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The Peace Movements in South Vietnam in Mid-1960s

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Michael Do

A. Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please, allow me a minute to introduce myself.

My name is Michael Do, former officer of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces. I graduated from the Polwar College in 1969, served 3 years as company commander in the 5th Infantry Division and 3 years as Chief Political Education in the 2nd Air Force Division.

I earned a Bachelor of Art in Political Science at Van Hanh University in Saigon; Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from the University of Texas at Austin; and a Master of Science in Engineering Management from the National Technological University at Fort Collins, Colorado.

I have been a community activist since 1992, and am currently the President of the Vietnamese American Community of the USA.

I was here three times in the past to present my papers at Conferences and Symposia hosted by the Vietnam Center. Besides, I was interviewed and featured multiple times on American and Vietnamese TV channels

In response to the call of papers by the Vietnam Center, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to discuss the topic “**Peace Movements in South Vietnam in mid-1960s.**”

With a lot of misinformation and misunderstanding, the Vietnam War history has been falsely written by our enemies (Vietnamese Communists) and has been taught the same way in US schools for more than half century.

I think that history must be studied from different perspectives of all sides involved to be, at least, close to the truth.

As a combat soldier and a political officer who fought 9 years in the war, I'd like to shed a light into the dark and chaotic period when the Communist propaganda reigned in the South Vietnamese college campus and the Buddhist communities.

The failure of the Vietnam War can be accounted for by many factors. Of which, the anti-war movements both in the US and in South Vietnam were the most important events that had enormous influence on the US policy and the international perception.

This presentation is to look into the peace movements occurred in South Vietnam in mid-1960s: Who they were? Where they came from? Who were behind the scene? And who would benefit from the movements?

I prepared this presentation very carefully and used only the reliable sources. There are many Vietnamese names and terms that can be very confusing to the audience. I apologize for that.

B. The Peace Movements in South Vietnam

The war continued to escalate in South Vietnam as 1967 opened with peace movements in both America and Vietnam demanding to end the war.

Ignoring the fact that South Vietnam was the victim of the North Communists' aggression, the American anti-war movements called for the withdrawal of the US troops and to stop US support to the Republic of Vietnam; meanwhile in South Vietnam, the Buddhist monks and students – encouraged by Communists- organized big demonstrations against the government throughout the country.

Ho Chi Minh and his Communist Party were happier than ever before. They thought that the time was coming to unleash the last blow to achieve their goal “liberating” the South.

That was the justification of the Viet Cong’s Tet Mau Than general uprising and offensive resulting in the death of tens of thousands of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) soldiers and thousands of innocent people in many regions in South Vietnam.

Before we dig into the main issue, I’d like to go over a brief history of the Vietnam War from its beginning.

1954 - 1960: In accordance with The Geneva Accord, the French troops left Vietnam, but tens of thousands of Communist cadres stayed behind in South Vietnam, blended into the peasants in countryside or infiltrated into the new government institutions. They conducted the guerrilla warfare as the first phase of the people’s war against the South Vietnam government.

1960 - 1968: In its 2nd National Congress, the Worker’s Party (Communist Party) created the People’s National Front for Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF). The war in South Vietnam progressed to 2nd phase which is the combination of guerrilla and semi-conventional wars.

The Communists conducted the war in three fronts: (1) Military operations, (2) Political activities, and (3) Campaigns aiming at the enemy soldiers. These were considered three offensive spearheads of the people’s war.

The second of the above fronts consisted of all activities to win the heart and mind of the people, including terror acts to keep people from siding with the government. This front also aimed at the intellectuals, students, small merchants, and priests to form them into supporting political groups.

1968: The Communists thought the bad situation in the South came to its climax. They launched the General Uprising and General Offensive in major cities throughout the country as the final phase to achieve its goal liberating South Vietnam. It was a big mistake! The 1968’s campaign turned out to be a great failure. 80% of their forces were destroyed and the infrastructure was exposed.

Hanoi then flooded their regular army via Ho Chi Minh Trail into South Vietnam at the rate of tens of thousands of troops per month. Meanwhile, they created numerous struggle movements in Saigon and other big cities to cause more chaos, backing their stand at Paris Peace talk.

1. Political turmoil after the 1963 coup-d’état

Due to the turmoil caused by the anti-government and peace movements in Vietnam in early 1960s, leading to the failure in military operations, the US began to see President Diem an obstacle to the democracy and a growing threat to the American interests. In Aug. 1963, President Kennedy ordered Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge to remove President Diem. That led to the murder of the President by a gang of ambitious generals.

After the death of President Diem on November 1, 1963, South Vietnam fell into a new fatal crisis as the generals fought against each other. In only 3 years, there were 4 governments rose and fell. The people lost trust in the government; the morality of the soldiers was at lowest level. While the Buddhist monks and the student body, after their victory overthrowing the first Republic, became the most powerful force. They continued on with the new slogan: **Peace for Vietnam!**

2. The surge in military activities: Increase of Vietcong activities - South Vietnam on the brink of collapse - Increase of US combat troops.

Meanwhile, the year 1963 marked a great turning point in Viet Cong's military activities. From the guerrilla warfare, the Communists now shifted to semi-conventional tactics. They began to launch offensive operations upon several military outposts as to estimate the capability of the ARVN. The battle at Ap Bac, Dinh Tuong Province, in January 1963 was the first major battle that the NLF (National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam) used a sizable force to challenge the South Vietnamese Army. The event at Ap Bac placed additional pressure on the SVN government and gave the US the reasons to send combat troops. Taking advantage of the deteriorating situation after the coup, Viet Cong increased their activities throughout South Vietnam territory. The surge in battle resulted in the higher and higher casualties in South Vietnam Army. The Republic of Vietnam was on the brink of collapse.

In February 1965, the first South Korean troops arrived in Vietnam. In response to the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964, on March 8, 1965, President Johnson sent US ground troops to Vietnam. The first 3500 US Marines landed near Danang.

The South Vietnamese security forces, including regulars, part-time militia, irregular defense groups, and National Police totaled 567,246 personnel. In 1963, there were 15,000 US military advisors in Vietnam. This number of both advisors and combat troops was increased to 23,310 in 1964, and jumped to 200,000 and 400,000 in 1965 and 1966 respectively.

In early 1960s, the Viet Cong army had about 40,000 soldiers plus about 80,000 guerrillas. The US Department of Defense's fact book estimated that the Viet Cong numbered less than 200,000 plus 39,175 political cadre. Of them, thousands of North Vietnamese regular fighters had infiltrated during the previous years. The first North Vietnamese army units dispatched to South Vietnam, consisting of three regiments (about 5,000 men), had arrived in South Vietnam in late 1964.

In 1964, there were 216 US and 7457 South Vietnam casualties. In 1965 it increased to 1928 and 11241 respectively. Then, the number jumped to 6143 (US) and 11,953 (ARVN) in 1966; doubled in 1967 with 11,513 US and more than 20 thousand ARVN. Despite the losses of North Vietnamese troops and Viet Cong was about 10 times higher than those of US and South Vietnam armies, the American people had no more patience and they considered the failure was at the side of US and South Vietnam.

In such bad circumstance, the peace movements in the US and South Vietnam simultaneously surfaced.

In this paper, we will discuss the peace movements in South Vietnam only.

3. The rise of peace movements in South Vietnam.

3.1. Buddhist movements.

Vietnamese Buddhism claims that 80% of Vietnamese are followers of the religion.

It's not true. At any time, Buddhist followers only made up about 15-20% of the Vietnamese population. Most Vietnamese worshipped their ancestors and went to the temple as a traditional habit as they celebrated Christmas though they were not Christians.

The South Vietnam of the twentieth century has often, and mistakenly, been called a Buddhist country. In a land with fifteen million people, there were between three and four million Buddhists and of these only about one half practiced the religion. (Moyar, 752)

Buddhism in Vietnam was not well organized into a system like the Catholic Church. Up to 1960's, there were no official Buddhist hierarchy to lead the church. Each pagoda belonged to a monk and had certain number of followers. It' so simple that anybody could enter the temple, shaved his hair, put on the yellow robe and became a monk. That explains why the Communists could easily infiltrate into the Buddhist rank to take the lead. The phenomenon is even true in Vietnam today.

Buddhism falsely accused President Diem administration of persecution and oppression. This was totally a hoax. President Diem, although a devout Roman Catholic, did a lot of favors to the Buddhism. The majority of members in his cabinet were Buddhists. During his presidency, tens of thousands of Buddhist temples were built or renovated. President Diem even donated a big lot of land to build the biggest temple that was named The Vietnamese National Temple (Việt Nam Quốc Tự) and it later became the headquarter of the Unified Buddhist Church (Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam Thống Nhất).

President Diem was a good man; he loved and dedicated his whole life for the interests of the country and the welfare of the people. He lived a simple and humble life as described by Geoffrey Shaw in his book *The Lost Mandate of Heaven*:

”The man was seeking political power not for his own aggrandizement but out of dedication to God and his fellowmen, whom he wished to serve” (p.36). Shaw also confirmed “Diem could never have attacked Buddhism as his critics have claimed; his Confucian ethic of honoring his parents and ancestors would not have permitted him to dishonor the Buddhism of his great-grandfather and other forebears” (p.39)

Two of the biggest Buddhist temples in South Vietnam were An Quang and Xa Loi; in Central Vietnam were Tu Dam and Bao Quoc. The Buddhist An Quang was the aggressive faction that provoked the people into anti-government movements. An Quang temples became headquarters of the militant monks such as Thich Tri Quang, Thich Tri Thu, and Thich Don Hau... . There, the monks met with the leaders of rebel students to discuss and plan the resistance. Also, during that time, they stocked the weapons and propaganda materials used in the riots.

The Vietnamese Communists must have inserted agents into Buddhist rank. Vietnamese police reported a number of Buddhists when arrested, had no identity cards.

Thus, the Buddhist struggle was only the tip of an iceberg. What lied beneath was a huge pre-mediated plan of the movement led by North Vietnamese Communists to overthrow the regime, creating a chaotic situation and paving way to the military offensive to seize South Vietnam.

The Buddhist movement remained an active and powerful force in the years to come. Buddhist protesters often took to the street with the altars to block the traffics. Especially in 1965, during the rules of Generals Nguyen Khanh and Nguyen Van Thieu, Buddhism went too far from a religion to a political pressure group.

3.1.1 Thich Tri Quang, the Man of Action

In 1966, the most militant Thich Tri Quang, based in Hue City, the old capital of Vietnam, led a persistent movement against the government. The Vietnamese intelligence agency and police had some evidences that linked Tri Quang to the Communist cadres. They believed the Buddhist movement was a part of the Communist fronts beside the student movement and military activities.

Tri Quang had served with the Vietnamese Communists during the 1st Indochina War. His brother was an official in the North Vietnamese government. During the Buddhist movement, this man championed the Communist covert action programs in South Vietnam.

In some provinces of Central Vietnam such as Da Nang, Hue, Quang Tri, Tri Quang formed the Struggle Committee (Ủy Ban Đấu Tranh) backed by Youth Commandos (Đoàn Thanh Niên Quyết Tử). The later were armed with knives, sticks, and even with some rifles and grenades taken from the People Self-Defense Group (Nhân Dân Tự Vệ). Those commandos were assigned duties as spying, patrolling the neighborhoods, and guarding the altars they set on the streets. In fact, the whole region of 3 Northern provinces was under strict control by Buddhist militants.

Some Buddhist protesters moved in military formations under the direction of whistles and drums, and they established elaborate defenses against government forces. The Buddhists clearly could not have developed such tactics on their own. (Moyar, p. 759)

One thing to notice, the majority of Buddhists did not agree with the movement. But Tri Quang's followers became very fanatic. They would not hesitate to carry out terror acts as the Communists had ever done to scare people. There were reportedly clashes between the Buddhist Commandos with the Catholic youth (that claimed the lives of twelve people) and even with government forces. In a large demonstration in late November 1964, the militant Buddhists became more violent. A mob consisting of militant Buddhists hurled rocks at policemen and hit them with clubs.

The important members of Buddhist youth later, in Mau Than event, were also leading members of the Youth and Student Force for the Liberation of Hue. According to the US Embassy experts, the less senior Buddhist leaders, particularly those close to Tri Quang, were in league with the Viet Cong. One of them was Thich Huyen Quang, the Secretary General of the Buddhist Church and a close friend of Tri Quang as was his deputy Tran Dinh.

Many experts suspected Thich Tri Quang a double agent working for the CIA and the Communists. By looking at his deed, we see its similarity to the Communist revolutionary tactics.

Mark Moyar, in his paper, wrote:

"...the militant Buddhists practiced a form of political activism that was inconsistent with traditional Vietnamese Buddhism. The evidence also suggests that some of the militant Buddhist leaders were agents of the Vietnamese Communists."(Moyar, 2004, p. 749)

and

"In June 1963, Tri Quang urged his fellow Buddhists to seek assistance from the Viet Cong in opposing the Diem government. Tri Quang's methods of political mobilization bore a close resemblance to those practiced by the Communists, and they were far more advanced than those of other Vietnamese Buddhists. When the Communists conquered South Vietnam in 1975, they gave Tri Quang a job in Hue and he voiced no objections to their regime, whereas they imprisoned many other monks who had a record of political activism" (Moyar, 2004, p. 756)

Thich Don Hau, another active militant, when the RVN Army retook the old capital, followed the defeated North Vietnamese troops back to their secret base in Truong Son Mountain.

3.1.2. Thich Nhat Hanh and his Peace Appeal

Another prominent peace activist was Thich Nhat Hanh. In 1942, Thich Nhat Hanh entered the monastery at Tu Hieu Pagoda, Hue, to become a Zen Master seven years later. In 1956, he was in charge of “Vietnamese Buddhism”, an official periodical magazine of the Unified Vietnam Buddhist Church (Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam Thống Nhất). He then founded the Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon and School of Youth for Social Services (SYSS). This School of Youth later was the main force of his peace movement that caused the headache to the government.

Right after the first US combat troops landed on Vietnam soil, at a meeting in April 1965, Van Hanh Student Association issued the statement “Appeal for Peace” in which said: *"It is time for North and South Vietnam to find a way to stop the war and help all Vietnamese people live peacefully and with mutual respect."* Nhat Hanh's close assistant, the nun Thich Chân Không who was in charge of the SYSS, was accused by the Chancellor of Van Hanh University a Communist mole. From then on, the SYSS struggled to raise funds and faced attacks on its members.

During his visit in the US in 1966, Nhat Hanh championed and presented the paper "The Renaissance of Vietnamese Buddhism" at a symposium at Cornell University to promote his peace movement. On June 1, 1966, Nhat Hanh issued a 5 point statement of the An Quang Buddhist Church in which it demanded the US to (1) stop immediately all military operations and to withdraw its troops from Vietnam, (2) stop bombing North Vietnam, (3) help to establish a civilian government as well as to (4) rebuild South Vietnam. This statement was merely an echo of the NLF's (National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam) agenda.

Nhat Hanh gained support of Dr. Martin Luther King who later publicly questioned the role of the US in Vietnam. King also nominated him for the 1967 Nobel Prize but was rejected by the Nobel Committee. On June 2, 1966, Nhat Hanh testified before the US Senate where he accused the US and South Vietnamese as the cause of all miseries the Vietnamese people had endured.

In 1967, Nhat Hanh published “Viet Nam, Hoa Sen Trong Biển Lửa” (Vietnam, Lotus in a Sea of Fire). In this book, he promoted the so-called Buddhism Engagement and blamed the US and South Vietnam of making war against the will of Vietnamese people. In lines 20-22, page 52, he praised Ho Chi Minh as a national hero.

From his perspective, the NLF was founded by the South Vietnamese to resist against the US involvement; it had no relationship with the Communist North Vietnam. He stated that because of the dictatorship under President Ngo Dinh Diem and PM Nguyen Cao Ky, the Vietnamese patriots were forced to join the NLF.

When South Vietnam government closed the door for him to return, Nhat Hanh went to France and took the leadership of the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation and stayed there until after the war ended. Despite his contribution to the fall of South Vietnam, the Communist government denied his request to return to Vietnam. Hanoi government even called him a tool of the Pentagon while in a document from the Vietnam War; CIA called him "brain thruster" of Thich Tri Quang, the leader of a dissident group.

We don't have any hard evidences of Nhat Hanh linking to the Communists. He and his followers claimed themselves neutral. But we know he was blind to the real world and became Communist sympathizer. In his speech "Embracing Anger" delivered on September 25, 2001 at the Riverside Church in New York, when talking about the suffering in Vietnam, Nhat Hanh had no single word to blame the Communist but put all the responsibility on the US and its allies.

*"I was able to understand the nature of the suffering in Vietnam. I saw that not only Vietnamese suffered, but Americans suffered as well during the war in Vietnam. **The young American man who was sent to Vietnam in order to kill and be killed underwent a lot of suffering**, and the suffering continues today. The family, the nation also suffers. I could see that the cause of our suffering in Vietnam is not American soldiers. **It is a kind of policy that is not wise. It is a misunderstanding. It is fear that lies at the foundation of the policy.**"*
(Thich Nhat Hanh, Internet)

In the same speech, he made up the story of Ben Tre massacre to lie to the American public:

*"My Dear friends, I would like to tell you how I practice when I get angry. During the war in Vietnam, there was a lot of injustice, and many thousands, including friends of mine, many disciples of mine, were killed. I got very angry. One time **I learned that the city of Ben Tre, a city of three hundred thousand people, was bombarded by American aviation** just because some guerillas came to the city and tried to shoot down American aircrafts. The guerilla did not succeed, and after that they went away. And the city was destroyed. And the military man who was responsible for that declared later that he had to destroy the city of Ben Tre to save it. I was very angry."* (Thich Nhat Hanh, Internet)

This statement was posted on a whole page on The New York Times along with his picture.

The truth is the BenTre incident didn't happen. The population of Ben Tre at that time was about 75 thousand people. The US and South Vietnamese Army never dropped a single bomb onto any city except in Hue during the Mau Than battle.

3.2. The Youth and College Student Front

There were 2 types of organizations the Communists created to conduct affairs: one legal that could appear in public; the other in the dark. Usually, the Communist sympathizers or sleeping agents would run for leadership positions of the legal student organization. This legal organization consisted of real students (registered). The moles would stay low to recruit more sympathizers. Behind the scene, the Communist Youth League (the right hand and vanguard of the Communist Party) took the lead. The Communist students took the leadership of the Joint Student Association of Saigon in 4 consecutive terms from 1966 to 1970.

The student movements marched alongside the Buddhists in anti-government campaign prior 1963 and continued on to protest against any government that followed. During that time, the Communist Youth League had already infiltrated but did not have enough cadres to completely control the student community. In Hue, 1964, Thich Tri Quang founded the People's Council to Save the Country (Hội Đồng Nhân Dân Cứu Quốc) chaired by Dr. Le Khắc Quyên. The Youth and Student Forces to Save the Motherland (Lực Lượng Thanh Niên Học Sinh Sinh Viên Cứu Quốc) was also

founded to lead the young people in multiple terror acts in Hue and Danang. When the anti-government in Central of Vietnam rose to its climax, it was later reformed and renamed The Youth Commandos (Đoàn Thanh Niên Sinh Viên Quyết Tử); then, The Youth and Student Force for the Liberation of Hue (Lực Lượng Học Sinh Sinh Viên Giải Phóng Huế). The leadership now in the hand of the Communist cadres such as Nguyễn Đắc Xuân, Hoàng Phủ Ngọc Tường, Hoàng Phủ Ngọc Phan, Hoàng Văn Giàu, Nguyen Thị Đoàn Trinh... Those, during the Communist occupation in Hue in Tet Mau Than 1968, acted as executioners whose hands soaked in blood of thousands of Hue innocent people.

3.2.1. Chronicle of the Rise of Communist Student Movements

The Communists always take seriously the force of young people in their revolutionary process. Young people are willing to sacrifice to a cause they deem to be right. They act according to their emotion rather than reason. That's why; they are likely to be easily motivated.

1949: In Saigon, during the war against French occupation, the Communist Party founded the Inner-City Student Association. The students helped to distribute leaflets and organize labor and school strikes.

1950: Formation of the group of cadres in charge of Student affairs. The group offered training classes in summer in outskirt villages of Saigon (Bến Dược, Củ Chi, Bàu Trai, Đức Hoà, Long Tân, Mộc Hoá...)

1961: The 2nd National Congress of the Vietnamese Worker's Party (previous name of the Communist Party) approved its three objectives. One of which was the liberation of South Vietnam. The National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam was then founded to start the war in South Vietnam. A portion of the Worker's Party Central Committee was sent to Duong Minh Chau secret zone to form the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), the leading body of the resistance. The Vietnamese Worker's Party also created the People's Revolutionary Party of South Vietnam to hide its identity and to mislead the international community. Along with this party, there was The People's Revolutionary Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth League (Đoàn Thanh Niên Nhân Dân Cách Mạng Hồ Chí Minh).

Both Youth Leagues were the right hand of the parties. They consisted of young people recruited from the families of party members, peasants and selected from the student body. They are the vanguard and the human resources for the future generation of the party.

The Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) – a detachment of Vietnamese Worker's Party in South Vietnam - stated in its directive on January 27, 1961:

“[the creation of the People's Revolutionary Party of South Vietnam] is only the name change. ... It is indeed a part of the Vietnamese Worker's Party. It is under the leadership of the Central Executive Committee led by President Ho Chi Minh”

Beginning 1960, Võ Văn Kiệt (Vietnam PM 1988-1992) then Communist Party Commissar of Saigon-Gia Dinh ordered to create the Committee for Students Motivation of Saigon – Gia Dinh (Ban Vận Động Học Sinh Sinh Viên Sài Gòn – Gia Định). They recruited members from high school and college students, sent them to camps in the jungle to get training in the principles of secret services of revolution. In “Theo Nhịp Khúc Lên Đàng” published by Nhà Xuất Bản Trẻ: 2000, page 19, the Communist youth

“was still immature to launch its independent big campaign to struggle face-to-face with Saigon government in 1963-1964 Buddhist movement. The Party Commissar ordered it to blend into the Buddhist agitators”

September 1, 1961: Creation of The Union Association of Youth, High School and College Students for the Liberation of Saigon – Gia Định (Hội Liên Hiệp Thanh Niên Sinh Viên Học Sinh Giải Phóng Saigon Gia Định).

1965-1967 marked the birth of a secret group: The People’s Revolutionary Youth Group of Saigon-Gia Định (Đoàn Thanh Niên Nhân Dân Cách Mạng Đặc Khu Sài Gòn Gia Định)

1967-1972: The Youth Communist League of Saigon Gia Định (Thành Đoàn Sài Gòn Gia Định) was formed. This was the official youth group that affiliated to the People’s Revolutionary Party of South Vietnam. It is like the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth League to the Communist Party.

During 1968 Communist General Uprising and General Offensive, the Communist youth was involved into three activities: The armed force and commando, The armed political action force and the openly struggle force. These folks mostly were the members of the Buddhist and student movements.

3.2.2. The leading figures

The Viet Cong created an urban front in 1968 called the Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces for Vietnam (Liên minh các Lực lượng Dân tộc, Dân chủ và Hòa bình Việt Nam) . The group's manifesto called for an independent, non-aligned South Vietnam. In June 1969, the alliance merged with the NLF to form a "Provisional Revolutionary Government" (Chính Phủ Cách Mạng Lâm Thời Cộng Hoà Miền Nam Việt Nam). There are strong evidences of the interchange of leadership between the students and the intellectuals in peace movement.

Nguyen Van Hiếu, Secretary General of the NLF once said in Peking on September 20, 1964: *“The fundamental strength of the South Vietnamese people lies in their politics and this is also the fundamental weakness of the enemy...”* (Nguyen, 1965, p. 12)

After 1968, we witnessed the booming of dozens of other organizations under the umbrella of the NLF. Although they publicly stated different objectives, they only aimed at the US and the South Vietnam government, calling them to stop the military activities. They never pointed the finger at the NLF and North Vietnam Communists who were the prime suspects of war crimes.

It is like they wanted to tie the hands of one side and let the other side to win the battle.

The Mastermind of all Movements: Trần Bạch Đằng

The most dangerous man behind all the youth and student movements was Trần Bạch Đằng. Đằng joined the resistance at the age of 17 and two year later became member of the Communist Party (1943). He moved up to one of the top leading Communist political officers in Saigon and a member of the Council of Chairpersons of the National Liberation Front.

His power and responsibility oversaw many fronts mobilizing the intellectuals, youth, students, Chinese Vietnamese. He was also the chief of political indoctrination and the top leader of the People’s Revolutionary Youth League of Saigon-Gia Định.

In Tet Mau Than 1968, while a standing officer of the Communist Party Committee of Saigon, he drafted the offensive plan and was also the commander of the campaign in Saigon.

After Mau Than, he was promoted to Secretary of Communist Party of Saigon-Gia Định.

Tran Bach Dang was credited of recruiting, training, organizing Saigon students and intellectuals into the youth movements and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam. He also mobilized the south Vietnamese politicians and priests (of both Catholic and Buddhist) into organizations to riot and destabilize the normal living in big cities, as well as to launch propaganda to misinform the international communities. Always, Bach Dang disguised his objectives as to restore peace to South Vietnam

The Saigon Joint Student Association and Huỳnh Tấn Mẫm

Mẫm was recruited by Nguyễn Văn Chí (aka Sáu Chí) to be member of a secret cell when he was 15, and two year later, in 1960, he joined the Union of Youth for the Liberation of Saigon-Gia Dinh.

In 1960, as the President of Student Joint Association of Saigon- Gia Dinh, Mam led the struggle movement to protest against the government. In 1965, he became member of the People's Revolutionary Youth League.

In 1971, he launched the riot to burn hundreds of US military vehicles in front of the news reporters from all over the world. He was arrested 11 times. In 1973, he was released as the Paris Peace Accord had been in effect. He continued to lead the student peace movement. The last time he was released was on April 28, 1975 when General Duong Van Minh was about to surrender to the Communist forces.

Huynh Tan Mam was one of the first Communist Youth cadres who had infiltrated into the student organization.

In 1976, he was promoted to member of the Executive Committee of Saigon Communist Youth; Vice Chair of Saigon Committee of the Fatherland Front and elected to the 6th National Congress.

Lê Hiếu Đăng, Another Active Member of the Student Movement.

Le Hieu Dang, a Communist Party member, held many positions in the party, party-affiliated organization, and local shadow government such as: Deputy Secretary General of Central Committee of the Alliance, Vice-Chairman of the Fatherland Front Committee of Saigon, and Secretary General of the People's Revolutionary Committee of Saigon- Gia Dinh. During the student peace movement, he was member of the Executive Committee of Saigon Student Association.

Before he passed away in 2014, he expressed his disappointment toward the Communist Party and gave up his party membership.

3.3. Intellectuals

3.3.1. Mrs. Ngô Bá Thành and The Movement for Women Rights

Mrs. Ngô Bá Thành, maiden name Phạm Thị Thanh Vân, claimed herself a representative of the third force. She founded the Movement for Women Rights (Phong Trào Phụ Nữ Đòi Quyền Sống) in 1970 and worked closely with other groups to support the peace movement. She was also member of the Board of Chairpersons of the Central Committee of the Vietnam Fatherland Front.

3.3.2. Trinh Đình Thảo and The Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces for Vietnam.

In 1955, Trinh Dinh Thao was the Honor Chairman of the Peace Movement in Saigon that opposed the US intervention and Ngô Đình Diệm administration. He joined the NLF as soon as this organization founded. In 1968, Trinh Dinh Thao went to secret zone to form the Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces for Vietnam and became the first chairman of the Alliance.

On June 6, 1969, Thao became Vice-Chair of the Advisory Council of the newly founded “The Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam” (Liên minh các Lực lượng Dân tộc, Dân chủ và Hòa bình Việt Nam). In same year, he led a delegation of the Alliance to visit North Vietnam and talked with Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi.

After 1975, he was member of Communist Vietnam National Congress, and member of the Board of Chairpersons of the Central Committee of the Fatherland Front.

3.3.3. The Phenomenon of Trinh Công Sơn – Khánh Ly

In 1960s, Trinh Công Sơn was a very popular song writer who became famous in decades. His songs reflected the aspiration of Vietnamese for a long-lasting peace. The rhythm and lyric in his songs suited the taste of middle class young people and students, even South Vietnamese soldiers. No other singers but Khanh Ly could effectively pass the feeling of the songs to attract hundreds of thousands of people.

Trinh Cong Son was smart enough to hide his identity as he did not point the finger at either side. The South Vietnam government did not ban his songs; but the Communists used them as a propaganda tool to support the peace movements.

After the war, Son stayed in Vietnam to serve the new regime. Khanh Ly fled the country and had served the anti-Communist community until she recently came back to Vietnam to perform in a failed event in Saigon.

3.4. Peace Efforts of the RVN Government

Have suffered the killing and destruction of war for so long, most of Vietnamese people wanted peace at any price!

South Vietnam did not make war. The people as well as the government just needed peace and stability to develop the country. We had no choice but to bear arms to defend our country.

Because of growing instability and Vietcong insurgency in rural areas, President Ngo Dinh Diem launched the Agrovillage Program in 1959. Its main purpose was to protect Vietnamese peasants from Vietcong terrorism by relocating them to secure areas controlled by the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). The government built several new communities as part of the Agrovillage Program, completed with schools, medical clinics, and electricity.

On September 3, 1967, General Nguyen Van Thieu was elected President of the 2nd Republic. He declared his highest priorities in restoring peace, social reform and development of democracy. Talking about peace, he vowed to “*open wide the door of peace and leave it open*” (Lamb, 2001, Internet).

In the eyes of the American liberal media, President Thieu was an obstacle to peace. The true peace, to President Thieu, cannot be achieved when the Communist forces still existed in South Vietnam threatening the national security. He explained to the American reporters:

“We resist against any peace which demands the (audible) of South Vietnam and gives SVN to the Communists. .. When there is a just peace, a guaranteed peace, there is no one single obstacle to peace.” <https://youtu.be/tM643Wx6IyY> (minute 1:08)

What he demanded at the Paris Peace talk was the completely withdrawal of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops from the South as did the US troops. However, the Paris Accord was signed despite the disagreement of the South Vietnam government.

4. The Force behind the Movements

As the war went on, we realized that the communists and their sympathizers’ objective was not peace, but the victory for Viet Cong and North Vietnam. The peace movements both in the US and South Vietnam only wanted to stop the war from the US-South Vietnam side and strongly supported the war efforts from Viet Cong and North Vietnam. The leaders of militant Buddhist movement were working for the Communism.

From November 1963 to July 1965, the militant Buddhist movement was the primary cause of political instability in South Vietnam. While the militant Buddhists maintained that they represented the Buddhist masses and were fighting merely for religious freedom, they actually constituted a small and unrepresentative minority that was attempting to gain political dominance. Relying extensively on Byzantine intrigue and mob violence to manipulate the government, the militant Buddhists practiced a form of political activism that was inconsistent with traditional Vietnamese Buddhism. The evidence also suggests that some of the militant Buddhist leaders were agents of the Vietnamese Communists. (Moyar, 2004, p. 749)

In the chapter “The Buddhist Crisis of 1963”, Geoffrey Shaw wrote:

“... it has been document in North Vietnam that he [Thich Tri Quang] worked alongside Vietnamese Communists in their campaigns against Western colonialism”. (Shaw, 2015, p. 197)

In interviews with Communist authors Ho Son Dai and Tran Phan Chan, “William Colby, Lindsay Nolting, and General Nguyen Khanh, all said that although they lacked proof they believed that Thich Tri Quang was a Communist agent.” (Ho, 1994, p. 364)

One of Tri Quang’s close assistant, Dr. Le Khac Quyen, was the chairman of the People’s Revolutionary Committee in Hue when the Communists occupied the city in 1968. In her book “Our Vietnam Nightmare”, Marguerite Higgins quoted a statement of PM Trần Văn Hương about Thich Tri Quang:

“He talks like a Communist. The things he does help the Communists. But you Americans want absolute proof. And evidence is not the same as absolute proof. We can prove that Thich Tri Quang held a secret meeting with Viet Cong leaders near Cap Saint Jacques. But Thich Tri Quang is capable of saying that he was down there trying to convert the Communists to Buddhism—and some people would believe him!” (p. 261)

From 1963 to 1966, Tri Quang led the movement to repeatedly protest against any government and caused enormous harm to the anti-communist efforts.

For the student movement, in previous section, we have mentioned its relationship with the Communism. Most peace movement activists in South Vietnam are communist agents

Communists are the master in manipulation. They have experience to mobilize the people, put them into proper groups that they could use as effective tool for their goals. The peace movement was used to mislead the world. Soon after April 1975, the Vietnamese Communists stated that they won the war not on the battlefield, but on the American soil. Exactly speaking, they won the American public.

C. Conclusion

Pro-Communist or not, the peace movements in South Vietnam were orchestrated by North Vietnam and were used as effective tool for the ultimate goal of the Communists.

Peace movement was one of North Vietnam strategic objectives to weaken South Vietnam and make American public to withdraw their support of South Vietnam. They succeeded doing it!

Vietnamese people have paid a very high price for it. The end of war only meant the silence on the battlefield, no sudden death by weapons of any types. But the whole country faced starvation, more half the south Vietnam population experienced persecution, quarter of million people sent to concentration camps for from 3 to 20 years. Freedom of speech, of religion ceased to exist. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their home and land. Half million people vanished on the high sea.

Forty two years after, Vietnam under Communism is still ranked in the 3rd world countries with GDP per capita \$4000, about 1/10 of that of other Southeast Asian countries that have the similar conditions for development (compare to South Korea \$33,200).

And the most important thing, Vietnam now submitted to the giant China and may some day in near future, become Chinese colony.

To conclude this paper, I'd like to quote from a speech of the late President Ronald Reagan:

“Ending a conflict is not so simple, not just calling it off or coming home. Because the price of that peace could be a thousand year of darkness for generation’s Vietnam borned”

https://youtu.be/8_MbUxpNjyw

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