

Speech delivered by H. E. Vu Van Thai, Ambassador from Vietnam to the United States at the Overseas Press Club in New York City on January 12, 1966.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

First, I wish to say how much I appreciate this opportunity to meet you and to speak about my country's problems. Until this day, I had but good friends among the Press - I sincerely hope that that situation will remain unchanged following this redoubtable test.

In the recent weeks, a great amount of efforts have been produced to explore the possibilities of restoring peace in Vietnam. Unavoidably, there have been speculations on the attitude of my government, and I feel it necessary to reaffirm here our basic position regarding war and peace.

First - We must secure and preserve for the Vietnamese of this generation and of the generations to come the right to choose the institutions of their own liking, and to alter or abolish those institutions in conformance with democratic rules, if the need arises. The Vietnamese people must not be condemned forever to one type of government system as in the case of communist regimes.

Second - We must guarantee the independence of the Vietnamese nation against "satellization" by any other power or group of powers - in the present juncture, the threat of satellization by Communist China is extremely great and real, and we must have the necessary guarantees against that threat.

Also, we must preserve the right for the people of Vietnam to proceed to exchanges of all nature - intellectual, commercial...with all other countries, of all tendencies, without any exclusives.

Third - We aim to participate with other powers in the search for a vast scheme of international cooperation, which will bring about a formula for the "de-Balkanization" of South East Asia, for harmonious development and lasting peace in the area.

We certainly welcome all the efforts toward peace, provided they give proper consideration to those permanent requirements. The Vietnamese people have continuously suffered with war for a quarter of a century; they have consented to indescribable sacrifices in order to defend those principles. They are undoubtedly more eager than any other people in the world to see peace reestablished, but they also are more determined than any other people to preserve their basic rights.

Some people will raise the question as to what the people of Vietnam really want. We have been living under the law of the gun all these years; there have been very few occasions for public opinion to freely express itself. Elections with secret police roaming around the booths and prison camps as permanent reminders to dissenting subjects are not reliable indications. Yet, to my mind, the commitment of the Vietnamese people is extremely clear.

The search for a concept of nationhood which could answer all the expectations following one century of colonialism and underdevelopment, has been a long and painful sequence of trials and errors for the Vietnamese people. The Communists, with a long experience in professional revolutionary technique, and tight international organization to back them, succeeded at first to eliminate several generations of noncommunists contenders for national leadership. But one cannot silence forever the aspirations of a nation, and when the communist experience had been lived through long enough, we came to the end of a demonstration "ab absurdo" in 1954: following Dien Bien Phu, following victory over the colonialists, one million people, almost one tenth of the population of North Vietnam at that time, streamed to the South within a hundred days. A few other million would have followed, had the moratorium been extended. I must say that the trains and ships running in the other direction were rather empty. Was this not the evidence of a choice, of a total commitment?

Then, the regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem brought about high hopes for a brief moment, before it turned into a nightmarish personal dictatorship. On this terribly difficult road, the attitude of the Vietnamese people was also unequivocal. They gave unfailing support as long as the government served the interests of the nation. Then the insurrection of November, 1963, was the end of another demonstration by the absurd, another evidence that the Vietnamese people reject all forms of dictatorship whether on the right or on the left.

Of course, rejection of dictatorship is but a negative step. But, because of the natural connivance between the forces of sommunism, colonialism and dictatorship, the Vietnamese people have not had the opportunity to proceed to the kind of dialogue, free dialogue, from which consensus would emerge on a concept of nationhood. Only a few days ago, a Vietnamese colleague of yours, and a friend of mine, Tu Chung, the editor of a leading Saigon daily was gunned down by VietCong terrorists. Chung was in no way an extremist, nor is his newspaper the mouthpiece of the government or of an active political group, but Chung's crime in the eyes of the communists was that he promoted that dialogue, that search for a concept for the Vietnamese nation. Before Tu Chung, scores of other Vietnamese leaders and intellectuals have been liquidated by the Communists, in North and in South Vietnam: in the field of journalism alone, we can cite the assassinations of Khai Hung, Nhuong Tong, the persecution of the Nhan Van group...Also, the forces of personal diotatorship tried their best to prevent this dialogue from taking place: the suicide of Nguyen Tuong Tam, the respected leader of the Tu Luc Van Doan Literary group in Saigon, 1963, on the eve of his being tried for political reasons by the Diem government, is an illustration of the very very thin margin within which the free Vietnamese had to operate.

Now, despite the concurrent difficulties, the war, the pressures, I believe that this dialogue can take place and has already started. We are

no longer squeezed in between two forms of dictatorship as we have always been in the past. A revolution, a noncommunist revolution to bring to Vietnam a solid sense of national cohesion, a proper order of social justice and respect of human dignity can be achieved.

We do not doubt for one minute that that revolution would be carried out for the best interest of the Vietnamese people in a much easier way if we had peace. But we do not want to give the communists a chance to repeat their stratagem which has become classical - to use the procedures of peace in order to secure gains for further stages of the war. Therefore, we are prepared to start informal talks, without preconditions. But we shall consent to formal negotiations only when the Communists have produced the evidence of a sincere, genuine desire for peace.

Thank you.

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