

Honorable Devall L. Patrick, Governor of Massachusetts,
Honorable Martin J. Wash, Mayor of the city of Boston,

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed an honour and a privilege for me to welcome you in this hall today.

On the 26th of October 1956, 58 years ago now, the people of Vietnam found themselves ushered into a new era: the birth of the First Republic of Vietnam, a most significant milestone in our history, and one that will forever remain engraved in the minds and the spirit of all Vietnamese back in Vietnam or elsewhere in diaspora.

As we celebrate today, we cannot forget the generosity of the American people since that fateful 20th of July 1954 when it was decided, at the Geneva Conference, that our beautiful country was to be divided into 2 separate entities.

With your help and under the wise and bold leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem, the new Republic of South Vietnam managed, in defiance of all odds, to pick itself up from the dust of war, reach a level of stability the country had, until then, never known, setting itself up on the road to modernity. It wasn't long before the young republic enjoyed the freedom and democracy it had long sought, and in their wake, the undiluted respect of South East Asia.

During that same period of time, the government in the North, flying the banner of The Democratic Republic of Vietnam, a name that belied its constitution, locked itself in a dictatorial system ruthlessly kept in check by the brutal communist regime. The country was very quickly transformed into one large prison, a gulag behind a bamboo curtain.

The obvious disparities between North and South, by then officially considered 2 different countries, attested to the great success of the First Republic of Vietnam, the fruit of the exemplary leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem aided by a faithful ally, the American people.

It was in that spirit of mutual friendship and respect that Pres. Eisenhower invited President Ngo Dinh Diem to officially visit the United States of America. On that occasion, he was given the highest official welcome.

The American people offered him their warm welcome and the 2 Houses of Congress acknowledged with great enthusiasm the speech he delivered on May 9th, 1957.

May I quote a couple of passages from his speech:

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May 9, 1957

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, gentlemen of the Congress, the Republic of Vietnam, the youngest Republic in Asia, soon will be two years old. Our Republic was born among great suffering.

She is courageously facing up to economic competition with the Communists, despite heavy and difficult conditions, which become daily more complex. Vietnam nevertheless has good reason for confidence and hope. Her people are intelligent, have imagination and courage. They also draw strength from the moral and material aid they receive from the free world, particularly that given by the American people.

... In the face of increased international tension and Communist pressure in Southeast Asia, I could not repeat too often how much the Vietnamese people are grateful for American aid, and how much they are conscious of its importance, profound significance, and amount.

..... In actual fact, at any other moment of history, the conflicts between peoples have never been posed in such immediate terms of civilization as they are today. It is by having made timely contributions in sufficient quantities for the rehabilitation of our economic and technical life, which permitted a higher standard of living, that the free world, under the leadership of the United States, is assuring the success of the new system of international cooperation. This action has contributed to the defense of Southeast Asia and prevented the raw materials of this area from falling into Communist hands.

..... It is on this high moral plane that we pay tribute to the generous and unselfish assistance we have received from the people of the United States. It is on the same plane that the interests of Vietnam are identical with the interests of the people of the free world. It is on this plane that your and our fight are one and the same. We too will continue to fight Communism.

..... It is in this conviction and in the ardent and always present remembrance of the strong sympathetic comprehension with which the American people and Government have followed our efforts, that I close, thanking you once again, Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, and gentlemen of the Congress, for the honor you have bestowed on me and for your kind attention."

[Congressional Record - House. May 9, 1957, pp.6699-6700.]

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End of Quotation.

Revisiting these events, my mind still echoes with the voice of the leader earnestly pleading with his powerful allies, urging them further into what was to be their mission, namely to help curtail the rapid advance of communism in South East Asia.

Sadly, the November 1st, 1963 coup that toppled the First Republic of Vietnam spelled the downward spiral for South Vietnam, and left the door open to a new chapter fraught with seemingly unsurmountable difficulties exacerbated by ill-conceived decision-making on the part of an overwhelmed administration. Here are some examples:

- *the ill-advised destruction of strategic hamlets, a proven military system that had protected the countryside very effectively.*
- *a failing economy, leading to political unrest.*
- *the massive invasion of the South by North Vietnam troops: the Americans reacted in kind by landing the first major batch of American soldiers on Vietnamese soil.*

By the end of the conflict in 1975, the final battlefield toll among American troops was 57 000. More than 300 000 Vietnamese soldiers had also given their lives.

The Paris Peace talks took place on Jan 27th 1973. It was supposed to put an end to the bloody war, bring peace and allow the peoples of both Vietnams to dialogue, hold general elections to decide on their fate. Immediately after, the Americans and all other allied troops left South Vietnam.

Left to its own devices, a now weakened South Vietnam had to deal with the 100 000 North Vietnamese soldiers who had already invaded the South and never left. That fact, the Paris Peace Talks conveniently ignored, and neither mentioned nor ever dealt with.

From then on, massive attacks and invasions continued with the backing of Russia and China, leading to the complete downfall of South Vietnam on the 30th April 1975, remembered as the Black April.

Today 40 years later, 90 millions of Vietnamese still mourn the Black April 1975 when the entire country found itself under the iron fist of the Communists, dreading a potential invasion by China.

Distinguished Guests,

This afternoon in this historic city of Boston, a city of freedom, of generosity, of intellect, I apologize for taking up much of your time, but the reason for that is to help build the future based on the lessons of the past.

Today we look at the future of Vietnam and of the important relations between Vietnam and The United States of America.

Because of its strategic position, its freedom, its independence, Vietnam cannot afford to continue to live in fear, in insecurity next to China, a giant that increasingly continues to occupy land and water body that belong to Vietnam.

Here are some problems facing today's Vietnam:

On one hand:

- *The Socialist Republic of Vietnam remains closely dependent on China in all aspects, legal and political systems.*
- *The debts and favours received have not yet been repaid in full to China.*
- *The disturbing personal relations between Vietnamese high-ranking party members and their China counterparts.*
- *The secret treaty on the Sept 3rd, 1990 has transformed VN into a self-governed province of China.*

On the other hand:

- *General disillusion and animosity toward the government.*
- *Widespread corruption within the government and in the Army.*
- *The people's feeling of being betrayed and abandoned by their leaders.*

All these factors contribute to erode the will to resist foreign invasion.

Most recently, some generals have openly displayed their dissatisfaction and anxiety toward certain decisions concerning the fate of the country, decisions that were hidden from the public.

Many intellectual patriots, former party members, religious leaders have stepped up the plate, demanding the abolition of the one-party system, urging a call for democracy, freedom and justice.

This is the solemn wish of our people, a wish that I would like to bring to your attention and that of the international community.

Once again, I wish to thank you for your attention.

Boston, October 26, 2014

*Le Trong Quat, Esq,
Former Minister of State
Justice to The Constitutional Court
Republic of Vietnam*