

May, 1995

## **About Vietnam: please give readers the true facts**

By Ton That Thien

In the article "Don't whitewash the record of the war against Vietnam" (*Globe and Mail*, 1 May 1995) Professor of political science and international relations G. Prontzos advances a number of interpretations based on a certain number of facts. As a (retired) professor of political science and international relations myself, I will not question Professor Prontzos' interpretations of events, but I feel compelled to write to your paper to say that many of the "facts" given by him are totally inaccurate. I ask you, out of respect for the historical truth, and out of respect for the readers, to give someone the opportunity to draw attention to the need for accuracy.

1/ Professor Prontzos says that "the war with the United States was primarily a result of Vietnamese nationalism". He does not mention that the war was part of the Cold war, and all the great powers involved in the Cold war were obliged to come to Geneva in 1954 to try to settle it before it degenerated into a world war involving them directly. Every historian and political scientist knows, or should know it, and tell his students accordingly.

On the other hand, half the population of Vietnam – South Vietnam --, which resolutely rejected the communist brand of nationalism, was allied to the United States. So the war cannot be considered a war of the U.S against Vietnamese nationalism. With regard to Ho's and the Vietnamese Communist Party's nationalism, here is what one communist who had been a member for 43 years, Nguyen Ba Hao, says today (in *Thong Luan*, September 1993, Paris): "In reality, the Communist Party of Vietnam always served the Soviet Union and Communist China, subjecting the country into endless wars, causing the deaths of millions of people and plunging the country into a situation of great sufferings and utter poverty. Do not tell me about their merits".

2/ The U.S. troops "occupied" the southern zone? This is completely inaccurate. There was an (anti-communist) Vietnamese government in South Vietnam which invited American aid, as there was a (communist) government in North Vietnam which invited Soviet and Communist Chinese aid, not only arms and money, but also, now we know from North Vietnamese *as well as Communist Chinese and Soviet public admissions*, military personnel. The Chinese communists have admitted publicly that they had military advisers as well as anti-aircraft troops helping North Vietnam during the battle of Dien Bien Phu, and they gave North Vietnam enough weapons to arm 20 divisions for their war in the South. And there was Soviet personnel serving SAM batteries in the North. This was revealed after 1990, after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

3/ Washington "invented" a state called the Republic of South Vietnam? I will not comment on such a statement by a professor of political science and international relations. I leave it to his students to do so. They can read in any book on Vietnam how the State of Vietnam (South Vietnam) came into being. If they read an official publication by Hanoi on Ho Chi Minh's daily activities (*Ho Chi Minh Bien Nien Tieu Su*, Chronology of President Ho's

Daily Activities, Ha Noi, 1994, pp.391-418), they will learn that Ho went secretly to Peking and Moscow in *early January 1950* to discuss coordination of action with the Soviet and Chinese leaders. That was one month before U.S. official recognition of South Vietnam, and six months before the out-break of the Cold war in Korea. Ho stayed three months in Moscow, the same length as Mao Tse Tung, who was also in the Soviet capital then. And in February 1951, at the second national congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (under the apparently neutral name of Vietnamese Labour Party), Ho proclaimed that his government was a solid member of the communist bloc.

4/ "The United States chose Ngo Ding Diem"! Professor Prontzos' students can read in ex-Emperor Bao Dai's memoirs (*Le Dragon d'Annam*, Paris, Plon, 1980), all the details on how the ex-Emperor chose Mr. Diem as prime minister at the time. The French were opposed to his selection, and the U.S. went along. The students can read in the State Department's released document how General Collins, President Eisenhower's special representative, united his efforts to those of General Ely, the French high commissioner, to unseat Mr. Diem until it was clear that the Vietnamese army ignored French orders and sided with Mr. Diem against the Binh Xuyen gangsters supported by the French. Those are facts, and hard facts.

5/ Ho Chi Minh was the legitimate government of "all" Vietnam? Professor Prontzos should tell his students that Mr. Diem's government was recognised by the French government as the legal government in South Vietnam, and many other governments, including the Canadian government, also recognised it as a legitimate government, and neither the Hanoi nor the Saigon government was considered the government of all Vietnam at the time.

6/ The United States sent "two million troops" to kill Vietnamese. Professor Prontzos' students can check the figure with the U.S. Defense Department. Even during the war against Japan, the U.S. did not have so many troops in combat.

7/ "Limited war". Whatever others may call the war, General Giap and his colleagues called it "total war" – with catastrophic consequences for the country after 1975.

8/ The regime in Saigon was "on the verge of defeat", according to Mr. McNamara. But the man who ran the war in Hanoi, secretary general of the party Le Duan, thought the opposite. In a letter to the war commanders in the South in *July 1962*: "There were moments when in Southern Vietnam and in zone V (northern provinces) the situation was difficult to the point where it looked as if the revolution could not be preserved and developed... We must absolutely not allow ourselves to become alarmed and lose faith because of the temporary difficulties caused by the enemy's gathering of the population into the strategic hamlets..." The letter was secret then, but has been published by Hanoi in 1986 (*Tho Vao Nam*, Letters to the South, Hanoi 1986). **Please note the date carefully: July 1962.** Obviously Mr. McNamara knew nothing about this real situation, just as Hanoi's plans for violating the New Year's truce in 1968 and striking by surprise, causing a collapse of will in Washington. So, the U.S. lost 58,000 lives for nothing because of very poor intelligence gathering. Ironically, at the time, the American public and government were told by their correspondents that the war was being lost because of Mr. Diem and the strategic hamlets.

9/ Those 58,000 American lives would not have been lost if a number of officials in the State Department and the White House had not advocated and plotted the overthrow and assassination of President Diem and his Brother Nhu, **who were absolutely opposed to the introduction of American troops**. If Mr. McNamara had strongly opposed the overthrow of Mr. Diem and his brother, South Vietnam might still have been lost, but surely without the loss of 58,000 American lives. Indeed, Mr. Nhu told a party of U.S. congressman in late September 1963 that “if you remove us, you will have to come in and fight yourselves”. Americans should exercise the right to know, and find out who the advocates and plotters of the overthrow of Mr. Diem and his brothers were. They are the real people responsible for the loss of 58,000 American lives.

10/ Professor Prontzos charges that Mr. Van Praagh “parrots”... I wonder who is really “parroting”, for the vocabulary used by professor Prontzos is literally the vocabulary used habitually by the communist propaganda organs.

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