

08.06.1994

American masochism and the Vietnam War A letter to the New York Times

By Ton That Thien

To: The Editor of *The New York Times*,

It is strange, not to say tragic, that Americans continue to masochistically fight the Vietnam War as an *American* civil war. Case in point: the epistolary joust between Mr. Anthony Lewis and former Secretary Henry Kissinger in recent days in *The New York Times*. Both these pundits failed to mention that, in fact, it was an international war, a war waged by the communist bloc against the United States. The two major parties on the communist side were the Soviet Union and China. Vietnam was only a proxy and a junior partner. It could neither really wage a successful war without the approval and support of its senior allies, nor make peace without their prompting and blessing.

Americans are so bent on fighting each other that they forget to find out what went on in the enemy camp. If they had taken the trouble to look up Vietnamese communist documents, they would discover some rather edifying things.

1) Vietnam was dragged into the cold war not by the Truman administration, but by Ho Chi Minh. The latter went secretly to Peking and Moscow in *the first week of January 1950* to enlist Mao's and Stalin's support. That was one full month before Washington's recognition of the Bao Dai government, and six months before the outbreak of the Korean War. (see *A Drop in the Ocean*, Peking, Foreign Language Press, 1988, the memoirs of Hoang Van Hoan, member of the VCP Politburo until 1976 and ambassador to Peking in 1950).

2) In 1954 Hanoi could not continue the war and had to accept a very unsatisfactory peace settlement because Moscow, and especially Peking forced it to stop. This is very clear from a study of the Geneva Conference archives by a well known French scholar Francois Joyaux (see: *La Chine et le premier règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine*, Paris, Publication de la Sorbonne, 1979, and Hanoi's White Paper on *Thirty Years of Vietnam-Chinese Relations*, Hanoi, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 1979).

3) Hanoi began to talk peace in 1968 only after Moscow had decided to ease tensions with Washington, but it had to try to conceal it from Peking, and it had to fight on until 1973 because, as the above mentioned White Paper charged, the Chinese wanted "to fight America to the last Vietnamese".

4) The overriding aim of Hanoi in the Paris peace talks was getting the Americans out, and not getting rid of Thieu. Insisting on Thieu's departure was only a ploy, and Kissinger fell for it. This was made clear by Mai Van Bo, former ambassador and member of the Hanoi delegation at the Paris peace talks in his memoirs (in Vietnamese: *Tan cong ngoai*

giao va tiep xuc bi mat – Diplomatic Offensive and Secret Contacts -, Ho Chi Minh City, Nha Xuat Ban Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh, 1985).

5) Hanoi was not so sure it could win the war until after Watergate. This was clear from a book by Le Duan, a very important book, which has been totally ignored by the “experts” on Vietnam (because it was in Vietnamese, and few “experts” could really read Vietnamese or bothered to study Vietnamese communist sources?) The book is *Thu Vao Nam* – Letters to South – Hanoi, Nha Xat Ban Su That, 1986. In it Le Duan constantly sought to tranquilise his comrades in the South. And Pol Pot has disclosed that Nguyen Van Linh, Hanoi’s man in the South, came to him in 1960 to beg for asylum because he and his men could feel safe nowhere in the whole of South Vietnam. (see: Ministère des Affaires étrangères du Kampuchea démocratique, *Livre noir: Faits et preuves d’actes d’agression et d’annexion du Vietnam contre le Kampuchea*, September 1978).

When will American journalists and academics stop being masochist, and start to seek *all* the truth about the Vietnam War, by trying to find out what the communists have to say about it?

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