

In commemoration of the 30th of April Day

Vietnam, a meaningful experience.

1954: the Dien Bien Phu battle was the ominous harbinger of a further final victory of the Communists over the whole country. Winning this battle, they won the ten-year lingering war during which they had to fight in hardest conditions. It was the first step to consequent obvious victories, not only in Vietnam but also in the neighboring countries of Cambodia and Laos.

With the Geneva Treaty, the vanquished French troops left for ever their former colonial territory after being there for more than one hundred years, ceding place to the Americans. Embittered by the Dien Bien Phu bust, the French was angered with the Americans who had plotted against them. Hence their behavior seemed to be adopting the position of Hanoi rather than buttressing Washington and never in the twenty-year of anticommunist fight in South Vietnam had France showed to be a crony of the U.S.

Ngo Dinh Diem was brought back to the effervescent enthusiasm of the South Vietnamese to handle the half-nation helm of state. But he failed to keep the promise of South Vietnam, one of the four signatories of the Geneva Peace Treaty, to hold free general elections, the purpose of which was to choose a final regime for the reunited Vietnam.

The communists hence had the excuse to arouse the South Vietnamese people's instinct of revolt against the government and, unfortunately, they were supported by a worldwide opinion that faulted South Vietnam for betraying the peace accord it had signed. The Communists had on their side the national cause and they started to instigate a war of liberation against South Vietnam. The United States denied any responsibility in this affair since it had refused to sign the Geneva Treaty.

In fact, these general elections would surely have failed South Vietnam. The country was not yet pacified nor has the government built a solid control over the different political and religious factions, as the suppression of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao armed forces had just finished. In the central part of Vietnam, the majority of people were pro-Communist and in the southern part people were lured by the demagogic marxist theory although they never had experienced Communism and known its practices. The fight for independence against the Americans, the neo-colonialists, was the wondrous banner the

Vietnamese Communists used to deceive the population as the Vietnamese had proven to be, all along their proud history, very patriotic and courageous, and had never forebore bondage.

1963: the break off between Diem and the Americans led to the assassination of the first president of the Republic of Vietnam and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu. Both died fatally and later, when years went on and the ebullient joy of the revolutionary days had faded away, Diem was regretted not only because he was the most capable leader and had a good sense of morality, but mostly because he was a patriot. Diem dared put his country's interests before the interests of his allies and he had refused to be an implement of the Americans. For the Americans, he was a hard-headed Vietnamese who did not agree with their policies and their actions. He had declined the American proposition to bring American troops into the country to fight Communism. Also, the rumor ran that he had started secret unofficial talks with the National Liberation Front and Hanoi and he longed to settle the political situation of his country.

The same friends who fostered Diem during his exile and handed him powers, eventually murdered him. After his death, the Americans decided not to let any other Diems get to the power in South Vietnam. Even now some Vietnamese recall the past with nostalgia and wonder what would happen if - the If that would put the city of Paris in an empty bottle - Diem was not murdered and if he succeeded in negotiating with Hanoi. Once again he is dearly regretted.

Diem's death constituted the turning point of the situation in Vietnam. The massive landing of American troops was the blatant reason for North Vietnam to organize a heavier infiltration of its men southward, in order to "fight the Americans and save the nation". The song of liberation was sung by those who went to the battlefield to "exterminate the invaders" or die for the fatherland. This cover-up is used by Hanoi to screen their real purpose: expand to the south and win the control over the entire country.

The nationalists in South Vietnam, in the meantime, grew more and more dependent on their American allies. The anti-communist fight had no justification other than defending the freedom of the people and opposing the invasion of North Vietnam. Those were meaningless watchwords compared with the national liberation slogan. Hanoi was asking ". How can people be free under domination of the Americans? Without independence, there is no freedom." Even the word "invasion" used by Saigon and its allies seemed nonsense as the "invaders" were Vietnamese.

Diem's legacy was quickly annihilated. Those who succeeded him were incompetent, corrupt, and immoral. They were opportunists, loyal puppets to Americans while nationalist parties who in other circumstances could play a constructive role were fissile groups in search of egoistic interests.

The Americans had indeed made a serious mistake in suppressing Diem and replacing him with politically inexperienced military cadres. After Diem's death, the Americans did not want a nationalist leader in Vietnam. They give virtual leadership of the country to a herd of good-for-nothings, their point of view was that since the onus of paying for the war was theirs they should have the right to make decisions and there was no need to have a steady and effective government in Saigon, such government would casually oppose their will.

The Americans had always thought that the fight against Communism is their sole responsibility and had never wanted to have equal partners in that fight. They wanted to hold the anticommunist monopoly.

Now that the Vietnam War had ended in shambles, we see that their monopolistic view was clearly a mistake, and what happened later in Angola, Mozambique, and El Salvador was identical to what happened in Vietnam, the same mistake was made and it is too late to be sorry. The Vietnam War should have been conducted by the Vietnamese with the American support as much as the Salvadoran war should be conducted by the Salvadorians, not by the Americans. Each war has local characteristics that can only be understood fully by local leaders. Hanoi was conscious of this notion and had always insisted that the decisions should be theirs, not the Russians' or the Chinese's. In this respect, Hanoi had proven to be independent from its allies although it had received the same amount of military and economic support during the war. Basically the North Vietnamese vanquished the Americans because they fought the war their way and not the Russian or Chinese way.

From 1965 to 1975, the situation worsened. Increasing casualties among American troops caused a fateful response in the U.S. . Antiwar protests were organized to show the anger of the American people who suddenly realized that their sons and husbands were dying for an unjust cause. The war in Vietnam took the turn of a nasty war, similar to the French "sale Guerre" (Dirty War). The ideal of liberty was dirtied and while Bob Hope entertained the GI's Jane Fonda and Joan Baez sang for the North Vietnamese troops. The split between Americans supporters and protesters of the war was another fountainhead to the future breakdown. Hence, the war became un-winnable.

Not only did war kill, it also destroyed the social integrity of South Vietnam. Traditional moral values were overthrown, people live in constant fear of death and wanted to enjoy life in haste, they adopted the materialistic view of life and both morality and spirituality lost their values. Was it existentialism, realism, or materialism? It didn't matter. Every people sensed loss of hope, despair and disillusion. The Vietnamese society had started to disintegrate and nobody cared or was it too late to prevent it from breaking down further? Social vices were present everywhere, corruption, prostitution, drug addiction, games, illegal trafficking, crimes...

From top down, everybody wanted to get richer illegally and aim justified means. Nobody cared about the fate of the nation; the government was disoriented and had no plan to fix the situation. Political parties fought against each other.

Who was running the state? The Americans and they were happy to do so. Conspicuously, the war was not the American war and for no reason should have they run it alone. Time went by and the burden of the war weighed on their shoulders. International reaction to their intensive bombing of North Vietnam, the national effort to put pressure on the U.S. government to end the war, and the political segregation undermined the morale of those men facing the enemy in the battlefields far away from home. Paradoxically, discouragement and anxiety suddenly made them conscious of the absurdity of this war which was not theirs.

Abandoning Vietnam was only a matter of time and to save face wasn't it appropriate to arrange a peace agreement? Peace or surrender, what was the difference? After twenty years of vain effort to combat Communist North Vietnam, wasn't it time to just wash hands and leave? For the Vietnamese, this is synonym to treason and cowardice.

Some other factors contributed to the abandonment of this formerly called outpost of anticommunism. Fundamentally, the Communist threat was not from North Vietnam, it was from Red China. The protracting of this hopeless war, its costly expenses, and its negative influence on the American people were the reason why Nixon agreed to convene the Paris Conference, but the virtual reason was that Red China had become friendly to America and looked forward to collaborate with the Americans. China, the long-time fearful enemy had

become an economic partner and American businesses anticipated big gains from this partnership.

South Vietnam was not the barrier to contain the Communist wave anymore and there was no need to keep the war going. The talks with Hanoi were conducted at the expenses of Saigon as the American people were pushing for a quick withdrawal. The four-sided Paris conference was in fact two-sided as the main protagonists were only the North Vietnamese and the U.S. The Americans had sacrificed the interests of its ally, South Vietnam and Saigon did not have a voice in the negotiations, its presence in Paris was merely symbolic.

And while Washington wanted to arrive quickly to a conclusion, the bickering attitude of Hanoi kept the talks going on and on and spurned to any suggestion made by Washington. The North Vietnamese knew the weak point of its rival and tried to get the most out of the negotiations. They knew that at the end, they would get what they had been longing for, the entire control of Vietnam.

And think of Henry Kissinger sharing the Nobel Prize for Peace with Nguyen Duc Tho, the North Vietnam delegation head for having reached an honorable end to that twenty-year-long war!

After the signing of the Paris accord, Hanoi did not care abiding to it and Saigon went on giving fallacious interpretations of the political and military situation in South Vietnam, and its smug optimism due to the woeful ignorance of Thieu and his cronies led to the fall of the Republic of Vietnam.

Many things are still kept under wraps so far. Only those who masterminded the collapse of Saigon know the answer and it has not been revealed to the public. Was it a gambit that the U.S. was looking for from the Chinese? Was it a collusion with China in which South Vietnam was the scapegoat? Because as of Spring of 1974, there was no sign of a disastrous ending and nobody could explain one year later the sudden military pull-outs of the central highlands and the central part of the country without any battle.

Until now, the Vietnamese do not believe that that the fall of Saigon was due only to the reckless calculations of Thieu, and nobody can explain the run away of the South Vietnamese generals who for twenty years had conducted and won famous battles against the Communists. Even the North Vietnamese conceded their surprise as they did not expect the South Vietnamese to surrender that easily and quickly. Their inordinate Big Spring Victory was nothing honorable as matter-of-fact they did not win the war since there was no decisive battle similar to Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

The general euphoria of the pro-communists on April 30th of 1975 turned out short-lasting. Smiles, ceremonies decorated with flying colors and splendid bouquets of flowers, explosive statements made by the politburo, abusive slogans, exhibitions, recognition of war heroes, all disappeared a couple of years later, and the Socialist Revolution sympathies faded away as people saw the truth and realized that Communism is just a hoax, people's hope and happiness were now relegated to the past. Then they fondly recalled the "mock" prosperity they enjoyed before the arrival of Communism, they rather "suffer the yoke of the new colonialists" and have enough food to eat than enjoy the victory of socialism and have empty stomachs.

There was no bloodshed as the Americans expected, but something worse. For hundreds of thousand of South Vietnamese officials and military officers it was the enduring of hell in reeducation camps or force labor camps, or Vietnamese gulags, that lasted for some detainees fifteen years. For the rest of the population who expected the return of peace and progress, here came the war against China and the Cambodian invasion. The young generation was still drafted to go to the battlefield. Over 250,000 troops were sent to Cambodia to liberate this country from Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouges. Two million dollars were daily financed by the Soviet Union. Ten years after the end of the Vietnam War, the communist threat in South East Asia was still palpable and the policy of Hanoi was a brinkmanship endangering all its neighboring countries.

Ten years went by since that historic day, and for those who had participated to that war, it still remains an indelible shame, a betrayal of a people and of the ideal of liberty, a denial of the human values, rights and conscience. But for the Communists who won the war, the situation does not seem encouraging. Fatality steers the Communists to disaster and they become the anathema of all the peoples over the world. The story of the boat people, those who escaped Communism at the risk of their lives, creates a scandal and stirs up the conscience of the international community with tales of harrowing and pathetic experiences that go beyond the imagination of the common people. Around the world, people who were supporting the Communists are turning their back to them. And in Vietnam, those who jumped on the bandwagon in these early days are now deserting the party and fleeing the country.

Even though, some countries, such as Angola, Mozambique, and El Salvador are following the steps of Vietnam in order to gain their independence and the

Communists are still declaring proudly that nothing can "stop the revolutionary currents." Unfortunately, the Vietnam War does not provide us with any meaningful lesson to learn from.

Be that it may, the winning of independence is a compulsory history event in any colony and a prerequisite to a higher stage of politico-socio-economic regime. It is only one step forward and it is one link of the revolution chain. In different phases of a revolution, different people are needed to achieve different goals and play different key roles in leading the country forward. The Vietnamese Communists have played their role in the war for independence. It is time for others to play their role in the post revolutionary era. History requires them to remediate their power and their leadership so that progress could be made. Vietnam has emerged from its colonial status; it is time for another group of people to take over the power of directing the country toward social and economic prosperity.

It will be one day when history speaks about the achievement of the Vietnamese Communists in winning the independence for the nation but history will not forget their betrayal to the people. And it will be the day when flags flap the wind, bells chime, and people cry of joy for another victory, the inevitable victory over Communism and over their destiny. From that day starts an era of peace and happiness for Vietnam.

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