

REALITIES OF THE VIETNAM WAR

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Peace loving people in Canada and the United States appear to be greatly concerned about the Vietnam war. Opinions, however, seem to be sharply divided throughout North America over this tragic issue. There are some indications that the complex situation in Southeast Asia is not fully understood by many Westerners.

Upon arrival in this fabulous continent, I was approached by various persons eager to obtain first hand information on the Vietnamese conflict. Much to my regret I did not have the courage at that time to comment on this subject. Therefore, I apologize for my silence.

It will be appreciated that, when I departed from the Orient, I was under great emotional strain. I felt that there was nothing left for me in Vietnam. Every member of my immediate family had been killed by the Communists. Naturally, I was looking forward to start a new life in my country of adoption but above all I wanted to forget the past.

To my profound gratitude Canada has given me a brighter outlook on the future. I have discovered the joy of living in a placid environment. Freedom is such a magic world; it is like a fairy tale to me.

On the other hand, I am dismayed beyond measure to read in the press and hear over the radio and TV so much criticism of the Saigon administration and protest against the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. I am perfectly aware that most of these misleading reports derive from unscrupulous newsmen. It is inconceivable that civilized people dare fabricate such monstrous lies to mask communist aggression in that area and depict the Americans as villains. The February issue (1968) of MacLean's Magazine might be cited as a classic example. Preconceived articles on Vietnam contained therein are fatuous and of very bad taste indeed. It leaves the reader with a completely distorted picture of the current situation.

In the light of the foregoing, I consider it my duty to present this great nation with a brief exposé of the realities in Vietnam lest the sacrifices of so many fine soldiers be in vain. And, at this point, I must emphasize that I was born and raised in North Vietnam; I fled into South Vietnam in 1955. Thus by the force of events rather than by choice, I became intimately familiar with the existing problems and the prevailing situation on both sides of the 17th parallel. Subsequent to my flight from the North, various sources kept me up-to-date with significant developments in that particular sector.

To begin with we shall examine the most common question: "What is this conflict all about? My answer to that is quite simple and let us not be shy or hide from it. The South Vietnamese people are struggling for their freedom against a most treacherous communist aggression led by the Hanoi regime with the blessing and wholehearted support of Peking and Moscow. This conflict is identical to the Korean War in 1950-53. Although Communists use differing tactics in South Vietnam their objective remains the same, i.e. domination of the southern portion of the country against the will of the people.

I feel certain that a great majority of those who oppose the Allied intervention in Vietnam would quickly change their views if they saw the results of the Viet Cong (Vietnamese Communist) atrocities. The blowing up of public buildings and buses loaded with civilians; terrorist attacks against women, children and elderly citizens and the use of flame throwers on local population are but a few examples. It is a tragic sight to see, lying on the city streets and along the roads, the dead bodies of the innocent victims of this vicious form of warfare. I pray to Almighty God that a just and honourable end to the war will soon be achieved.

By mounting an extensive propaganda campaign over the accidental killing of a few hundred North Vietnamese civilians in air raids, the Communists are trying to hide a whole decade of deliberate murder of thousands of non-military South Vietnamese. Furthermore, a large number of civilians has been maimed, in the South, in deliberate acts of Viet Cong terror, and an estimated 50,000 have been kidnapped.

Whole villages are burnt to the ground by the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. Young men are pressed into service with Red units; girls are degraded; school teachers, priests, nuns, policemen and civilian officials are tortured and assassinated. A main Viet Cong target is the village and hamlet leadership class. Murder and terrorization of non-combatant civilians are planned and deliberate; it is a key part of Communist strategy. Numerous persons are killed at random to intimidate large groups; others are singled out because they are civic or political leaders. Entire families are wiped out. By any definition, this is genocide.

The Viet Cong concentrated attacks against populated areas during the festival of the lunar new year (Tet), after having declared a seven-day truce, should be an eye opener to the whole world. Tet is a sacred holiday in the Far East. It is to Vietnam what Christmas is to America. Such bestial attacks during a festivity bring into focus Communist barbarism in all its forms. As a result, several thousands civilians were killed during the fighting and a large number of children, as well as sick and the aged, died of starvation. Hundreds of thousands became homeless throughout the country.

Just to refresh your memory, let us take a brief look at the geography and location of Vietnam. It is a long narrow country which forms the eastern coastal rim of the Southeast Asian peninsula bordering on the South China Sea. There is a common border with China in the North and with Laos and Cambodia on the West. Mountain ranges clearly mark all these inland borders.

From the southern tip, the coastline extends northward for almost 1,500 miles. At about the centre of the curve the country is only about 25 miles wide, but at either end it widens to about 300 miles in the North and 130 miles in the South. Its total area is 127,000 square miles - about the size of Southern Ontario.

The population of Vietnam as a whole is approximately 36 million, with 17 million living south of the 17th parallel and 19 million north of it. Saigon is the capital of the South. It has, with its twin city Cholon, a population of nearly 3 million. Hanoi is the capital of the North. It had, prior to its evacuation, a population of about 600,000.

In the South, religion and religious belief play a large part, not only in the spiritual life of the country, but politically as well. Approximately 60% of the population are Buddhists and 10% are Catholics. The Cao Dai have 2 million adherents and the Hoa Hao have approximately 1 million followers. Various American Protestant missions have been in Vietnam for the past 50 years and their activities are mainly with the mountain tribes of the hill country in the central provinces. Baptist and Seventh Day Adventist missions are also found in several cities. With 60% of the population being Buddhist adherents, Buddhist bonzes are in a position to exert strong pressure on the Government. Inexplicably, it is suspected that a few Buddhist monks have succumbed to Communism.

A summary of past history would help us to better understand the Vietnam of today. Of particular interest, I shall mention that the Indochinese states came under French suzerainty in 1883. Hanoi was then chosen as the seat of the French Administration in Vietnam. Saigon, at that time, was a city of secondary importance. The first Vietnamese revolutionary party was established in 1912. The area fell under Japanese control during the Second World War, but in 1944 Ho Chi Minh formed a provisional government of free Vietnam. Following the Japanese capitulation in 1945, the French fought to recapture their former colony and quit only after the fall of Dien Bien Phu. But the Communists were unable to capture all of Vietnam and are still struggling towards their goals.

It is noteworthy that the French Army had several Foreign Legion battalions in its ranks during the Indochina war. Cases of rape and brutality towards civilians were frequent with these units. To a certain extent these incidents drove the local population against the French. Nevertheless, it is most unlikely that the Viet Minh (communist guerillas from North Viet Nam) under General Giap's command would have achieved any success without the support of Red China and other communist states.

The humiliating French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954 marked the end of the Indochina war that had gone on for eight years. It led to the French withdrawal and the Geneva settlement that divided Vietnam. In the North, President Ho Chi Minh formed the Hanoi Government. And the government in the South, in Saigon, came under the leadership of President Ngo Dinh Diem.

The Cease Fire Agreement signed at Geneva on 20 July, 1954, provisionally divided Vietnam into two fairly equal parts separated by the Demilitarized Zone, which is some 10 kilometers wide and which runs along the Ben Hai River from its mouth due west to the border of Laos. Because the Ben Hai River is close to the 17th parallel, the Demarcation Line is usually referred to as the 17th parallel.

Representatives of France, the Viet Minh, Cambodia, Laos, Red China, South Vietnam, the USSR, the UK and the USA took part in the Geneva Conference. These representatives, with the exception of South Vietnam and the USA, signed a Final Declaration commenting on the Cease Fire Agreements for Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The 1954 Cease Fire Agreement for Vietnam contained 47 Articles. The USA took formal note of the Cease Fire Agreement and the Final Declaration, and made a general declaration of its own against the use of force and the renewal of aggression in violation of these agreements.

The British and Soviet Foreign Ministers, in their capacity as Co-Chairmen of the Conference, invited Canada to serve with India and Poland on a Commission which would supervise the implementation of the Cease Fire Agreement.

The responsibilities of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam (ICSC) included the supervision of the regrouping of forces, as well as a variety of others assumed by the Parties, including supervision of the movement of refugees, of the exit and entry of war materiel and personnel, the prohibition of reprisals and discrimination against persons who had participated in the hostilities, the demilitarization of a zone between the two parts of Vietnam and the obligation of North and South to refrain from the resumption of hostilities or the adoption of an aggressive policy towards the other party.

The mandate of the ICSC is to examine and report on breeches of the Cease Fire Agreement. To carry out this mandate various team sites were established in both North and South Vietnam. However, at the request of the North Vietnamese Government, all teams were withdrawn from the North in February, 1965. Only the small detachment in Hanoi was allowed to remain on site.

Within the framework of the Commission, each delegation is headed by a Commissioner, i.e. India, Canada and Poland. Under the terms of the Geneva Agreement, the Indian Commissioner is ex officio Chairman of the Commission. Parliamentary procedures are followed at the regular and special meetings of the Commission.

The Commission, in its early years of operation, provided a useful service. It would be a fair criticism that the ICSC has, to a great extent, been overtaken by events which were not foreseen by the drafters of the Cease Fire Agreement and that it has become practically invalid. Nevertheless, the Commission draws timely attention to the fact of violations of the 1954 Agreement, and the various powers most directly involved in the conflict in Vietnam seem to think that the Commission's mere existence serves as a reminder of the Geneva settlement.

At the outset of his nationalist movement, Ho Chi Minh gained enthusiastic support from all quarters. To the majority of the Vietnamese people it was a liberation movement, not a communist struggle. However, Ho Chi Minh lost several of his staunch supporters when it was realised that he had communist designs in the making. To the despair of the nation, it was already too late. The Viet Minh were gradually tightening their grip on the control of power and there was no possible escape. As if to confirm our fear, Ho Chi Minh turned out to be the Fidel Castro of Southeast Asia after the fall of Dien Bien Phu.

When North Vietnamese representatives signed the Geneva Agreement in 1954 they thought elections would be held in two years and that the remainder of the country would then fall under their control. But the South Vietnamese people were determined not to drift under Communist domination and applied pressure on President Diem to defer the elections which could have had that result. Hanoi, therefore, had to resort to other tactics to achieve its end.

After Geneva it soon became evident that the Hanoi regime did not intend to respect any of the agreements. Their Armed Forces were increased considerably, and a flow of subversive agents and bands of guerillas infiltrated the South.

In 1960, in North Vietnam, following the Third Congress of the Lao Dong Party, i.e. the Communist Party, a "Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam" (political arm of the Viet Cong) was set up to mask the degree of Hanoi's control over the Viet Cong (VC). The overt explanation from Hanoi is that the VC is made up principally of democratic neutralists whose main object is to get rid of the U.S. presence in South Vietnam without seeking the immediate reunification of the country under Hanoi control.

But whatever the degree of so-called "non-Communist" participation, it is most unlikely that non-Communist elements, if any, in the Liberation Front would be able to free themselves from Communist control in the event of a political settlement bringing the war to an end.

The Viet Cong have developed their base in South Vietnam through stated application of principles of revolutionary warfare. They destroyed, by selective use of terror, what local administration there was and proceeded to establish their own.

The Diem regime, and its successors, have attempted to counter this by plans with a variety of names and with a variation of details. The essential ingredients of all the plans, however, have been: to regroup peasants into defensible areas; to improve the quality and honesty of local administration; to pour social and economic assistance into regrouping areas in order to give the peasants something worth defending; to spread the area of Government control a bit at a time ("clear and hold" is the description given to this Rural Reconstruction Plan) so that an area once given Government protection is not abandoned, even temporarily to the VC. The plan is basically sound, but it cannot be fully implemented because Government troops and their allies are preoccupied with meeting the purely military VC threat. Even if broader consideration permitted application of this plan, it would be a long, hard struggle.

It is pointed out that the flow of arms and personnel from the North into the South increased considerably after the creation of the National Liberation Front (FLN). Defectors and prisoners confessed that they were from the North; caches of weapons and ammunition with North Vietnamese markings were uncovered; captured documents giving a breakdown of the VC field organization and command structure up to the North Vietnam High Command as well as orders and instructions issued to the VC by North Vietnam were produced but the Hanoi regime kept denying all violations until such time as full North Vietnamese regiments were identified in the South thus rendering any further concealment impossible.

Faced with this mounting threat, the Saigon Government launched an urgent appeal to the free world requesting all possible assistance in its struggle for freedom. A spontaneous response was received from the following countries which sent their brave soldiers to fight communist aggression alongside the Government troops: the USA, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines. Several other countries, including Japan and Malaysia, are providing material support to the Saigon administration. Needless to say that without the gigantic backing of its gallant allies, South Vietnam would have fallen under the communist yoke long ago.

At this point, it is necessary to have a look at the situation and living conditions in North Vietnam if we wish to understand the reason why the South Vietnamese people have such an aversion towards the Hanoi regime and are so resolved not to fall under its control. As I stated before, I was born and raised in North Vietnam. My father owned a few acres of land which he had inherited from his ancestors. The whole family was strongly united and we had an extremely happy life. Like any other mountain tribes, money meant very little to us. Our land, together with the neighboring rivers and forests, provided more food than required for our need. Hence we exchanged our surplus products at the town market, approximately 10 kilometers away, for other commodities and a few luxuries.

My father, being a canton chief, was revered by everyone. He had always shunned politics. In the beginning of 1953, my father and my eldest brother were both assassinated by the Viet Minh, in my terrified presence, for having refused to endorse the communist movement. During that year, a large number of honest mountaineers and peasants were executed in a similar manner. Any who opposed Communists were destroyed, others were frightened into their ranks.

Christianity has been stamped out in North Vietnam since the emergence of Communism; religion has become taboo. Foreign missionaries have either been executed or have left the country long ago. Buddhist monks, who are such a common sight in the South as well as in any other free Asian countries, are not seen anywhere in North Vietnam. The new generation has never heard the gospel.

Hanoi, which used to be known as the "Pearl of the Orient" under the French rule, has become one of the most dismal places on earth since 1954. People are poorly dressed and the morale is relatively low. Buildings have an urgent need of repair and painting. Only a few cars are seen and are for the sole use of Government officials and Party members. On the other hand, old bicycles with pieces of rubber wrapped around the wheels are common sight; tires are expensive and in short supply. The elegant cafés of old, restaurants and night clubs have disappeared long ago. Fruit is plentiful but grocery stores and butcher shops are practically bare. The large state store, which used to be referred to as the "Galleries Lafayette of the Far East" looks exactly like a museum. There are only a few articles on its shelves. A good percentage of the labour is done by women as most of the young men are either in the police or the Armed Forces.

In North Vietnam, guns and ammunition are taking precedence over food and clothing which are stringently rationed. A woman, for instance, is basically entitled to three square meters of cloth per year. With the exception of fruits, most foodstuff is on ration, and several items are unobtainable. National resources are funnelled into war making. Consequently, people have been tightening their belts since 1954.

Following the Communist take over in North Vietnam, all private property, cars, bank accounts, etc., were confiscated. To pay for their crimes, the ex-owners were sent to do labour work away from their families being allowed to come back for a visit once a year or twice at the most. It will be noted that travelling is restricted throughout the country and rigidly controlled.

North Vietnamese, with the exception of officials on duty, are not allowed to hold conversation with Westerners. Young boys have been arrested for accepting cigarettes from foreigners. A twelve-year old girl was prosecuted for having smiled at a European. At school, children are brained-washed in Communist ideology to such an extent that even their parents can no longer trust them. In several cases parents having been denounced by their own children were arrested for having voiced their dissatisfaction of the regime.

Perhaps the whole situation can best be described by the following incident. A few years ago, a French-speaking member of the Canadian Delegation stationed in Hanoi went to the fruit market to buy persimmons. He was served by an old lady who could talk French fluently. In her emotion, despite the rigid law interdicting any conversations with foreigners, she told this young Canadian: "I have visited Canada in 1938 and I like your country very much. When you return home, please let your people know how oppressed we are in North Vietnam". She was arrested and executed shortly afterwards. Was this perhaps the loose talk of a tired old woman? Definitely not: this is the plight of practically every mother and grandmother living North of the 17th parallel.

Contrary to a widespread belief, only a small percentage of the whole population in North Vietnam is Communist. The remainder are forced into submission by the regime. I am positive that, if the bamboo curtain was raised and the North Vietnamese were free to leave the country at will without any fear of reprisal against other members of the family, a mass exodus into the South would ensue.

With a few exceptions, the policy of the Hanoi regime is to let no one enter the country unless it serves the purpose of the Party. For instance, a newsman will normally not be granted an entry visa until the regime has the assurance that he will write a so called "friendly" story. Movements of foreigners are restricted in North Vietnam. Throughout the country, visitors are accompanied by official guides who are in fact security officers. When strolling along by themselves within the Hanoi restricted area, all westerners including members of the Canadian Delegation, are usually followed by secret police.

Like Castro, Ho Chi Minh is a former student from the Moscow school. At 78, Ho is a fragile old man and is nothing more than a fatherly figure within the Party. Although General Vo Nguyen Giap and Truong Chinh are dominating figures, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong appears to have emerged as the strong man. However, the regime is full of intrigues and the struggle for power is still in full swing. While the mass of the people are being oppressed, Party members indulge in dubious financial arrangements, embezzlements and diversion of funds.

Opinions regarding the conduct of the war are divided as much in Hanoi as they are in Washington. Ever since the beginning of 1966 the hawks and the doves in the North have debated the merits of continuing the war against the power of the United States. The present course of action appears futile and insane to the doves. However, the mere fact that several American Congressmen oppose the Allied intervention in Vietnam gives strength to the North Vietnamese hawks in their contention that the U.S. will be forced eventually to abandon South Vietnam.

Approximately 1,000,000 North Vietnamese fled from the North into the South after the partition of the country in 1954. I followed suit with my younger brother in 1955; the rest of my family had been murdered by the Viet Minh. Shortly after my flight, the bamboo curtain was lowered on the border thus preventing anyone from leaving or entering the North. Therefore, the fate of the North Vietnamese people was ultimately sealed.

My brother joined the South Vietnamese Army as soon as he became of age. He was killed a few years later in an operation against the Viet Cong. On two occasions, I applied to enroll for service with the paramilitary forces in South Vietnam but I was turned down on account of my being underweight.

It would be misleading, of course, to imply that corruption is nonexistent in South Vietnam. As a matter of fact, graft has been a way of life in Asia for many centuries. It is a system which goes back to the mandarins. At one time it was almost patriotic for an Asian to steal from colonial government; chiseling was a part of the Oriental ambiance. In South Vietnam, war and inflation have given an upsurge to this permissive atmosphere. Therefore, in July 1967 the Chief of State, General Nguyen Van Thieu, signed a decree specifying the death penalty for any military or government employe caught taking bribes, abusing his office or stealing public funds. Communists, of course, exploit the situation by grossly exaggerating the degree of corruption and prostitution in South Vietnam. Nevertheless, the brandishing of these evils by the Communists in a massive propaganda campaign do not absolve them of their own sins and crimes.

Presidential elections for South Vietnam were held on 3 September, 1967. Detractors, as usual, suggested that these elections were being rigged. In view of those accusations, General Ky invited various countries to send observers to witness the election process at first hand. The United States, in particular, sent 22 of their representatives as eye-witnesses of that electoral campaign. The majority of all foreign observers satisfied themselves that the elections were fair and everyone was clearly impressed with the organization of the balloting.

President Nguyen Van Thieu and Vice-President Nguyen Cao Ky were elected to office with a substantial majority. Approximately 20% of the total nation-wide eligible voters cast their ballots in favour of the Thieu-Ky ticket. This result might lead one to believe that the President and Vice-President of South Vietnam do not have the confidence of the people. As a matter of fact the votes were split in many ways for the simple reason that eleven candidates were running for the presidency. Furthermore, a large number of electors were kept away from the polls by the Viet Cong who were boycotting the elections. In their attempt to vote, more people were deliberately murdered by the VC than there were civilians reported killed accidentally in air raids over North Vietnam.

Some critics hold that the Saigon government is a dictatorship and unworthy of support. Of course, what the South Vietnamese people have today is a war government. In any country, responsible leaders must take on extra powers during periods of national emergency. For instance, Prime Minister Churchill's powers in Great Britain during World War 2 might be considered dictatorial when viewed in peacetime. In South Vietnam, as in any country, there are certain factions who oppose their own government. However, this does not necessarily mean that dissenters of the Saigon administration in the South are seeking a communist regime.

There has been an increase in the number of draft dodgers in South Vietnam during the past few years. However, it is expected that, with the forthcoming mobilization, all males between the age of 18 and 45 will be called up for military duty and that stern measures will be taken to implement this decree.

The South Vietnamese enjoy many of the rights and freedoms that are usually found in a democracy although the country has been at war for a quarter of a century. Life in the South is greatly emancipated in comparison with the oppressive living conditions of the North. South Vietnam is moving towards democracy but it must have a period of peace to achieve its goal.

Food and clothing are plentiful in the South but prices have soared enormously during the past few years. Eminent groups now recommend the rationing of basic food as a measure to combat inflation. A recent presidential decree has closed out all bars; it is considered that money should be spent in helping the poor and in boosting the war effort rather than on entertainments.

Populated areas, South of the 17th parallel, are overcrowded with refugees; hospitals are packed with sick and injured persons. Each and every individual bears the scar of this atrocious communist aggression. Hundreds of thousands are homeless. Most admirably, very few complain about their misery and suffering. Supreme sacrifices are widely accepted as the high price one must pay for freedom. The adage "Better dead than Red" would be appropriate to express the thinking of the masses. Everyone attends to his normal business with a relative calm although death might be around the corner. Peasants plow their rice paddies with water buffaloes, as did their ancestors centuries ago, but today they are in constant fear of being blown up by a Viet Cong mine or of being abducted by the Communists and pressed into their battalions.

Nevertheless, the nation as a whole has faith in its allies and is hopefully looking towards a brighter future. Parents trust that their children will eventually have a better life than they themselves have had, free of foreign coercion and subversion. The new generation, which has known nothing but war, hopes that a peaceful settlement will soon be achieved. In sharp contrast with the North, pretty girls wearing colourful "ao dai" (ladies national dress) are seen everywhere in the South.

Opponents of the Vietnam war claim that the population failed to rise against the Viet Cong during the Tet offensive. This indicates clearly how little knowledge these well-intentioned people have of the situation. In all fairness, how can unarmed civilians fight against murderous guerilla bands. On the other hand, the Hanoi regime thought they could win over people they wrongly considered were ripe for conversion. The Viet Cong have not won any appreciable number of hearts and minds. Only a few spivs and the very poor - some trishaw drivers, people like that, responded to their call.

Perhaps I should explain the reaction of the South Vietnamese which in certain circumstances is wrongly interpreted by the West. For instance, in insecure areas civilians will pretend to be totally indifferent and even hostile at times towards the Government troops and the allies. It is pointed out that this artificial attitude is motivated by fear of communist repercussions. If these same people are placed in a secure area they will come out openly on the Allied side and will normally volunteer valuable information concerning the Viet Cong. Only a very small percentage of the peasants are communist sympathizers.

The terrain, in South Vietnam, lends itself to ambush and to the hit-and-run tactics of guerilla warfare, and is generally unsuitable for conventional warfare. One really has to see the area to realize the very dense vegetation throughout the country which provides ideal concealment from air and ground observation, and assists VC raiding parties to escape.

It may be remembered that in previous campaigns against guerilla forces such as in Malaya, not only was the geography of the country more of an assist to Government forces than a hindrance, but the required number of troops (estimated at a 9 - 1 ratio) was available. The current ratio in South Vietnam is perhaps a little better than 7 - 1, which is still short of that considered by most competent military authorities as a requirement to successfully wage an anti-guerilla war.

No fair-minded Asian believes that America has any ulterior economic or territorial motives in the Far East. We are aware, in the Orient, that the United States returned all the territories occupied in World War 2 and spent vast amounts of money to rebuild these countries. For instance, America helped Japan to become one of the most prosperous countries in the world. It gave independence to the Philippines and sent its soldiers to save South Korea from communist domination. These are facts no amount of propaganda can distort.

The United States has not only the right to be in South Vietnam, but it is bound to the defence of Southeast Asia under several commitments. Red China has openly and brazenly declared her aggressive intentions. North Vietnam has subversive agents and guerilla bands operating in Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Eastern Burma as well as in South Vietnam. What excuse can the Hanoi regime offer to justify these aggressive acts? What excuse had Red China to invade Tibet which is one of the most peaceful nations on earth? Consequently, the American shield is indispensable in South Vietnam to prevent the Communists from conquering all of Southeast Asia and eventually flooding into India and Japan.

Pacifists who claim that the conflict in Vietnam is only a civil war are completely cut off from the reality of the world in which they are living. The problem of South Vietnam goes much further than the border of that unfortunate country, and deeply affects the future and national existence of all the Southeast Asian countries and, in my view, Australia and New Zealand as well. It is a conflict between murderers and a people which wishes only to live in peace. It is a struggle between freedom and slavery; between communism and democracy. South Vietnam, in essence, has become the first line of defence against the spread of Chinese-style communism by war and insurrection. If the Americans pull out, it is certain that they will face more and tougher Vietnams at a later date. A powerful Red China occupying the whole of Southeast Asia, and pointing nuclear missiles in all directions would be a serious threat to the security of the world, including the USSR.

It is true enough that twenty-seven years of war have worn out the soul as well as the body of the South Vietnamese. Nevertheless, while handfults of anti-war demonstrators are making headlines throughout the world, Government troops and their gallant allies are quietly making personal sacrifices in the jungles fighting communist aggression. Many South Vietnamese soldiers serving with combat units have already been wounded five or six times.

Even though Vietnam is one country, ideological differences have in reality turned it into two as in Korea and Germany. If North Korea had no right to attack South Korea, and if West Germany has no authority to take over East Germany, then North Vietnam must be subject to the same restraint. Everyone will agree, I am sure, that South Vietnam has the right to self-determination as have any other small nations. The vast majority of its people reject communism and only want to live in peace. The South Vietnamese have their own aspirations in a democratic way of life free of outside interference.

It does seem mysterious that so many intellectuals look forward with complacency to a communist victory in Vietnam. For they are looking forward, of course, to the rapid spread of a system which means the murder of the free mind. The cultural revolution in Red China, the prevailing oppressive rules of communist states, the recent student uprising in countries behind the Iron Curtain, the Hungarian revolution in 1956 and, above all, the Viet Cong atrocities in South Vietnam should encourage a second thought to those who are attracted by communism.

No aspect of the war in Vietnam has caused more controversy than the U.S. air raids on the North. Demands and petitions that they be stopped come from all quarters. Last December, for example, both Pope Paul VI and the National Council of Churches pleaded for an extended pause. On the other hand, many politicians and military men feel that, to be really effective, the raids should be stepped up to include some of North Vietnam's most vital targets.

Naturally, the bombing of my native land gives me great concern; some of my friends and distant relatives are bound to get killed in these air raids. Nevertheless, I shall not let my emotion prevail over my conscience. I am sincerely convinced, deep in my heart, that uninterrupted bombing of military and strategic targets over the North is an absolute necessity to bring this terrible war to an early conclusion.

The air campaign is causing serious manpower, supply and morale problems to Hanoi. That strategy, we must remind ourselves, is for the purpose of changing the will of the adversary and bringing him to accept the impossibility of imposing a Communist regime on South Vietnam. In fact, many North Vietnamese regard the air war as a blessing in that they hope it will eventually bring about the downfall of their tyrannical regime.

The bombing, of course, is hurting the North badly and they are seeking a breathing spell. Consequently, the Hanoi leaders are crying from the roof tops that if the pounding stops they will talk peace. By the same token, it would be naive to believe that a cessation of the bombing will bring peace to Vietnam.

Let us examine, for instance, what has happened during previous bombing pauses. To my knowledge, the bombing over the North has been suspended on at least ten different occasions since its initiation in February, 1965. The pause which followed the Christmas truce in 1965, for example, lasted thirty-seven days. It is estimated, during that particular period, that the flow of arms and personnel into the South was ten times greater than that normal under conditions of air raids. This was followed by stepped up terrorist attacks against villages and massive mortar and rocket attacks on military installations, airports and cities, resulting in a considerable increase in loss of human lives among both military and civilian personnel. Then the Hanoi regime declared that they would not talk peace unless all the Americans pull out of South Vietnam.

Through a variety of media, Communist leaders seek to obscure the issue of North Vietnamese aggression by grossly exaggerating the number of civilians accidentally killed in the air war. In fact, casualties attributable to U.S. bombs over North Vietnam are relatively low. It is noteworthy that a large number of North Vietnamese are injured by their own flak and projectiles. Actually, the total casualties in air raids over the North represent a very small fraction of the number of non-combatant civilians deliberately murdered by the Viet Cong in the South.

In order to keep civilian casualties to a minimum, U.S. pilots fly very low for greater precision, thus endangering their own lives, since they become more vulnerable to ground fire. Attacks on certain targets are purposely avoided because they are too close to urban residential areas. Hanoi is fully aware that the U.S. could bomb North Vietnam back "to the Stone Age" if this was its object.

The formation of a coalition government with the Viet Cong or the neutralization of the country will never be accepted by the South Vietnamese people. An accommodation of this nature would only be used by the Communists as a stepping stone for a complete take over at a later date. The lesson learned after the fall of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, where non-Communist elements, who had fought with great distinction, could not free themselves from Viet Minh control is to fresh in the memory of every South Vietnamese. Likewise, the flagrant violation of the neutrality of Laos and Cambodia by North Vietnam is a constant warning to the Saigon government that the Hanoi regime must not be trusted.

On July 23, 1962, a 14-nation conference in Geneva guaranteed Laos its independence and neutrality. Under the Geneva Protocols, no foreign troops were to remain on the territory of Laos. In conformity with this agreement, the United States immediately withdrew all its military personnel from that country. Before the ink was dry on the agreement they signed in 1962 at Geneva, the Communists started a campaign to subvert and take over the government of Laos - one of the things they had pledged not to do. Significantly, instead of reducing its forces in Laos, North Vietnam has now at least two full Army divisions stationed there, attacking the Royal Lao Government troops and using the country as an infiltration route into South Vietnam.

By observing a strict neutrality, the Head of State in Cambodia (Prince Sihanouk) is doing everything in his power to keep his tiny country out of the war. In spite of this neutral policy, the government and the people of Cambodia are being harassed by subversive agents and by guerilla bands from Hanoi. Furthermore, the Viet Cong have at least six training and staging camps in Cambodia. They use that neutral country as a sanctuary as well as a base for their attacks against South Vietnam.

It is deplorable that certain unscrupulous politicians and world leaders exploit the Vietnam war in order to achieve their own ambition or satisfy their own personal feeling. For instance, General de Gaulle's diatribes insisting that the United States must pull out of Vietnam is regarded as sheer madness. It is pointed out that a large number of people in both North and South Vietnam feel that the Paris administration "sold out" their country to the Communists at the Geneva Conference in 1954. Therefore, the French President should have the decency at this juncture to remain silent on this tragic issue rather than giving moral lectures to our great allies.

Let us remind ourselves that it would be the biggest crime in history for the Americans to abandon South Vietnam under the present circumstances. More than half a million people are earmarked for execution following this course of action.

The Viet Cong do not hide their diabolic intention, in the event of a victory, to carry out a massive purge in South Vietnam which would surpass in atrocity and terror the massacres that have followed the Communist take over in Manchuria and Tibet. Those who are skeptical of the possibility of this happening should visit the city of Hue where the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong have put into practice, with their usual efficiency, the traditional Communist policy of punishing by execution selected leaders, government officials, priests, teachers, policemen and everyone who has supported their enemies. The mass graves of these victims, in and around Hue, are a silent testimony to atrocious Communist vindictiveness.

With the exception of communist states, most countries in Asia are looking towards the West in general and towards the United States in particular for assistance and leadership. Withdrawal of the United States from Vietnam in view of its various commitments would have absolutely disastrous effects, not only in the Far East, but farther afield. The Americans would be mistrusted and hated throughout Asia for generations to come; no country in the Orient would want to trade with America.

According to several military and political experts including Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer, former Chief of the General Staff, and Commander of the British and Gurkha troops who beat the communist guerilla rising in Malaya, if the Americans pull out of Vietnam the Communists will take over the whole of Southeast Asia, Burma, India and westward to the shore of the Caspian Sea.

Hanoi knows that it cannot win a military victory in South Vietnam, as long as the Americans are there. It counts on political instability, war weariness, impatience, peace movements and above all on a massive propaganda campaign. To that end, international Communists are staging anti-American demonstrations throughout the world disguised under such headings as "Peace in Vietnam", "End the War in Vietnam", etc. Of course, Hanoi wants peace but at what price? "Total withdrawal of U.S. troops and a complete take over of South Vietnam". How would the Communists react if the allies were asking for a complete take over of North Vietnam as their price for peace?

A typical example of anti-American propoganda is the documentary film entitled "Last Reflection on a War" which was shown lately on the CBC network. I could not agree more with Mr. Rowland Evans that it was "calculated to arouse hostility against the U.S.". It is obvious that one of the Vietnamese who is being interviewed is making a great effort to memorize a prepared lesson. If Mr. Bernard Fall had been as honest in his intention to show a true picture of the Vietnamese conflict as his wife claims he was, he would have without fail shown some of the Viet Cong atrocities, he would have shown American doctors treating sick children and wounded civilians, he would have interviewed North Vietnamese refugees and defectors, foreign missionaries, a few of the millions of South Vietnamese who shudder at the mere thought of U.S. abandonment. His views, of course, are widely known throughout South Vietnam.

What is happening in Vietnam is not the picture we receive in certain local newspapers of a little country being bullied by the United States. The issue is not American involvement, but Communist aggression. To talk of a recent escalation of the American effort is to ignore the escalation of Communist militarism in the previous ten years.

It is true that South Vietnamese troops are making mistakes. U.S. pilots have also bombed South Vietnamese civilians as well as their own forces, due to navigational errors. These mishaps are bound to happen in any war. However, meticulous investigations are held in every case where civilians have been accidentally killed and remedial actions are taken accordingly. No targets are bombed in South Vietnam without previous approval of the local authorities.

I have not heard of any atrocities committed by the Americans in South Vietnam. Contrary to a widespread belief, very few children or civilians are burned by U.S. napalm and phosphorous bombs. Most of the burns are inflicted by the Viet Cong who set gasoline traps for people. A few months ago I saw the picture of a little boy in a magazine. The article said he had been burned by a napalm bomb. Incidentally, I recognized the child and I know for a fact that he was injured by the VC in a terrorist attack. This is the type of communist lies and distortions that we see quite frequently in the press. It is becoming common practice for the Viet Cong to burn villages, kill civilians and then blame the Americans for doing it.

We shall bear in mind that every criticism of the Saigon administration or of the U.S. policy in Vietnam gives comfort to the Hanoi regime, strengthens the will of the enemy in his determination to dominate the South, prolongs the war and indirectly increases the suffering and the number of casualties on both sides of the 17th parallel. If professed pacifists were sincere in their aim to end the war, they would hold a peaceful demonstration in front of USSR embassies throughout the world and request this great power to stop sending arms to Hanoi; 80% of the total war supply in North Vietnam comes from Russia.

Anti-American demonstrators are rendering a great disservice to North Vietnam as well as to the South. Peaceniks seem to forget that the majority of the North Vietnamese people are against this fratricidal war which is being imposed upon them by their tyrannical regime. It is reported that the terrific U.S. air power has inflicted such a frightening number of casualties lately on General Giap's military personnel in the Khe Sanh area that wounded soldiers are being evacuated to hospital in Southern China in order to conceal their toll from the North Vietnamese population.

People in the North are not allowed to hold demonstrations against their regime. Although the Party is conducting a massive propaganda campaign such as exaggerating tenfold the number of U.S. aircraft shot down, insinuating that the South is begging the North to liberate them from the Americans, etc., the common North Vietnamese knows deep in his heart that this is not so. The man in the street is worried and is looking to an early end of this war.

These are the realities of the war in Vietnam as seen and lived by 30 million Vietnamese. This is the story of an unfortunate country which has been engaged in a fratricidal conflict for a quarter of a century for the sake of a few maniacs who are trying to impose their own ideology on a whole nation against the will of the majority. These are the bare facts of a civil war which has expanded into such international proportions as to confront superpowers, divide the opinion of churches throughout the world, affect the economy of the richest country on earth, threaten the freedom of the entire Asian continent; where the communist lie depicts the murderer as the hero and the martyr as the aggressor; where unscrupulous politicians claim that it is immoral for South Vietnam to fight for its freedom against a most treacherous communist aggression; where America is being condemned rather than admired throughout the world for its heroic action in assisting a weak nation in self-defence; where the integrity of a great nation, the United States, is at stake. If, in the quest for temporary peace of mind, we ignore these facts we are inviting disaster.

It is beyond comprehension how Ho Chi Minh and his accomplices, haunted with their monstrous crimes, can sleep at night. For the number of innocent victims who have lost their lives on account of these lunatics is a frightening figure. It is only known to God.

Personally, I lay awake at night thinking about my own people in their tribulation; freedom, which is often taken for granted in this hemisphere, must be paid for in blood in South Vietnam. I feel rather guilty to remain comfortably idle in this beautiful land while my countrymen are getting killed in their struggle against communist aggression. It seems that 14 million people are pointing their fingers at me.

In my thought I visualize the assassination by the Viet Minh of my father who in his last words exhorted the rest of our family not to yield to communist pressure. I still can see in my mind's eye the dead body of a foreign missionary mutilated by the Viet Minh. I shall never forget the scenes in Haiphong where, following the Geneva Conference, thousands of North Vietnamese awaited a plane or a ship in their exodus into the South. The sight of a hamlet close to my own in the South is still fresh in my memory where 40 women, children and elderly people were slaughtered by the Viet Cong; babies lying beheaded like chickens. I recall a fatally wounded South Vietnamese soldier praying to Buddha that his sacrifice be not in vain. I can see the huge cemetery near Saigon where thousands of South Vietnamese soldiers are resting in peace. I still visualize with tears in my eyes a huge pile of home-bound coffins being loaded in a U.S. jet; they contained the remains of fine American boys who have given their lives, in a strange land, in a most frustrating war, in order that a weak nation may live in peace. How people can hold demonstrations against a cause where so many young men have made the supreme sacrifice is beyond the scope of my understanding. This does not appear to be in keeping with principles of western civilization.

I often have nightmares and it seems that the whole world is going back to barbarism. I only wish I could forget the past completely.

It has been abundantly clear to everyone in the past that Hanoi has not been interested in a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam war. All effort by the allies and by several world leaders to bring about an end to this terrible conflict through negotiations have failed so far.

This proves that Communists will understand only one thing: force. No country has tried harder than India to find security by a deliberate policy of passivity. As have others, India has had to learn the hard way when attacked by Red China in 1962 that expansionist states do not respect weakness. Violations of Laotian and Cambodian territories and aggressions against South Vietnam have shown the world that Hanoi does not respect neutrality nor honour agreements.

However, recent developments tend to indicate Hanoi has at long last realized that domination of the South is out of its reach. Perhaps this message has also got to Moscow but it is most unlikely that it will ever be accepted by Peking.

This sudden reversal of position by North Vietnam might be attributed to the heroic stand by the U.S. marines at Khe Sanh, the effective bombing of the North, the failure by the VC during the Tet offensive to arouse the South Vietnamese against the Saigon government, the success of air strikes against Communist troops and, perhaps, the constant drainage of the USSR economy in providing arms and equipment to North Vietnam free of charge.

However, anyone who understands the mentality of the Vietnamese people knows that it could be unbearable for the Hanoi leaders to come to the peace table without a face saving of some description. I consider that the magnanimous move by President Johnson not to seek nor accept nomination at the next presidential election has provided this "behind the scene" outlet for North Vietnam to take a first step in the direction of peace negotiation.

On the other hand, it can be expected that Red China will try to stall any peace movement. Therefore, the process of finding a peaceful solution is likely to take several months and the waiting period will be rather hard on the nerves. It would be inviting disaster to neutralize South Vietnam or to impose upon Saigon the formation of a coalition government with the Viet Cong. We must bear in mind that the fate of all Asian nations hinges on the settlement of the Vietnam war. U.S. bases must remain in South Vietnam, Thailand and South Korea for many years to come in order to discourage any further aggression in those areas. The day must not be sold for the hour.

At the same time, a settlement which to any extent looks like a defeat of North Vietnam would be rejected by Hanoi, I am sure. But Moscow might even perhaps help Hanoi to save face by accepting some of the odium of agreeing to a negotiated settlement which gives Hanoi less than its goals.

Nevertheless, the allies must continue to apply military pressure throughout South Vietnam and maintain the air strikes around the Demilitarized Zone lest the negotiations drag into another Panmunjom. It is considered that Hanoi should be simply requested to withdraw all its troops and subversive agents from South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma - no more, no less. Vietnam must remain divided by the 17th parallel. With the exception of the return of prisoners, there is nothing to negotiate. It could well be that Hanoi intends to undertake a quiet de-escalation, and eventually the war will fizzle out.

Settlement of the Vietnam war can best be described by the following statement made by the late Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York at Christmas 1966 in Saigon, as though he had a presentiment of this being the last of his several visits in that area: "Anything short of a U.S. victory in Vietnam is unthinkable". Not a victory in the usual sense, explained the venerable prelate, but a victory for the sake of genuine peace. To this end, President Johnson has set an example to all politicians and world leaders in placing the search for peace above his personal ambition and interest.

At this point, I can find no adequate words to express the profound gratitude of the South Vietnamese people towards their great allies for the tremendous assistance given them in their struggle for freedom.

Finally, I request every person of good will to understand, in their own consciences, the grave situation in Vietnam. I make an appeal to the students in particular, who are shaping the world of tomorrow (their own world), not to let Communist fallacy deceive them and to refrain from giving comfort to our enemy by suspending anti-American demonstrations. I urge the world leaders to use their great influence and good offices in order to end this atrocious conflict. Perhaps I have a larger stake than anyone in the resolution of this war. I have lost my whole family and our property. Furthermore, it might never again be safe for me to visit my native land. But hate does not achieve anything. We shall let forgiveness and the prospect of peace fill our hearts.

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