



## Update On Losing The Vietnam War

by John E. Bommarito

Reprinted with permission from Review of the News, December 18, 1968

The war in Vietnam escalates as the North continues to infiltrate men and materials for a major move.

Although little attention has been given to it in the American press since the phony cease-fire truce arranged by Henry Kissinger, the Vietnam War still rages. The fighting is often more furious than it was at any time during the ten-year U.S. involvement.

Since the phony Paris peace agreement, some 80,000 Vietnamese have been killed. North Vietnam has moved deeper into the South, and is waging war far exceeding the "tolerable levels" set up by the January 1973 agreement. The Communists have established divisional fronts and are increasing their regimental attacks, artillery barrages, and air strikes. Hanoi has greatly increased the size of its army and stockpiles of military supplies in the South. Observers estimate that some 150,000 fresh troops have been infiltrated into the South in direct violation of the truce. The Communists' battle-ready troop strength in the South is now put at 300,000.

In recent weeks Communists have made gains with small-unit warfare—overrunning militia outposts in the Mekong Delta and ranger camps in the Central Highlands. They have also made major gains with larger-unit action near the central coast city of Da Nang, sending thousands of refugees fleeing South.

The Communists' logistics system has also been much improved since the U.S. stopped bombing in Indochina. New all-weather roads and pipelines give them a capability they have never before had.

And the North Vietnamese have stepped up their harassment of South Vietnam civilians. Statistics now available in Washington tell the story: In one district of Quangnai Province, 130 homes were recently burned to the ground to discredit Saigon's power. The civilians were then "liberated" to areas controlled by the Communists to work as slave labor. In Quangnam Province, Vietcong raiders forcibly transported 10,000 civilians to the west to work as field hands and pack carriers. Refugees who managed to escape the Communist transfer reported that Hanoi aimed to capture 20,000 civilians to bolster its labor force.

And all of this under the watchful eye of the International Commission of Control and Supervision (I.C.C.S.), made up of Iran, Indonesia, Poland, and Hungary.

This shameful truce team was preparing to pull out of Vietnam in late September because of a lack of funds when the U.S. came to the rescue. It made an advance payment of \$4,080,000 to keep the supposed overseers of the cease-fire moratorium in the countryside at least through the rest of this year. Most of the original \$24.5 million cost of maintaining the I.C.C.S. was to have been financed by the United States, South Vietnam, the Vietcong, and North Vietnam. To date only the United States has paid its share of the cost. South Vietnam says with some credibility that it lacks



the funds, and Hanoi refuses to pay anything until the U.S. starts giving aid to the North.

The I.C.C.S. has been ineffective in its policing job for two main reasons. One is that it needs the cooperation of the two contending Vietnamese belligerents, which it does not have and was never expected to have. The other is that while Iran and Indonesia maintain a neutralist posture, the Poles and Hungarians invariably favor the Communists. The result is that very few cease-fire violations are ever investigated.

Meanwhile the increased Communist military activity in the South is not only prompting thousands of civilians to flee farther south, it is also causing some of the South Vietnam armed forces to turn to profiteering, which is in turn widely publicized in the United States to justify a further curbing of American aid. For example, artillerymen were firing excessive amounts of ammunition and selling the brass shell casings for scrap. When government officials discovered the scheme, they limited artillery units to just five rounds per day, whereupon battery officers began demanding a subsidy of up to two dollars a round from infantry units requesting coverfire. Chopper pilots were charging to evacuate wounded military personnel from the field: eight dollars for enlisted men, sixteen dollars for N.C.O.s, and twenty-five dollars for officers. The South Vietnam air force was even competing with the country's commercial airline, Air Vietnam, by charging cut-rate fares for passenger and cargo business.

President Thieu has recently moved aggressively to stop such corruption, but the practices had already been widely publicized in the United States. The result was heavy cutbacks in aid.

## A Brief History

Even to begin to understand the significance of what is happening in Vietnam requires a brief outline of its past.

After being governed by the French for a hundred years, then being occupied by the Japanese during World War II, the Vietnamese were easily encouraged by a combination of O.S.S. and Communist agents to fight for "independence." France, determined to maintain its control over the country, sent in troops to put down the uprising. The revolutionary army in those years was called the Vietminh, and received aid from the Soviet Union and later Red China.

In 1949 France agreed that Vietnam should be independent under the Emperor Bao Dai, hereditary ruler of the country. But the Communists, led by Ho chi Minh, rejected this solution and continued fighting. France supported Bao Dai with large armies. It even asked the United States for assistance, but was repeatedly refused. After France suffered a defeat by the Vietminh at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 because of the refusal of a necessary air strike by U.S. forces, a Socialist Government came to power in Paris and surrendered the northern portion of Vietnam to the Communists.

Later that same year, in a fourteen-nation conference at Geneva, it was agreed to form the present separate countries of North and South Vietnam.

But the Communists were not satisfied. They continued to plot for control of the entire country, organizing a revolutionary army in the South called the Vietcong, supplying it with weapons and



soldiers. In 1960 the State Department convinced the Administration that U.S. interests were at stake in Vietnam and several hundred “advisors” were sent to help train South Vietnamese military forces. Large quantities of arms soon followed. In 1961 President Kennedy increased military aid to South Vietnam, and in 1964 President Johnson sent American troops into battle against the Vietcong. He also ordered a very limited bombing of supply lines and depots in the North.

The U.S. soon had a half-million men in Vietnam and had dumped thousands of tons of bombs on jungles and rice paddies, but the war was never fought with the idea of seeking victory. As it dragged on it lost public support in America. With the Vietnam War becoming a political issue in the United States, organized radicals persuaded more and more Americans to join their demonstrations against U.S. involvement. Suddenly a show was made of seeking strategic victory. After the mining of Haiphong Harbor and an escalation of B-52 raids over the North, the Communists agreed to a cease-fire and truce on the condition that America would retire her forces from the field.

## Truce As A Communist Tactic

The truce agreement was sold by the Nixon Administration as a means of a winding down the war. But no one even suggested that it would stop the fighting. The Paris accord would instead be used by the Communists as a tactic to permit them to continue the war by infiltrating tens of thousands of fresh troops into the South and increasing the intensity of their attacks. Military experts familiar with Communist methods warned that the agreement in Paris would only serve to strengthen the Communists. They pointed out that the truce would give North Vietnam time to rebuild its supply routes, replenish its stockpile of strategic materials, and beef-up its troops. The Communists needed time, and we gave it to them. Their tactics do not change. Neither do the responses of our leaders.

The United States engaged in the longest war in its history, costing more than fifty thousand lives, yet failed to stop Communist aggression in Vietnam, because we continued to employ the “no win” policy that earlier denied General MacArthur the modern weapons, increased manpower, and supplies he requested to defeat the Communists in Korea. Our failure in Vietnam, as in Korea, was a product of political subversion, a failure of political will, a carefully orchestrated backing down from credibility as a world power capable of enforcing an anti-Communist foreign policy.

This attitude is reflected in the provisions of the Vietnam peace agreement. In summary the truce called for the United States to respect the sovereignty, unity, independence, and territorial integrity of Vietnam as recognized by the 1954 Geneva agreement. It declared that the U.S. would stop all its military activities and end the bombing and mining in North Vietnam; that it would withdraw its troops and military personnel from South Vietnam; that reunification of Vietnam be carried out step by step through peaceful means; that an international control team be set up to supervise the truce; that all four parties (the U.S., North Vietnam, the Vietcong, and the Saigon Government) strictly respect the fundamental national rights of the Cambodian and Laotian people as recognized by the 1954 and 1962 Geneva agreements; that prisoners be exchanged and that



free elections be held in South Vietnam; that the ending of the war create conditions for establishing new, equal, and mutually beneficial relationships between North Vietnam and the United States; and, that the United States contribute to heal the wounds of war and to reconstruction in North Vietnam and throughout Indochina.

This latter point has not been approved by a Congress unwilling to pay reparations until the Reds account for our Prisoners of War and M.I.A.s.

The most important provision of the truce as far as South Vietnam was concerned called for the Vietcong to refrain from introducing more troops, munitions, armament, or other war material in South Vietnam. Needless to say, the Communists have flagrantly violated this part of the agreement, just as they have ignored all of the other parts.

President Nguyen van Thieu has long believed that Communists can be dealt with only by force. In a tough speech delivered on South Vietnam's Armed Forces Day, President Thieu charged that "Despite the latest peace agreement, the Communists have continued to violate the cease-fire even more seriously. The violations show that the Communists do not advocate peaceful means. They have never thought of halting their aggression." Indeed.

Obviously Thieu knows the nature of the Communists. Regardless of what flag they fly, regardless of what country they are in, Communists are all the same. To think that Vietnamese Communists are any different than Chinese Communists or Russian Communists or Cuban Communists, is a folly of enormous proportions. Communists are Communists, and they all follow the basic teachings of Marx and Lenin (with a little Mao added for the Asians), just as faithfully as Moslems follow the teachings of Mohammed. There may be some minor variations from country to country, but the major aim of Communism remains the same: control of all the world through revolution and subversion.

## The Prognosis

Most U.S. officials experienced in the tough Vietnam War feel that an all-out Vietcong offensive to take Saigon is likely within the next twelve months. Increased military aid from Moscow and Peking has enabled Hanoi to rebuild its forces to a point that far surpasses any previous peak of its strength during the more than a quarter of a century in which that bloody war has been waged. Our military experts say that by year's end North Vietnam will have sufficient weapons, munitions, and man-power in the South to sustain a full-scale war for at least two years.

While North Vietnam strengthens its forces, South Vietnam faces a 50 percent reduction in military aid from the United States for the current Fiscal Year. Unless Congress changes its mind, the Thieu Government will receive only \$700 million in military aid, down from last year's \$1.4 billion. The reduction is even more serious when one considers the increasing cost of strategic materials: fuel prices have almost doubled in the past year, and the cost of ammunition has risen by about 20 percent.

South Vietnam faces an economic crisis as well. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has apparently succeeded in its effort to reduce economic aid to South Vietnam. This in light of



intelligence reports that estimate Russian and Red Chinese economic aid to Hanoi is running about \$1.2 billion this year. And Ambassador Graham A. Martin says Hanoi sympathizers in the West are working hard to stop all aid to South Vietnam.

The pullout of U.S. troops cost the Vietnamese considerable income and the loss of some 300,000 jobs. Inflation has hit Vietnam as hard as any nation at war and the continuing conflict has turned it into an import-reliant country. South Vietnam's basic and valuable natural resources are in contested or Communist territory and her agricultural regions are under constant attack. Because of this, South Vietnam's export business has dropped sharply.

The price of rice — staple of the Vietnamese diet — is now beyond the reach of millions there. While consumer prices in general went up 65 percent last year, the cost of rice doubled. During the next few months, food prices are expected to rise another 60 percent. One U.S. official said that in some coastal villages near Hué people are being forced to eat the roots of trees to survive. Other reports tell of large families living on one meal a day, consisting of three potatoes and a few land crabs.

Saigon officials say that the only solution to the food problem at this time is for the people to eat less. And President Thieu admits that if the price of rice continues to rise above the people's reach, complete collapse would not be impossible as unemployment and hunger make even Communism seem better than the carefully created misery in which these brave people now live.

Meanwhile, Hanoi's current aim is probably by muscle-flexing to force the Vietnam War back into world consciousness, requiring President Ford to take some new initiative. This would in turn result in renewing of peace talks with an eye to more concessions to North Vietnam, leaving the Communists in a much better position from which to extract reparations and concessions than they were in January 1973.

Still more grim is the fear of some observes that the big Vietcong offensive will come with such ferocity and speed that there will not be time for the United States to provide the assistance necessary to prevent Saigon from being overrun by the North. The Communists are confident that the created cynicism of the American people over the Vietnam War would prevent President Ford from sending in troops. If it works, all Southeast Asia will fall, like a row of dominoes, just as Conservatives predicted from the moment it became clear that Washington meant to fight a protracted "no-win" war there. It is the certain consequence of foreswearing victory as a military and political strategy. And it is reprehensible.