

COMMENTARY

From Polarisation to Integration in Vietnam

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Every nation, no matter how well governed and fortunate, suffers a certain degree of political and social division. In a country at war, however, polarisation tends to increase as the war goes on because people are increasingly forced to take sides. And there are not just two sides – the right side and the wrong side, the nationalist side and the Communist side, the Northern side and the Southern side, the free-world side and the totalitarianism side, and other such dichotomies. People take sides within every side and, at times, the infighting can be more vicious than the fighting with so-called enemies on the outside, domestic and foreign. During such times, people in the various infighting sides also try to form alliances with outside forces in order to bolster their own positions and, therefore, end up creating even larger polarisation. Conversely, there are times when people cross sides to form alliances and coalitions that help to mitigate the polarisation and create the necessary social and political conditions for reconciliation and possible future integration. True integration, in my opinion, requires a certain degree of moderation and consensus. Hence, social and political movements that can provide support for resistance against authoritarian policies and programmes as well as provide spaces for exchanges of views, would be able to create at the same time the social capital necessary for future integration.

In order to see whether there is any merit in the general observation just made, let me now turn to the case of Vietnam, a country that experienced continual warfare for nearly 45 years, from 1945-89. Since this is such a long span of time and since I assume that the majority of readers are not Vietnam specialists *per se*, I will be quite general, giving details only for periods that I think are crucial for an understanding of the integration problems in Vietnam. My hope here is to raise a few issues for further discussion.

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On 2 September 1945, Ho Chi Minh had declared Vietnam's independence from France in front of a crowd of over half a million in Hanoi. Most of the country was behind Ho and his revolutionary government. Even Emperor Bao Dai had abdicated in favour of Ho Chi Minh and moved from Hue to Hanoi to serve as supreme advisor to Ho and his government for almost a year. The USA and Great Britain, however, ferried French colonial troops back to Vietnam in the autumn of 1945 and helped France to re-conquer Indochina. Eventually, the USA and France agreed to the so-called "Bao Dai solution" and got Bao Dai to become the leader of the administration that they set up. During the nine-year war, or "war of resistance" as the Vietnamese called it, about half a million Vietnamese fighters on all sides were killed and the country suffered severe social and economic destruction. As a result, polarisation as well as social and moral dislocation increased. Nevertheless, a war of independence requires pan-human efforts and so it was also a period of coalition building and political moderation.

In 1954 the so-called First Indochina War ended with the Geneva Accords signed in July of that year that temporarily divided Vietnam into two military regroupment zones. The demarcation line was at the 17th parallel. The military forces of the Viet Minh were to regroup north of the line, while the French and its so-called allied forces were to regroup south of the line. Article 14 of the Accords detailed the provisions for political and administrative control in the two regrouping zones pending the general elections to reunify the country in 1957. Paragraph (a) states in full:

Pending the general elections which will bring about the unification of Vietnam, the conduct of civil administration in each regrouping zone shall be in the hands of the party whose forces are to be regrouped there in virtue of the present Agreement.

Although the USA had exerted a lot of pressure on all sides in order to obtain terms to its liking, it did not sign the Accords. Instead, the US chief representative at the Geneva negotiations, Bedell Smith, issued a so-called Unilateral Declaration on behalf of the USA saying that it would abide by stipulations set forth in the Accords. Bedell Smith (cited in M. Gettleman, *Vietnam: History, Documents, and Opinions on a Major World Crisis*, New York: Fawcett World Library, 1966: 156-7) further stated that:

In connexion with the statement in the Declaration concerning free elections in Vietnam, my Government wishes to make clear its position which it has expressed in a Declaration made in Washington on June 29, 1954, as follows: "In the case of nations now divided against their will, we shall continue to seek to achieve unity through free elections, supervised by the United Nations to ensure that they are conducted fairly."

Columnist Joseph Alsop wrote in the 31 August 1954 issue of the *New York Herald Tribune*, after a trip through southern Vietnam, that,

In the area I visited, the Communists have scored a whole series of political, organisational, military – and one has to say it – moral triumphs... What impressed me most, alas, was the moral fervor they had inspired among

the non-Communist cadres and the strong support they had obtained from the peasantry.

In the winter of 1954, travelling through the Viet Minh areas of the Mekong Delta, this hawkish US journalist again was forced to comment:

I would like to be able to report – I had hoped to be able to report – that on that long, slow canal trip to Vinh Binh, I saw all the signs of misery and oppression that have made my visits to East Germany like nightmare journeys to 1984. But it was not so . . . At first it was difficult to conceive a Communist government’s genuinely “serving the people.” I could hardly imagine a Communist government that was also a popular government and almost a democratic government. But this is just the sort of government the palm-hut state actually was while the struggle with the French continued. The Vietminh could not possibly have carried on the resistance for one year, let alone nine years, without the people’s strong, united support (J. Alsop, “A Man in a Mirror,” *The Reporter*, 25 June, 1955: 35-6).

Because the Viet Minh itself was a coalition that had widespread support of the general population, it remained quite strong after months of repression by the Diem regime, while most of the pro-French sects and parties had been liquidated by Diem either by force of arms or by US dollars (G. Kahin and J. Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam*, New York: Dell, 1969: 69-70). More than US\$12 million was spent on bribes during March and April 1955 alone. Leo Cherne, one of the original promoters of the “Diem solution,” wrote in the 29 January 1955 issue of *Look* magazine:

If elections were held today, the overwhelming majority of Vietnamese would vote Communist . . . No more than 18 months remain for us to complete the job of winning over the Vietnamese before they vote. What can we do?

One of the things the USA could do was to give peace a chance by keeping its promise to honour the national elections to reunify the country as stipulated by the Accords. Instead, the USA supported Diem to carry out more repression against most social, religious and political groups in the South in an effort to consolidate his rule. Integration by brute force, therefore, was the answer.

William Henderson, in an article entitled “South Vietnam Finds Itself,” published in the January 1957 issue of *Foreign Affairs* concluded:

South Viet Nam is today a quasi-police state characterized by arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, strict censorship of the press and the absence of an effective political opposition . . . All techniques of political and psychological warfare, as well as pacification campaigns involving extensive military operations, have been brought to bear against the underground.

Several hundred thousand Viet Minh cadres and innocent civilians suspected of being “Communist sympathisers” in the southern half of the country were killed and imprisoned. In the effort to weed out the Viet Minh cadres and other anti-Diem

elements, the Diem regime also began to round up the rural population into the *qui khu* (literally, “concentration areas”) and *qui ấp* (concentration hamlets) and, in later years, into the so-called strategic hamlets. These massive wholesale resettlement programmes caused incredible physical and social dislocation as well as misery and hunger to vast numbers of the rural population. There are several reasons for this sorry state of affair. One was that the Viet Minh military forces had all moved north, leaving the political cadres in the South largely defenceless. Even where the local cadres still had some arms and wanted to defend themselves, the Politburo in the North forbade them to do so because it did not want to compromise the chance for peaceful reunification of the country through elections. For several decades, Party leaders in Hanoi did not want to admit that they were partly responsible for the disaster visiting upon revolutionary activists and participants in the South.

However, in an overall assessment of the war issued in 1995 by the “Central Command for the Overall Assessment of the War of the Politburo of the Vietnamese Communist Party,” it is officially stated that “principally because the party did not come up with any clear-cut policy and appropriate strategy that would allow the population to actively resist the enemy in any effective manner” from 1955 to 1958 “the revolution in the South suffered unprecedented loss.” In the endnote to this statement the editors admitted that about 90% of all party members had been killed. In the Southern Region (*Nam bộ*, covering practically the same territory as the former French Cochinchina), 70,000 party cadres had been killed. Over 90,000 other party members and local inhabitants had been arrested, jailed and tortured. About 20,000 of these people had become crippled and severely wounded after the torturing. As a result, for example, only one local party cell remained in Bien Hoa province. Only 92 and 162 party members survived in Tien Giang and Ben Tre province, respectively. In the central provinces 40% of all provincial party cadres, 60% of all district cadres, and 70% of all village cadres had been arrested and killed. In some provinces only two to three cadres remained. Only in Tri Thien (the provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien) did 160 of the former 23,400 cadres survive (Ban Chỉ Đạo Tổng Kết Chiến Tranh Trực Thuộc Bộ Chính Trị (The Central Command on Overall Assessment of the War Directly under the Supervision of the Politburo), *Tổng Kết Cuộc Kháng Chiến Chống Mỹ, Cứu Nước: Thắng Lợi và Bài Học* [Overall Assessment of the Resistance against the Americans to Save the Country: Victory and Lessons], Lưu Hành Nội Bộ [For Internal Circulation Only] (Hanoi: Nhà Xuất Bản Chính Trị Quốc Gia [The National Political Publishing House], 1995), pp. 39-40 and p. 310. General Đoàn Khuê, member of the Politburo and Defense Minister, General Văn Tiến Dũng and Lieutenant General Trần Văn Quang were the principal directors of this official assessment).

In short, the repression by the Diem regime not only served to foreclose prospects for peaceful reunification of the country but also chances for political accommodation and integration in the South. Furthermore, it also served to strengthen the hands of the hardliners in the North, most of whom were leftists (*tả khuynh*) and pro-China Maoists, and helped them to justify activities and programmes that not only brought about untold misery and death to many but also foreclosed chances for true integration in the North. (You know, Marx had the slogan: “Workers of the world, Unite!” but I think a more appropriate statement would be, “Hardliners of the world unite.”).

The most grievous example of the destructive activities during the mid-1950s was the land reform programme that was carried out simultaneously with the rectification (*chỉnh đốn* was actually an intentional reformulation of the Chinese *jeng feng*, or *chỉnh phong* in Vietnamese, to give it some distance from the Chinese model) programme applied against so-called rightists (*hữu khuynh*) in the Lao Động (Workers) Party and the state bureaucracy. Of course, this was done in the name of building socialism and creating a so-called solid base for resisting imperialist aggression in the South. I do not have space to go into any detail on these programmes here. So let me first quote a few sentences on the impact of the land reform in the report by the Politburo to the 10th plenary session of the Central Committee that met in October 1956:

Leftist tendencies developed early in the land reform program and hence led to the mechanical application of the experiences of the country of our friends (i.e., China). There was resistance to investigations and careful research of the conditions of our own society ... On the other hand, there was strong insistence on opposing rightist tendencies in the process of carrying out the programs while leftist tendencies had become extremely serious ... The land reform machine, in fact, became the institution that was placed both above the Party and the government (*Văn Kiện Đảng toàn tập*) [*Complete Compilation of Party Documents*], Hanoi: Nhà Xuất Bản Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 17th volume: 430-31).

As far as the impact of the rectification of the Party and the government during the fourth and fifth phases of the land reform programme was concerned, the Politburo report just cited discloses that 2876 village party branches or cells (*chi bộ*) out of 3777 were subjected to rectification. These branches represented 150,000 out of the total of 178,000 party members. Of the party members who were forced to go through rectification, 84,000 (or 47.1% of the total number of party members) were purged. Many village party branches were summarily disbanded, many good party members were arrested and executed. The report went on to say that often the best village party branches and the best local cadres were the ones who were most severely punished. Many village party branches that made the biggest contributions during the resistance war against the French were regarded as reactionary and hence their party members and party secretaries were either jailed or killed. One of the aims of the rectification programme was to replace party members with those with “propertyless peasant background” (*bản cố nông*). As a result, the percentage of members with this background in the village party branches rose to 97%.

The rectification programme was also applied against 66 district party branches and seven provincial branches. According to the report, 720 provincial-level cadres out of the total of 3425 who had to go through rectification were purged. In the province of Ha Tinh the entire provincial-level party members were accused of being reactionary and were all purged. To rectify the excesses of the rectification programme and the land reform programme, the 10th Central Committee Plenary was convened twice, lasting from September to November 1956. A number of Resolutions was passed, one of which was the Resolution to carry out concrete measures for tackling what was stated as bureaucraticism (*tình trạng quan liêu*), authoritarianism (*độc đoán*), power monopoly (*chuyên quyền*) and loss of

democracy (*mất dân chủ*) (*Văn Kiện Đảng toàn tập* [Complete Compilation of Party Documents], Hanoi: Nhà Xuất Bản Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 17th volume: 578-86). Another very important resolution was on making preparations for the Third National Party Congress by the beginning of 1958 to discuss fundamental issues about the state of the society and the problems confronting the Party and the government. But the situations in the South forced the Third Party Congress to be postponed. In mid-1957, Lê Duẩn, the Regional Secretary of Nam Kỳ (the area of former Cochinchina) arrived in the North and took over many of the responsibilities of the Party General Secretary (at that time held by President Ho Chi Minh after General Secretary Truong Chinh had been dismissed because of the excesses committed during the last two phases of the land reform). The Third Party Congress was not able to be convened until December 1958. But instead of dealing with the issues planned, the Congress discussed the “socialist transformation” of agriculture and private commercial and industrial activities. In January 1959 the 15th Party Central Committee met. But instead of ratifying the resolutions of the Third Party Congress, it formalised the notion of armed uprisings in order to liberate the South. At the 16th Central Party Committee meeting in April 1959, two key resolutions were passed on the two most important tasks for the North. One was to carry agricultural co-operativisation and the other was to carry out the transformation of capitalist and private industrial and commercial activities. The main idea here, as stated, was to concentrate the necessary resources into the state sector so as to be able to build socialism in the North and contribute to the liberation efforts in the South. There was no more talk of implementing measures to counter authoritarianism, power monopoly and the loss of democracy. Forced integration was in. Moderation was out.

Meanwhile, in the South the increased repression of the Diem regime presented the southern population with few alternatives but to take up arms and fight back. Even the 1995 Politburo assessment cited earlier admits that “through extremely ingenious and varied forms of uprisings” the southern population had, from 1959 to 1960, “caused massive disintegration of the repressive machinery of the puppet regime in the villages and the return of the rights of self-governance to the inhabitants of thousands of villages and hamlets.” (In the endnote to this statement, it is stated that, in varying degrees, the control of local administration was returned to the people in 1100 of the total 1296 villages in the Southern Region and in 4440 of 4700 hamlets in the central provinces. In Ben Tre, in 1960 two-thirds of all the land that had been confiscated by the Diem regime was returned to the peasants.) In September 1960, Hanoi decided to create a broad-based coalition capable of rallying the diverse struggle movements in the South. This decision was motivated partly by the realisation that the party leadership in Hanoi risked losing control of the southern revolutionary movement completely unless some kind of strategy for a revolutionary war was adopted. On 20 December 1960, representatives from 20 political, social, religious and ethnic groups gathered at a secret location in Tay Ninh province, near the Cambodian border, to form the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam – usually referred to as the National Liberation Front, or simply NLF, in the West. The Front’s programme called for the overthrow of the Diem administration, liquidation of all foreign interference, human rights and democratic freedoms, a “land to the tiller” policy, an independent economy, the establishment of a national coalition government, a foreign policy of peace and neutrality, and

a gradual advance toward the peaceful reunification of the country (see Troung Nhu Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir*, New York: Random House, 1986. The appendix (pp. 319-28) has complete transcripts of the manifesto and programme of the Front).

In addition to the National Liberation Front, which is itself a coalition of many different groups, as I just stated, from 1960 to 1975 many other groups and coalitions also came into being in the southern half of the country. These later groups were together known as the Third Force, or the Third Segment as officially referred to in the Paris Agreement of January 1973 that was signed by the USA, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam), the Republic of Vietnam (the Saigon regime), and the Provisional Revolutionary Government (which was a coalition of the National Liberation Front with other groups formed in 1969). Before the signing of the Paris Agreement there were about 100 Third Force groups, ranging from the right to the left, which managed to work together on many issues and often in opposition to the Thieu regime. Therefore, in spite of the fact that the Paris Agreement established two parallel and equal parties in South Vietnam – the Saigon regime and the Provisional Revolutionary Government – and that the two parties were supposed to reach a political settlement under conditions of full democratic rights without US interference (Articles 1, 4, 9 and 11), the USA and Thieu consistently denied the PRG any political role in South Vietnam, while Thieu himself increased repression against many Third Force groups. Article 12 of the Paris Agreement stipulates that a “National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord” would be created with “three equal segments.”

The Third Segment was generally understood as the “Third Force” composed of individuals and organisations that were not aligned with either the Thieu regime (the First Force) or the PRG (the Second Force). Hence, they were considered “neutralist,” although almost all of them were either non-Communist and anti-Communist. The National Council, which literally means “Council of State” in Vietnamese (*Hội Đồng Quốc Gia*), was thus supposed to represent the various political forces in South Vietnam and function with higher authority than both the Saigon regime and the PRG in certain areas of the political life of South Vietnam. Three days before the signing of the Paris Agreement, however, US Secretary of State Kissinger still insisted at a press conference that the policy of the USA was against “imposing a coalition government or a disguised coalition government on the people of South Vietnam” (*New York Times*, 25 January 1973). President Nixon, meanwhile, ruled out any role for the PRG in any future government in South Vietnam. And, in the words of Gareth Porter (in *A Peace Denied: The United States, Vietnam, and the Paris Agreement*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975: 186), a US specialist on Vietnam,

In his radio and television address on January 23, 1973 Nixon ... announced that the United States would “continue to recognize the government of the Republic of Vietnam as the sole legitimate government of South Vietnam.” ...The statement that Nixon recognized the RVN as the “sole legitimate government” in South Vietnam bore the seeds of a new war.

Emboldened, if not to say encouraged, by Kissinger and Nixon, Thieu reiterated his Four No’s policy as soon as the Paris Agreement was signed: no recognition of

the enemy, no coalition government, no pro-Communist neutralisation of the southern region of Vietnam, and no concession of territory to the Communists. Later on, in an interview published in the 15 July 1973 issue of *Vietnam Report*, the English-language publication of the Saigon Council on Foreign Relations, Thieu stated:

The Viet Cong are presently trying to turn areas under their control into a state endowed with a government, which they could claim to be the second such institution in the South. They probably also hope that when this government has achieved a degree of international recognition, international opinion will force the two administrations to merge into a coalition government. If that were to happen, they would only agree to a pinkish government of coalition, which then will try to enter negotiation with Hanoi easily.

Because of his fear that peaceful political and economic competition with the PRG would eventually lead to the formation of a coalition government, Thieu stated in the same interview, quoted above, that “In the first place, we have to do our best so that the NLF cannot build itself into a state, a second state within the South.” In the second place, he continued, his government should use all means at its disposal to prevent the creation of a Third Force, branding all third-force personalities as pro-Communist. (Thieu made similar statements repeatedly for the next two years. See, for example, the reports of his speeches on 14 April 1974 in the 15 April 1974 issue of *Điện Tín* and of 13 November 1974 in the 14 November 1974 issue of the pro-Thieu and pro-USA daily *Chính Luận*.) Again, in early October 1973, Thieu declared that all Third Force groups were “traitors” with their “strings pulled by the Communists.” In late April 1973, Hoàng Đức Nhã, Thieu’s cousin and most trusted advisor, had declared: “If you’re not a Communist then you are a Nationalist (i.e., pro-Thieu); if you’re not a Nationalist then you’re a Communist. There is no such thing as a third component or fourth component” (*Chính Luận*, 28 April 1973). And Deputy Nguyễn Bá Cẩn, chairman of the Saigon Lower House and one of Thieu’s most effective supporters, said “there is no such thing as national reconciliation and national concord” with other political forces (*Điện Tín*, 3 October 1973).

Before the announcement in October 1972 of the draft of the Paris Agreement that had been initialised by Kissinger and Le Đức Thọ, the *New York Times* (7 September 1972) quoted Ngô Công Đức, an authority on the prison system in Vietnam, a former Catholic deputy in the Saigon Lower House and also the nephew of the archbishop of Saigon, as saying that there were about 200,000 political prisoners in Thieu’s jails. On 10 July 1972, *Time* magazine reported that “arrests are continuing at the rate of 14,000 per month.” On 5 August 1972, the *San Francisco Chronicle* also reported that some 14,000 civilians had been arrested and jailed every month since April of that year. After the draft of the Agreement was made public, the number of arrests soared. On 10 November 1972 the *Washington Post* quoted Hoàng Đức Nhã, Thieu’s nephew and most trusted advisor, as saying that 40,000 new political prisoners had been picked up in the two weeks after the Agreement was announced. On 11 November, CBS Evening News reported that Hoàng Đức Nhã boasted that the Thieu regime had arrested 55,000 “Communist sympathisers” since the announcement of the Agreement and had killed 5000 others. The *San Francisco Chronicle*

reported on 4 November 1972 that Thieu stated on the same day that persons who supported a coalition government were “pro-communist neutralists” and would not be allowed to live five minutes. And, according to one of the decrees that the regime promulgated after the announcement of the Agreement, any individual without a Saigon flag in his or her possession at all times to demonstrate allegiance to Thieu was considered a pro-Communist and was subjected to five years imprisonment. *Newsweek* reported in its 13 November 1972 issue that hundreds of South Vietnamese had been arrested “for failure to produce on demand a South Vietnamese flag.” The same magazine quoted a high US official as saying that Thieu was “arresting anyone who has a third cousin on the other side.” As reported by *Việt Tân Xã* (Viet News Agency, 16 November 1972), the Thieu regime’s official press agency, during the week of 8-15 November 1972, Thieu’s police carried out 7200 raids in the urban areas alone in an effort to arrest “pro-communist neutralists.” However, in a statement designed to make the Saigon regime accountable for fewer political prisoners than they actually held, Saigon’s Foreign Minister Trần Văn Lãm declared on the eve of the signing of the Paris Agreement (on 26 January 1973) that the number of political prisoners in South Vietnam’s prisons at the time was over 100,000 (*Đoàn Kết* [a bi-weekly published by the Association of Vietnamese in France], 31 March 1973).

Article 8c of the Paris Peace Agreement specified that the question of the return of Vietnamese civilian detainees, or political prisoners, should be resolved within 90 days of the ceasefire. In an attempt to sidestep the whole issue, the Thieu regime maintained that there were no political prisoners in Saigon jails. For example, Thieu himself was quoted in the 8 March 1973 issue of the *Washington Post* as saying that “there are no political prisoners in South Vietnam – only Communists [sic.] and common criminals.”

In order to support its claim that there were no political prisoners in South Vietnam, the Thieu regime systematically changed the files of many of the political prisoners, shifting their category to “common criminal status.” Senator Edward Kennedy, in a speech before the US Senate on 4 June 1973, quoted the US Embassy in Saigon as telling his sub-committee in a letter specifically that: “Before and since the ceasefire, the GVN [Government of Vietnam] has been converting detainees to common criminal status by the expedient of convicting them of ID card violations or draft dodging” (quoted in *The Boston Phoenix*, 26 June 1973). According to Senator Kennedy, the American Embassy in Saigon and the State Department admitted that there were political prisoners and that there was torture in South Vietnam, and said that political prisoners were purely an internal matter for South Vietnam. This led Senator Kennedy to exclaim in the same speech that, “This American position is truly incredible.” At that time, according to Senator Kennedy, the US government was still training Saigon police and torturers and still paid for Saigon’s prison system. According to the USAID Project Budget Submission for Fiscal Year 1974, its goal was the establishment of a Jail Administration Program in 552 detention facilities by the end of fiscal year 1973. The document also cited in its progress report the existence of the programme in 329 detention facilities. Senator Kennedy said that the US government reported to his sub-committee that it was going to spend over US\$15.2 million in Fiscal Year 1974 (beginning 1 July 1973) on support of the South Vietnamese police and prison system. He noted, however, the amount reported was

far from the total going to the Thieu regime for repression of Vietnamese prisoners since “presumably there is more buried elsewhere.” Mr Kennedy continued, “The administration’s cover up and deception on continuing support of the police and prison system in South Vietnam defies understanding” (all quotations from Senator Kennedy are cited in *The Boston Phoenix*, 26 June 1973).

What I am trying to show, with the details just given, is that from 1960 until 1975 there were tremendous efforts at coalition building and the creation of civil societies upon which reconciliation and true integration could be founded. However, with the help of the USA, the Thieu regime severely damaged this foundation with the repression of the Third Force. Furthermore, by forcing the military outcome that culminated in Northern bureaucrats and party members claiming the lion’s share of power – with the PRG disbanded and with most of the activists in social and political movements in the South either co-opted or put out to pasture (*ông Táo bỏ bụi tre* in Vietnamese parlance) – after 1975, the Thieu regime and the USA had helped set in motion forces that have not been conducive to true integration. The excesses in the political, economic and social policies and programmes from 1976 to 1986 serve to underscore this point. I have dealt with the events during this period in detail elsewhere and I do not want to repeat any of them here. What I want to call attention to here is that the reform processes of the last ten years, in my opinion, have been but accommodation efforts. Certain southern practices have been adopted by the central bureaucrats and policy makers, while the bureaucratisation of the entire society on the northern model has continued unabated. There has been forced integration that would create more, instead of less, polarisation in the long run. And the lack of true integration in all areas – social, economic, cultural and political – in Vietnam at the present time has, in my opinion, been creating increasing social instability that will, in turn, make sustainable development in Vietnam much more difficult.

I do not want to leave you with the impression that I am a hopeless pessimist. On the contrary, I hope that the Vietnamese people will take a careful look at the predicaments facing them and create the necessary conditions and social capital for greater and better integration. I also hope that people elsewhere will learn from the Vietnamese experience that it is difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, to promote integration, democracy and freedom through force of arms and war.

Ho Chi Minh had a dream when he said: “There is nothing as precious as independence and freedom.” Independence means *freedom from*. It is now up to this and future generations of Vietnamese, with help and support of friends around the world, to realise his dream by building the foundations for *freedom to*.

Acknowledgement

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