would risk World War III. But the war is not a military war in conventional terms, it is a political struggle in which the enemy is using military means along with political, economic and social actions to achieve a political end. They do not seek to defeat us on the battlefield militarily; but to psychologically

and politically defeat the Vietnamese nationalists in Viet-Nam and the U. S., at home. They were not fighting a military war, as we know it, when they murdered 2000 Vietnamese civilians in Hue during the Tet offensive. They defeated the French, not on the battlefield, but in metropolitan France. Will they succeed against the United States with the same strategy?

Perhaps it would help us to look back at Korea. We found the answer to blatant, naked aggression there. It was agonizing and prospects were bleak, but today South Korea is a free nation with one of the most rapid growth rates in the world.

Now, we are faced with a more subtle form of aggression which cloaks itself in nationalism and self-righteousness. We are painfully learning how to cope with this new form of aggression which the communists call, "Wars of National Liberation". It has been costly, and in looking mainly at the cost, sometimes our vision becomes obscured. We forget that the non-communist Vietnamese are carrying out their own democratic revolution, and that despite twenty years of struggle against the communists, they have the strength and resiliency to go on fighting.

*Not long ago,*  
~~Recently~~ a former candidate for the South Vietnamese Presidency was convicted and jailed by a military court, operating under a 1965 decree. This happened primarily because the independent judiciary foreseen in the Constitution, had not yet been fully created by the elected National Assembly. Due process of the law, as we know it, is not yet fully operative. But, to focus solely on this lapse in democratic practice is to ignore the fact that

over the last two years there have been elections for a constituent assembly, the adoption of a sound and fair constitution, the election of a President and an independent National Assembly, as well as hamlet, village and city council elections. Since its formation, the Government has been legally changed once with the approval of the National Assembly. A Prime Minister is now in power who is generally recognized to be the most honest and prestigious civilian in South Viet-Nam. A growing coalition of non-communist nationalist groups is underway. These are healthy trends, but there is still much to be done which will require both time and patience on our part, as well as understanding support.

~~2~~ A fourth premise is that the war is a civil war, with the Viet Cong being an independent and legitimate political force.

Viet-Nam is a very complex society, in which the Viet Cong are a distinct political minority. There are some 35 nationalist political and religious groupings in Viet-Nam with at least six million followers. In addition, there are more than two million Cambodian Buddhists, mountain tribal people and Chinese. These groups are not merely non-communist, they are for the most part anti-communist. At no time, has any claim by the Viet Cong that they represent more than 15 to 20 percent of the total South Vietnamese population ever been substantiated. The Vietnamese Government was able to register approximately 70% of the total population (eligible by standards of age alone) to vote in last year's Presidential and

Assembly elections.

If political and religious groups and individuals, representative of at least 70% of the eligible voting population, are already willing to operate within the legal framework of the existing Vietnamese Constitution, what is right about rewarding a distinct minority by elevating them to equal status with the present Government. This is what proposed four-way talks would do, in which the Viet Cong would be co-equal with the South Vietnamese Government. A coalition government would be an even greater reward for their not merely illegal, but murderously immoral opposition. Is this *our country has* the cause for which ~~we have~~ already given 25, 000 American lives?

As for the supposed independence of the Viet Cong, or National Liberation Front, let me merely point out that because of the repellent image of the Viet Cong, Hanoi has been obliged to create a new front, the Alliance of Democratic and Peace Forces, in order to try to attract non-communist support. To date, despite real Vietnamese fears of an American pull-out, the communists have been unsuccessful in attracting any prominent nationalist leaders into this new front.

**A fifth premise is that we have the right to impose a form of Government onto the non-communist Vietnamese.**

The non-communist Vietnamese are unwilling to accept a coalition with the Viet Cong. They remember too well the first such coalition in 1946, in which the communists were initially a minority, but which they used as a basis for eliminating by murder or intimidation their nationalist compatriots.

*"Anybody can do it, but it's not  
worth doing unless it's done right."*

The nationalists want to see some demonstration, after twenty years of gratuitous killing in the name, but not in the true cause, of Vietnamese nationalism, that the communists are willing to abide by the rule of the democratic process. For this reason, free elections without some prior test of Viet Cong intentions are neither fair nor reasonable.

Now, some Americans, in their haste to get out of this difficult and costly conflict, are advocating that we force on to the Vietnamese our own political solution. Unenunciated, but self-evident, is a new principle in international relations, that a powerful nation giving assistance to a weak and needy nation has a right to dictate its form of Government.

~~Is this what we really believe?~~ Isn't this precisely the same totalitarian

~~principle which the Russians are now applying in Czechoslovakia?~~ If we

~~rule of thumb, since the French committed extensive forces, supporting~~

~~we put this new rule into practice in Viet-Nam, how will other nations in the~~

~~world come to look upon us?~~ Will they trust us?

I submit that the idea we should impose a political solution onto the Vietnamese people, in whatever form, whether through a coalition government, by direct talks with the Viet Cong, or through elections which are free in name only, is morally wrong and unworkable in practice.

**2** A sixth premise is that Viet-Nam is unique, that we will not have to face similar challenges elsewhere.

The challenge in Viet-Nam is not one of a kind. Such "Wars of National Liberation" will be with us until it is clear to the communists that they cannot succeed. We must avoid future Viet-Nams as represented by the

massive size and cost of our present efforts. We must and can find a better way of meeting this challenge. We cannot simply quit and then hope to take up the challenge elsewhere under better circumstances. We must work our way out of Viet-Nam in an honorable and just fashion, leaving behind something worth fighting for, or we shall be seriously impaired in facing the same challenge in other places. And make no mistake, at least one such challenge - in Thailand - is already upon us.

What then can we do in Viet-Nam -

First of all I believe we must understand that our failure to win in Viet-Nam is not a policy failure, but a failure in proper implementation of policy. What we can do and what we must do is to make our deeds, in prosecuting the war and in helping the Vietnamese, more consistent with our own principles of self-government and of placing the welfare of the people first. We can do these things better than we have done them, by concentrating our support behind Vietnamese democratic political development, by cutting down the size of the American presence, and by shaping our military efforts so that primary emphasis falls on protecting people, rather than killing them. Greater control has been placed in recent months on the use of our massive firepower, but even greater discrimination should be used in the future so that where killing Viet Cong is in clear conflict with protecting civilians, we favor the civilian population.

Even more important to ultimate success is the continued but more rapid

growth of a cause, beyond self-preservation, which unites and inspires the non-communist nationalists. To help, we can legitimately insist that our Vietnamese allies live up to their own principles and ideals, as expressed in their constitution, and that they perform the deeds which will make these ideals come alive. Such programs as free, local elections up through the level of province chief, a decentralization of governing power to the villages, a sincere implementation of land reform, rule by law through an independent judiciary and other similar deeds are what I mean.

~~I have no doubt that if the Vietnamese can put into actual practice the democratic principles of their constitution, and thereby unify the nation-alists, and undercut the Viet Cong, that Hanoi will be willing to come to reasonable terms. Let us resolve then to help the true Vietnamese nation-~~

~~alists complete this political task, which when achieved, will provide a realistic basis, in part, for an honorable and lasting peace.~~

We can and we must find a better solution which is consistent with our own ideals and principles if we are to live at peace with ourselves and with our own conscience, as well as with the rest of the world. We cannot escape this challenge.

(Note: This text was prepared prior to the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, with the exception of one sentence on Page 7 which refers to that tragic event.)

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A Seventh Premise is that it is the Vietnamese alone, who because of corruption and incompetence are to blame for the failure to defeat the Viet Cong.

South Vietnam, as a country, shares many handicaps in common with other underdeveloped but newly independent nations. Its society is in state of ferment and change. Its people can leaders lack experience in national politics. It has no firmly established institutions. Its people have been living in a continuous state of insecurity in which the only thing a man can trust is himself and his family. All these are conditions which make difficult the development of a cohesive democratic society from a traditional society, repressed and distorted by years of colonial rule.

On the other hand, the Vietnamese as a people are highly nationalistic with a strong sense of cultural identity and a common heritage. They were the only Asian people ever to defeat Ghenghis Khan's conquering armies, a fact which every Vietnamese remembers with great pride. This nationalism, perverted by the communists, is what drives the Viet Cong, who exhibit spirit, will and cohesiveness the equal of any people on earth.

If the Viet Cong are Vietnamese, which they are, then why have not the non-communist Vietnamese been able to develop an equally strong and cohesive will to resist. it is here where we Americans must share the blame because our way of giving aid, both military and economic, and our presence, all

too often rather than helping to develop this common will and cohesive spirit, has hindered it. Vietnamese nationalists who are true patriots have pleaded with us to give our aid in a way which would encourage not discourage the development of a democratic government worth fighting for. One such Vietnamese patriot has said:

To cite an example, when we brought our troops in initially we paid little attention or thought to the economic and social impact this would have. In one year's time we dumped into the country's economic system, a great part of it in the form of direct and unlimited personal spending by our troops, an amount of Vietnamese currency equal to approximately 70 percent of the total Vietnamese National Budget. To envisage a similar situation in the U.S. it would be as if a foreign power were to be invited to send in its troops, each one spending on the average five times what the average U.S. citizen has to spend, and on the whole spending a total of seventy billion dollars. Can we imagine what the impact of this would be on our social and economic system. The miracle of Vietnam then is that somehow the Vietnamese have been able to hold together as a society and go on fighting despite this economic and social "atom bomb" being exploded in their midst. Is it any wonder that they have an acute problem of corruption.

Petty corruption, particularly in the old-line civil service has been an endemic problem, but we helped engender corruption on a new scale and made it so tempting and so easy as to be difficult to resist. The miracle is that there are still good Vietnamese leaders who are honest.

We cannot therefore merely blame the Vietnamese alone for the failure to defeat the Viet Cong. Certainly the Vietnamese Government and its leaders have weaknesses and faults but we have all too often contributed to increasing these weaknesses rather than overcoming them. In Viet-Nam it is not so much a case of the Vietnamese failing to help themselves as it is of our presence being a hindrance rather than a help to their struggle. While we have prevented the North Vietnamese from militarily conquering the South, we have at the same time made it extremely difficult if not impossible for the South to emerge as an independent force. There have been examples of other nations in similar straits such as the Philippines, whom we helped in a different fashion and therefore successfully. We can begin to apply a similar more intelligent and less massive approach in Viet-Nam.