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Viet-Nam Today

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This pamphlet is the text of an address made by U. Alexis Johnson, Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs, before the New England Press Association at Boston, Mass., on January 21, 1966.

Viet-Nam Today

I genuinely appreciate this opportunity to discuss Viet-Nam with you this evening. The questions we face there are of such moment that they properly concern and trouble every thinking American.

As you of the press have so ably and repeatedly informed the American public, the problems we face are complex and the answers are not simple. Also, I know that you are fully conscious of the heavy burden you bear in providing a forum for

that free and public discussion necessary for an enlightened people.

I do not this evening propose to give you any pat answers, nor do I propose to try to oversimplify the problem. What I hope to do is to share with you some of my own observations and thoughts, going back to my first personal association with Viet-Nam as a member of our delegation to the Geneva conference of 1954, my conversations with the Chinese Communists in Geneva from 1954 to 1958, my service on the SEATO Council, and most recently my service in Viet-Nam. I also want to summarize briefly the broad approach your Government is taking to this problem both in Viet-Nam and in the sphere of international politics.

The question is *not* whether Viet-Nam itself, or indeed Southeast Asia as a whole, is of such political, strategic, or economic importance as to justify asking our men and women to risk their lives there.

Rather the question is the worldwide effect of permitting the Communists to breach by force any of the lines that were drawn in the various

postwar settlements. The 17th parallel in Viet-Nam is just as much a part of those settlements as Checkpoint Charlie, the 38th parallel, or the northern border of Greece. The principles involved in Viet-Nam are no less important, and our national interest is just as surely involved. Though at times the outcome may have seemed in doubt in these earlier contests, the forces of freedom, with our assistance, ultimately prevailed. I am convinced that with similar patience and determination the ultimate outcome in Viet-Nam is no less certain.

The principle of self-determination is paramount. This, in fact, is the issue. Will countries be permitted to develop their own way without outside interference? Or shall we merely watch as they are subjected to infiltration, invasion, and terrorism by neighbors who consider them vulnerable to the technique of "wars of national liberation"? This problem is not unique to Southeast Asia, but we find it presented there today in far sharper focus than any place else in the world.

I have spoken of Southeast Asia, and not only

of Viet-Nam, because it is a struggle that transcends the borders of Viet-Nam. Laos has long been a scene of conflict because of the unwillingness of one side to honor its solemn written word, most recently affirmed at Geneva in 1962. The official radio of Communist China has announced the formation of a group dedicated to overthrowing the ancient, proud, and independent Kingdom of Thailand, and just last week it announced the formation of a similar group to overthrow Malaysia, which so successfully defended itself against a similar attack just a few years ago. This last September 2 Lin Piao, the Peiping Minister of Defense, again assured the independent countries of Africa and Latin America that their turn will come. As a result, I am convinced that, if the challenge is not successfully met in Viet-Nam, we will pay a far higher price for at least a generation to come in seeking to meet it in Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere.

As evidence of concern over this issue by free governments all over the world, there are today over 30 countries providing assistance to Viet-Nam in a wide variety of ways. Other govern-

ments in Southeast Asia are particularly concerned and are assisting the Republic of Viet-Nam according to their capabilities. Requests of the Vietnamese Government have brought responses from Australia, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea, which has now sent a full division of ground forces. And the newly elected President of the Philippines has said that he is considering sending Philippine combat forces to Viet-Nam. I am sure that the present, diplomatic effort will produce additional assistance from yet other countries.

HISTORICAL REVIEW

Let me briefly recall to you the events in Southeast Asia following the Geneva agreement of 1954. North Viet-Nam hoped it would be able, through rigged elections, to bring the South under its sway in 1956. Being frustrated in this design and working from the theory that the problems of governing a truncated South Viet-Nam would prove insurmountable, Hanoi prepared to capitalize on the anticipated political and economic disintegration of the South.

As early as 1956 Hanoi undertook to rebuild, reorganize, and expand the covert military machine that was left behind in South Viet-Nam at the time the Viet Minh supposedly withdrew in 1954. Southerners who had moved to the North were given intensive training and political indoctrination, and returned to the South as cadres. Covert supply lines were established, for the most part passing through the eastern portion of Laos near the demilitarized zone. This, in part, explains the intense interest and sensitivity toward this portion of Laos that has consistently been displayed by Hanoi. By 1959 Hanoi was ready to embarrass and raise doubts about the ability of the Saigon Government to maintain internal order by stepping up what had up to then been small-scale guerrilla actions. This was intensified in 1960.

Frustrated in their hopes of a cheap and easy victory, in that year the Communist regime in the North made some far-reaching decisions which they made no effort to conceal. The record in their own words is clear for all to read.

At the Third Lao Dong (Communist) Party

Congress in Hanoi in September 1960, Ho Chi Minh said that the North must "step up the national democratic people's revolution in the South." Other similar speeches were made, and at its conclusion the Party Congress called for the formation of a "National United Front" in the South. Three months later, that is in December 1960, Hanoi radio announced the formation of a "Front for Liberation of the South." This is the origin of the so-called "National Liberation Front" in South Viet-Nam. It was then and still is a pure creature and tool of the North Vietnamese regime. Its so-called leadership contains not a single nationally known figure. In a true sense it is as faceless to the outside world as it is to the Vietnamese people. Thus it is not a "national front," and it is certainly not a "liberation front" for its purpose has nothing to do with "liberation"—quite the opposite.

The formation of a purely political "liberation front" might have been manageable, flagrant interference though it was in the internal affairs of another state, but the Hanoi regime by no means