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Dear Professor Fishel:

I thank you very much for your kind letter and look forward to the great pleasure of seeing you again when you come to Washington.

I must confess that besides having got first the ordinary flu, more than a month ago, then the Hong Kong flu from which I have not fully recovered, I have been sick of the last developments in the Vietnam war.

A year ago, I went and visited Vietnam and returned here just two weeks before the Tet offensive. I had never seen Vietnam in such a sad state before. After years of military rule there seemed to be very little administration left, even in Saigon.

However, even in that state of hopelessness, nobody seemed to suspect that the communists were about to attack almost

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all our major cities and military bases at the same time. I am afraid they did not move undetected ^{because} of any help from the population but rather, more simply, because they moved across the countryside in an administrative vacuum. In Saigon itself, people found it useless to complain about the heaps of uncollected trash and the large holes in their sidewalks. It seemed that nobody was in charge, nobody would do anything. It was a year ago.

Anyhow, the communists have proved very much stronger against our present Allied forces than they ever were against the French Union forces in the darkest days of Dien Bien Phu.

Yet, there was no reason to surrender!

We have not won the shooting war for the only reason that victory had been ruled out from the very start, because the U.S. government never doubted it could at least win a "limited" victory in a "limited war", which was not true - (I do not mean that an illimited war had to be waged, nor that North Vietnam had to be bombed to ashes!) - and the "other" war could not be won for the simple reason that nothing

could be reorganized or rebuilt in a house still aflame, as long as the arsonists had not been repulsed and reduced to impotence. Building and rebuilding could not and cannot successfully compete with systematic destruction, no matter what illimited resources can be devoted to reconstruction.

What is necessary now is not some disguised surrender or some other fool's bargain, like the July 1962 agreement on Laos; it is a candid and lucid reexamination of the whole Vietnam policy.

Because of the two successive attacks of flu, I am sorry not to have found the time to read entirely your "Anatomy of a Conflict". It is also, I confess, because I am more interested in your own opinions than in the conflicting views of others and I am so much worried by the present situation. As it is, this collection will be most useful, even indispensable to those who want to know and study this most important issue.

However, as you have noted yourself, most writings on Vietnam are so biased as to inspire doubts on the ability of the human mind to discover

the truth, except in precise sciences. The more a man is sophisticated and knowledgeable and the more capable he is to juggle with words and sophisms, to fall victim to half truths and untruths and to find seemingly good reasons to prove anything he likes to believe. As you recalled: "hỡi! Không xương niều miệng lặt léo", and it not only the tongue, it is the human mind that can be twisted in all directions!

Unfortunately, more than thirty thousand Americans, more than half a million Vietnamese - most of them from South Vietnam - have been killed in this war; more tons of bombs have been dropped on North Vietnam alone than in the whole Pacific theater in the Second World War and four times as many on South Vietnam alone! Seven times as many U.S. troops are now in Vietnam than there ever were French troops proper at the peak of the Indochinese War!

Can all this be in vain and end up with a surrender of Vietnam to the communists, with an American defeat by North Vietnam? It would be tragic for the future of the world. Let us pray that it will not be.

We wish you and your family a very good new year -

Sincerely yours
John