



**A COUNTRY  
STAYS ALIVE  
WHEN ITS  
CULTURE IS  
ALIVE.**

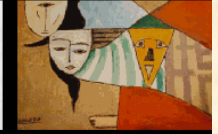
**HOPE NEVER DIES  
IN THE  
INDOMITABLE  
VIETNAMESE MIND**

- **SACEI Newsletter updates you on the latest news about Vietnamese-America.**
- **It serves as a LINK between SACEI members and those who are interested in the Vietnamese or Vietnamese-American culture.**

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Why VN Lost to Communism	1
How Communists kill South Vietnamese	4
Vietnamese New Vietnam Spy Style	4
Testimony of Dr. Nguyen Quoc Quan	6
But Ga's Comments about VIETNAM STUDY GROUP (VSG)	8
Duong Dinh Hung's Music	10
Last Days in VN	10

# SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE



## To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese-American Culture

NEWSLETTER # 80

JUNE 2015



## Why was Vietnam Lost to Communism?

PAUL SCHMEHL, Independent Researcher

Millions of words have been written about the Vietnam War, or as we prefer to call it, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indochina War. Many thousands of those words have been about why the war was lost. There are as many opinions about why the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indochina War was lost as there are writers to express them. <sup>1</sup>

Some say it's because we never should have been there in the first place, or because it was a civil war. Others say it's because a bunch of peasants in sandals beat the greatest military in the world with determination and grit. Still others say it's because it was a war for independence and any outsider would have been thrown out just as the French were. Many of them want to teach us the lessons they think we should learn from the war yet few of them recognize or accept the facts when they are presented to them. Or they want to ignore them or interpret them to fit their preconceived notions about the war.

Many brave men and women have served this country. More than a few have given their lives in those efforts. Most of them served with honor and courage. Too many of our politicians, on the other hand, have no principles and stand for nothing. At the first sign of trouble, rather than making their case for why we need to stand and fight, these cowards will turn and run and abandon the battlefield.

Enthusiasm ebbs and flows depending upon the Presidential or political will to win. After the initial enthusiasm for the war has faded and the shooting has started, some opportunistic politicians turn inward and begin to look for openings to score political points. If they can undermine another politician by undermining the war effort, they will. The cost to the nation is seldom even a secondary consideration for them.

Anyone's opinion, no matter how outlandish or how unproven, is more easily accepted if it helps the political cause. For a communist with political propaganda to spread, it's fertile ground.

The end result is that military men and women can go to war, supported by an enthusiastic public and a supportive government. Then, when the war isn't resolved quickly, men die because of gradualist tactics and no winning strategy. The mood can turn, and then those same people can betray the military a few years later while men and women are still fighting and dying far from home.

There are many reasons for this. Not least is that a large segment of the media is hostile and reports every rumor, innuendo and lie that is repeated without determining its veracity. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indochina War many journalists sat at their favorite bars in Saigon, the Continental, the Rex and the Caravelle, and soaked in the stories of Pham Xuan An, a North Vietnamese spy as well as other English-speaking malcontents and coup plotters. Then they repeated those stories to an unsuspecting public. They even hired An to report and to run their local bureaus. <sup>2 3</sup>

Antiwar activists repeated what the journalists wrote. Many were naïve and idealistic. Some were communist agents or collaborators intent on seeing the United States defeated. Some even traveled to communist countries to be briefed and supplied materials to be used in communist propaganda. <sup>4</sup> Then they returned to the US and repeated the propaganda as instructed. They even advised the communists on how to improve their propaganda for American audiences. <sup>5</sup> The politicians were eventually swayed and became antiwar. <sup>6</sup>

The one enduring lesson of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indochina War is this: the US cannot be trusted as an ally in long wars because of our system of government. Our country can be fully committed to a war in one year and be completely opposed to that same war just a few years later, because the political winds have shifted.

Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf resolution with two dissenting votes in the Senate and none in the House. Just ten years later Congress abandoned Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, cutting their funding and guaranteeing communist victories in all three countries. The same Senators who voted for the Tonkin resolution now voted to abandon our allies, without the slightest remorse for the millions who would die. <sup>7</sup>

In 2013 Major General Ira Hunt Jr. (Ret) published a book, *Losing Vietnam: How America Abandoned Southeast Asia*, that directly addresses some of the questions about why the war was lost. Some of the information in his book is eye-opening. Much of it is information that the academic left refuses to admit.

For example, Hunt proves statistically that the ARVN forces acquitted themselves quite well, right up to the final collapse.

*Continue on next page*

## VN Lost to Communism...

*"Exchange Ratio. This factor is a measure of friendly efficiency. On a countrywide basis, the ratio of enemy killed to friendly killed was a respectable 4.3 for 28 January 1973 to 31 March 1974. The exchange ratio for friendly-initiated attacks was 6.7, compared to 3.5 for enemy-initiated attacks, again indicating*

*that aggressiveness paid off."*<sup>8</sup>

There were exceptions, of course, but those exceptions were more due to very poor decision-making on the part of President Thieu and very poor leadership from some parts of the ARVN officer corps, especially Maj. Gen. Phu, Commander of II Corps and Lt. Gen. Truong, Commander of I Corps.

Even in early 1975, when the US had reduced aid to South Vietnam to the point that ammunition was being rationed to ridiculously low levels, the South Vietnamese military still performed well.

*"Yet, for all of this, the South Vietnamese soldiers were still seriously attriting the enemy and still had a strong military capability. Man for man, they were probably superior to the enemy."*<sup>9</sup>

His analysis of the US performance after leaving Vietnam is devastating.

*"The United States reneged on almost all of the pre-peace treaty promises made to South Vietnam. It did not replace major combat system losses on a one-for-one basis; it did not maintain the pre-treaty level of the stocks of ammunition; it failed to intervene militarily when North Vietnam overwhelmingly renewed its aggression; and most importantly it did not continue to provide adequate financial support."*<sup>10</sup>

Ask most academics and they will tell you that the ARVN were unreliable, ran from the fight and could never have beaten the NVA.<sup>11</sup> The facts say they lost because we abandoned them in their hour of need.

Having studied the war a great deal over the past few years, I can think of many reasons that the war was lost. First and foremost, the political leadership of our country failed us in spectacular and very troubling ways. Nixon had the will to aid South Vietnam, but the Watergate scandal stripped him of his power and drove him from office. The US Congress, emboldened by his downfall, defunded aid to all our Indochina allies, dooming them to communist reprisals and tyranny.

These are some of the things our politicians did that doomed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indochina war to failure and the three states of South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos to decades of darkness.

1. They refused to face reality.

- The communists never bargained in good faith and never had any intention of obeying the terms of any agreement they signed.<sup>12</sup> Yet our leaders, time and time again, caved in to their demands. For example, when we finally signed a peace agreement with the communists, we granted them two things they never should have had.
  - The NLF, a front organization for the North, was allowed to be a party to the negotiations, giving the communists two parties to the negotiations when everyone on the planet knew they were a front.<sup>13</sup>
  - The NVA was allowed to keep troops in the South, an insane concession that doomed South Vietnam to years and years of war, if not defeat.<sup>14</sup>
- They insisted on the neutrality of Laos and Cambodia, despite the fact that the NVA invaded both countries, established bases there from which to launch attacks in the South and built a logistics system, the Ho Chi Minh trail, that allowed them to resupply, refit and rest their troops without worry of harassment.<sup>15</sup> The single greatest reason the allies never defeated the NVA is because they stubbornly refused to cut off the Ho Chi Minh trail.<sup>16 17</sup>

2. They didn't respect the Vietnamese. No matter what we thought of them, the Vietnamese were fighting for their nation and their freedom. We were supposed to be supporting them. In far too many cases, our leaders tried to push their ideas down the Vietnamese leaders' throats rather than working toward a common goal. We even encouraged the coup of their elected leader, Ngo Dinh Diem, who was then assassinated, a black stain our nation will never outlive.<sup>18</sup>

3. They let hubris and politics overcome reason and facts and made decisions based on foolhardy criteria that led to disastrous results.<sup>19</sup>

4. They made promises to the South Vietnamese and then reneged on them, dooming the South to failure despite their superior performance against the NVA.

- President Nixon promised President Thieu that the US would provide air support if the NVA invaded after the treaty was signed. (Of course they were already there because of the awful concessions we made in the treaty.) Congress passed a law preventing air support in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, dooming all three countries.<sup>20</sup>
- The US signed a treaty that, among other things, promised to replace, item for item, any war materiel that the South used up. We never lived up to that promise.

5. They micromanaged the war, even though they had no training in military tactics, strategy or logistics. That cost many American and Vietnamese lives for little gain in the war.<sup>21</sup>

- They forbade the military to attack legitimate military targets inside North Vietnam. E.g. a pilot spotted barges filled with weapons and ammunition and asked for permission to engage. He was not allowed to engage. Another pilot spotted MIG-21s sitting on the ground but was not allowed to fire on them.<sup>22</sup> Even operational SAM sites were off-limits to our fliers.<sup>23</sup>
- They actually tipped off the enemy **in advance** of the targets chosen for bombing raids. This is an act of treason in war and undoubtedly cost many American lives unnecessarily. The justification was dumbfounding. Dean Rusk stated, "We didn't want to harm the North Vietnamese people, so we passed the targets to the Swiss embassy in Washington with instructions to pass them to the NVN government through their embassy in Hanoi."<sup>24</sup> No thought was apparently given to how many American lives this decision would cost.

6. They utterly failed to address the propaganda war, allowing the communists free hand to turn the American politicians falsely fearful of

*Continue on next page*

public opinion against the war.<sup>25</sup>

There were many reasons that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indochina War was a failure. Chief among them was the political leadership of the United States. These same mistakes continue to be made, because we have learned nothing from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indochina War.

We've learned nothing from the war because historians have failed utterly in their principal task, to analyze history and dispassionately reveal its intricacies and realities. Many of the academics who are so-called experts on Vietnam were antiwar activists in their youth. (Some were even affiliated with communists.) They carried that same mindset into their studies of the war and never managed to separate their personal beliefs from their study of its history.

The result is a history replete with falsehoods, misrepresentations, suppositions and myths that teach us nothing of value about the war and its lessons.

## VN Lost to Communism ...

1. A search on Amazon.com for "Vietnam War History" returns 5,315 results
2. Antiwar scholars claim that An never lied or sowed disinformation in his news reports and that doing so would have quickly exposed him as a spy. They ignore the fact that he would often provide information that the journalists already believed was true and therefore would accept as true, even if it was not. For example, he reported that the hamlet program was ineffective, an opinion (not fact) that many thought was true. Whether it was or not is arguable. For a balanced look at the complexities of An's life, read *The Spy Who Loved Us: The Vietnam War and Pham Xuan An's Dangerous Game*.
3. Bass, Thomas A., *The Spy Who Loved Us: The Vietnam War and Pham Xuan An's Dangerous Game*, New York, 2009, pp. 137-138 Writing of the battle of Ap Bac, a communist victory, Bass reveals that An provided the intelligence and training the Viet Cong needed to prepare for and win the battle. Then he tipped off American reporters to the battle. "The story broke in the Western Press and was written exactly the way the communists wanted it written."
4. Canfield, Dr. Roger, *Comrades In Arms: How the Ameri-Cong Won the Vietnam War Against the Common Enemy – America*, Sacramento, 2014, p. 202
5. Canfield, pp. 456-458
6. Tuan, Nguyen Anh, *America Coming to Terms: The Vietnam Legacy*, Bloomington, 2008, p. 243
7. The Case-Church Amendment passed the House 325-86 and the Senate 73-16. Cf Public Law 93-35, Section 108
8. Hunt Jr., Major General Ira A., *Losing Vietnam: How America Abandoned Southeast Asia*, Lexington, 2013, p. 49
9. Hunt, p. 169
10. Hunt, p. 167
11. I have often wondered if those who praised the communist soldiers and denigrated the South Vietnamese soldiers ever consider that they were all Vietnamese. Falk, Richard A., *The Vietnam War and International Law, Volume 4: The Concluding Phase*, Princeton, 2015, p. 74
12. Wikisource, "Paris Peace Accords", Chapter IX, Article 23, Accessed 8 May 2015
13. Paris Peace Accords, Chapter II, Article 3 (b). The communists also left troops in South Vietnam after signing the 1954 Geneva Accords, a clear violation of that treaty.
14. Office of the Historian, "The Laos Crisis: 1961-1963", Accessed 8 May 2015
15. Horowitz, David, "A Primer on Why We Lost Vietnam: a Vietnamese general confirms the anti-war movement's role in our defeat", Los Angeles Times, 6 Aug 1995, Accessed 8 May 2015
16. Duong, Van Nguyen, *The Tragedy of the Vietnam War: A South Vietnamese Officer's Analysis*. Jefferson, 2008, p. 236
17. Prados, John, "JFK and the Diem Coup", The National Security Archive, 5 Nov 2003, Accessed 8 May 2015
18. The single worst decision was the decision to consider Laos and Cambodia as neutral countries, despite the fact that the NVA had invaded both countries, and therefore refuse to cut off the Ho Chi Minh trail. This allowed the communists to resupply, refit and rest without harassment and ensured an endless struggle.
19. Public Law 93-35, Section 108
20. President Johnson once boasted that the Air Force couldn't bomb "an outhouse without my permission".
21. Stormer, John A., *None Dare Call It Treason: 25 Years Later*, Florissant, 1990, Chapter 18 is filled with examples of the military idiocy of the Administration
22. Prados, John, "The '65 Decision: Bombing SAM Sites In North Vietnam", Jan 2006, Accessed 5/10/2015
23. Piotrowski, General "Pete", *Basic Airman to General: The Secret War and Other Conflicts*, Bloomington, 2014, pp. 246-247
24. Stormer, pp. 368-379



## How Communists Kill the South Vietnamese

In a local museum in Ben Tre Province, is displayed a hammer, with which a communist cadre used to kill his enemies, the South Vietnamese.

"With this [hammer], camarade (sic) Nguyen Van Thang, deputy chief of Mo Cay Military Distris (sic), Ben Tre Province killed to deatts (sic) a total of 10 local tyrants"



## Vietnamese New Vietnam Spy Tale

### New Vietnam Spy Tale Sheds Light on How the U.S. Lost the War

<http://www.newsweek.com/vietnam-cia-40th-anniversary-327033>

(excerpt)

"Vietnam unfurled a massive celebration on Thursday to mark the 40th anniversary of the end of its long war with the United States. Thousands of soldiers, sailors, police, firefighters and students marched through the streets of Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon, brandishing flags and flowers. On the steps of Reunification Palace, once the grandiose home of South Vietnam's U.S.-backed president, honors were bestowed on aging "heroes of the revolution."

One of the missing heroes was Pham Chuyen, a little-known but key player in the "American war," as the Vietnamese call it. The old Communist spy died peacefully in his bed last November at the age of 93. Pham's death, in his ramshackle home southeast of Hanoi, passed without fanfare outside Vietnam, unlike those of some of his more illustrious comrades who managed to infiltrate the highest levels of the South Vietnamese government.

Yet according to a four-part series published in an obscure Hanoi military journal in April, Pham was a key double agent in an operation that led to the capture or deaths of scores of CIA and U.S. military-controlled spies for nearly a decade during the war. A translation of the series was provided to *Newsweek* by Merle Pribbenow, a 27-year CIA veteran who has spent his post-agency years translating Vietnamese Communist materials for the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington, D.C.

Reported here for the first time outside of Vietnam, the series draws partially on two books by American experts published decades ago. But in declassifying some of its wartime documents, Hanoi sheds new light on how its intelligence service was able to neutralize virtually every spying operation mounted against it by the CIA and, later, a top-secret U.S. military outfit known by its acronym MACV-SOG, or Military Assistance Command Vietnam/Studies and Observations Group. "[From 1961 to 1970], our security forces used the spies that the CIA sent into North Vietnam to lure the CIA into sending equipment and many more commando teams into North Vietnam," said the report in *An Ninh The Gioi (World Security)*. "We killed or captured all of these spies and commandos."

Many were lured into traps by Pham, a North Vietnamese exile in Saigon. The CIA recruited him in 1961 to return north and spy on his homeland. Yet not long after landing by boat at the port of Hai Phong, he was quickly captured and turned into a double agent by North Vietnam's Public Security Bureau, a powerful and fearsome intelligence service modeled on the Soviet KGB.

*Continue on next page*

## New Vietnam Spy Tale...

The CIA and Pentagon have previously acknowledged that nearly all their operations inside North Vietnam in the 1960s were quickly compromised. One secret program run by the U.S. military's Saigon-based Studies and Observations Group tried to capitalize on that, according to a 1999 book, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, by national security historian Richard H. Shultz Jr. The unit parachuted captured Communist troops back into North Vietnam with incriminating documents and maps sewn into their clothing, sometimes without their knowledge, counting on them to be caught. "The idea was to make the North Vietnamese think we had vast spy nets operating up there," a former MACV-SOG operative, Wayne Tvrdik, tells *Newsweek*. Most of the men sent north were captured and executed.

For years, the extent of Pham's role and even his true allegiance remained a mystery, at least to one U.S. intelligence operative involved in the operation. "Sure, I knew him," the late Sedgwick Tourison, a former U.S. military intelligence agent in Saigon, wrote in his 1995 book, *Secret Army, Secret War*. "We recruited him to send him back to North Vietnam in 1961. He was still in contact with us until at least 1969, and I was never sure if he was working for us or for North Vietnam."

But a senior former CIA operations officer in Saigon tells *Newsweek* that he had concluded early on that Pham—code-named "ARES"—had been turned into a double agent. "ARES was a singleton agent infiltrated into North Vietnam by the agency," says Walter McIntosh, a former chief of Vietnam operations for the CIA. "He was taken over by MACV-SOG, which failed to detect that [he] had fallen under North Vietnamese control." McIntosh recalls that he was so certain Pham had been doubled that he refused to assist the military unit on any more resupply missions to him. "I wrote a 12-page dispatch citing the evidence of ARES being in NVN control and what special stuff had been compromised," he says. His warnings evidently bounced off MACV-SOG operators, who continued to believe in Pham, McIntosh says. As a result, "12 men died while [delivering] him a resupply of agent material" in North Vietnam.

According to *World Security's* account, Pham's handlers in Hanoi concocted over 300 phony intelligence reports for him to send to Saigon, including misleading map coordinates for missile sites, bridges, rail lines, factories and other top targets of U.S. warplanes. They also devised clever radio methods to dampen any suspicion in Saigon that Pham was under Communist control and transmitted fake reports on how their supposed spy was narrowly avoiding capture. Meanwhile, Pham's regular reports that his equipment had been captured prompted MACV-SOG to send more resupply missions north, which always ended in the death or capture of their men.

One installment of Hanoi's needling account is called "10 Years of Leading the CIA Around by the Nose," implying that Pham was some kind of master spy. In reality, he was just a lump of clay, first in the hands of the Americans and then North Vietnam's spy agency.

His unlikely path to espionage stardom began with his disenchantment with North Vietnam's brand of Communism in the late 1950s. He was a disgruntled newspaper reporter and folk singer, and his public grousing soon attracted the attention of security officials. After he also was discovered carrying on an extramarital affair, he was ousted from his local Communist Party chapter. "Because of his acts of opposition," says the new account from Hanoi, according to Pribbenow's translation, "we had planned to prosecute him, but Chuyen fled and disappeared in July or August 1959."

He arrived in Saigon in 1960, at a time when the CIA and U.S. military spy agencies, in concert with a top-secret intelligence unit in the South Vietnamese president's office, were gearing up for ambitious sabotage and espionage operations against the north. Potential agents were in demand, so Pham's arrival from North Vietnam quickly drew their attention. Facing few alternatives, he apparently couldn't resist their recruitment pitch.

In the first week of April 1961, Pham was dispatched north, landing in a fishing hamlet on the coast about 35 miles southeast of Hanoi. A villager quickly noticed the unfamiliar boat, according to the *World Security* account. "The residents also occasionally saw a stranger who looked like Pham Chuyen hiding in the forested hills of La Khe Hamlet. Then one of our secret informants...reported that he had gone to the home of Chuyen's mother."

Engaged in conversation by the local spy, Pham dropped his guard, telling him "the truth, that he had returned to conduct operations" against North Vietnam. A few days later, the security forces rolled him up, along with his radio and other spy materials. Carefully handled by his captors, Pham was turned into a double agent.

If there's any master spy in the story, it's Pham's handler, Nguyen Tai, who was immortalized by former CIA analyst Frank Snepp in his unauthorized 1977 memoir, *Decent Interval*. Nguyen was a top Communist spy in the Saigon area from 1966 to 1970, when his South Vietnamese and CIA agents captured him and subjected him to relentless and often brutal interrogation. Over five years, he repeatedly frustrated his agents with a cascading series of cover stories that camouflaged his true identity and the names of his fellow spies. With Communist forces closing in on Saigon in the spring of 1975, Snepp speculated, his interrogators murdered him in his cell.

But "Snepp was wrong," Pribbenow wrote on the CIA's website in 2007. "The prisoner survived." Liberated by his countrymen, he "went on to other important positions" after the war's end, "including elected member of the reunified nation of Vietnam's National Assembly," Pribbenow wrote. And in 2002, the revolutionary government honored him with its highest title, "Hero of the People's Armed Forces." Among his accolades: He had directed the brilliant Pham double agent operation during its first three years. Snepp says he updated his book to include Nguyen's survival in 2002.

Pribbenow says the failed torture of Nguyen should serve as a warning to CIA interrogators tasked with breaking today's committed Muslim radicals, among other fanatics. "I am not a moralist. War is a nasty business, and one cannot fight a war without getting one's hands dirty," he

*Continue on next page*

## New Vietnam Spy Tale...

wrote in 2007. "There are limits, however, beyond which we cannot and should not go if we are to continue to call ourselves Americans."

But Pham's story should stand as an advisory opinion for those who say the CIA has little to show for its spying operations against the likes of China, Iran and ISIS, Pribbenow suggests. Like those "hard targets," North Vietnam had vast internal security networks and informants on every block. It "was a nightmare for anyone trying to conduct clandestine operations of any kind," Pribbenow says. Hanoi had "public security and 'militia/self-defense' organizations that extended down to the village and hamlet level." Plus, "everyone knew everyone else, and when a stranger appeared, everyone quickly knew about it." The same holds for China, Iran and territory held by ISIS.

If Pham had any regrets about helping the Communists he once despised kill agents from the south, where he had hoped to live, he never showed it. In fact, no one except his brothers and sisters knew about his spying life until a few days before he died, according to the account in *World Security*.

He died amazed that Tourison, one of the Americans he had been closest to in Saigon, still wasn't sure which side he had been on. "That is truly incredible," Pham wrote in a private memoir for his intelligence service. "This means that Tourison and the CIA in South Vietnam were defeated by North Vietnamese Public Security and that the United States was defeated by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam."

*Newsweek* national security correspondent Jeff Stein is the author of [A Murder in Wartime: The Untold Spy Story That Changed the Course of the Vietnam War](#) (St. Martin's Press, 1992).

## Testimony of Dr. Nguyen Quoc Quan

Testimony of Quan Q. Nguyen, M.D., Chairman of Rallying For Democracy in Vietnam

Before the Democratic Caucus, House of Representatives on "Current Human Rights Situation in Vietnam with Emphasis on Religious Freedom & the TPP"

April 30, 2015

Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Democratic Leader

Honorable Chairman and Distinguished Members of the Caucus:

40 years ago today, when the communist forces began to occupy South Vietnam, I left my country on a small boat, and escaped to America. I have been lucky to be able to rebuild my life here, and it is truly an honor to stand in front of you now to report about the long struggles of the Vietnamese people. Thank you for holding this hearing and allowing me to share some important issues that I believe should be brought to light.

### Overview

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Vietnamese people are still suffering from a totalitarian regime. Vietnam is a one party system where there is no separation of administrative, judiciary, and legislative branches. The Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) strictly controls the government at all levels, manipulates the National Assembly, controls all mass media, and deprives the Vietnamese people of all basic human rights. There are no free and fair elections, and no independent unions to protect the millions of Vietnamese workers. People who disagree and express their own opinions in a peaceful way are imprisoned.

The VCP and their cruel offspring have driven Vietnam to the brink of bankruptcy through a centrally oriented economy and wasteful, inefficient investments. Incredible wealth is in the hands of corrupted apparatchiks, while the majority of people live in poverty. The cost of living is soaring; the price of electricity, water, and gasoline are rising day by day; the Vietnamese "dong" is losing its value while wages and salaries are stagnant. Workers have to toil day and night, yet cannot make a decent living. The situation in Vietnam is ripe for transformation. The

people in Vietnam deserve support for their quest for freedom and democracy from the international community, particularly the U.S. In that spirit, I would like to draw attention to the following important issues:

### Religious Freedom

To the communists, "religion is opium" and they strictly follow that crazy idea! The Hanoi government's policy has always been to repress religious freedom. There is an unfortunate misconception from the West that the mere existence of churches and temples in Vietnam implies that there is freedom of religion. This is far from the truth. Per the latest report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, religious freedom in Vietnam has deteriorated significantly. The Vietnamese Communist uses Decree 92 issued in August 2012 to strictly control all religions in Vietnam. All Churches need to be registered and accepted by

*Continue on next page*

the government. The registration procedure is very complicated and allows the government to refuse applications of Churches considered as non-friendly to the government. For years now, the communist government has refused to recognize The Unified Buddhist Church. If you want to become a monk, nun, or priest, you have to notify and get permission from the local government. All promotions or appointments inside the Church have to be accepted by the government. Even if the Vatican wants to appoint a new Cardinal, Archbishop, or Bishop, it needs to inform and get approval from the Vietnamese government. At the end of every year, each Church is required to notify the local government of its detailed plans for the next year, such as the dates and times of events being held, what are the purposes and how many people will attend. Bishop of Kontum

*Dr. Nguyen Quoc Quan ...*

Patriarch Hoang Duc Oanh was actually refused permission to organize a Christmas Mass. The government of Vietnam uses force and imprisonment to keep priests and monks following the party line. Father Nguyen Van Ly, The Most Venerable Thich Quang Do, and several leaders of local indigenous Cao Dai & Hoa Hoa Churches are all examples of how religious leaders who advocate religious freedom are imprisoned or placed under house arrest.

The government continues to seize several properties belonging to the Catholic and Buddhist Churches. Recently, they pressured Lien Tri Temple to stop its activities and to sell its land to the local government for a development project. The local government also pressured the Fathers of the The Redemptorists Vietnam (Đòng Chúa Cứu Thế Việt Nam) to stop its healthcare program for the veterans of the South.

Considering the worsening religious freedom situation, Vietnam needs to be placed back in the CPC. Freedom of Information & Expression. The Vietnamese government strictly controls all mass media including the internet, and censors all information to the people. According to 2014 Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index, Vietnam ranks 174/180 countries. This year, The Committee to Protect Journalists, also ranked Vietnam among the 10 worst countries worldwide. Several dissidents and human rights activists have been harassed, arrested, and tried over the last 5 years on criminal charges including espionage and other vague crimes against "national security" for peaceful expression of their opinions on the internet. Vietnam's authorities rely on a combination of restrictive laws, Internet controls and outright repression to block the free flow of information, but thanks to social media, Vietnamese citizens are increasingly gaining access to independent sources of news. Vietnam is second in the world only to China in the number of jailed netizens (I have highlighted a few of the many cases on a separate handout for you to review). Given the economic impacts of a censored Internet, online censorship is not only a human rights issue, but increasingly, a business issue. The freedom of internet has become an important issue as the U.S. and Vietnamese governments negotiate the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

### **Labor Rights**

There are no independent unions to protect the millions of workers in Vietnam. Vietnamese workers have no health insurance, no worker compensation, no rights to go on strikes, nor collective bargaining. Most of the workers have to resort to bribery to get jobs. They are required to work overtime without pay, while frequently being subjected to abuse and maltreatment. Although illegal without permission, about 300 hundred strikes, mainly related to low salary, poor working conditions and unemployment funds took place in Vietnam last year. The latest one occurred in the Pouen Taiwanese factory near Saigon in March of this year. The unique Vietnam General Confederation of Labor (VGCL) is strictly controlled by the Communist Party. It represents the party and employers, but not the workers. Two prominent worker leaders, Doan Huy Chuong and Nguyen Hoang Quoc Hung, who tried to form an independent union outside of the VGCL are currently in jail. In short, Vietnam does not meet the requirements on labor rights to become a member of the TPP and we should not allow any waivers on these requirements.

### **Vietnam Joining the TPP**

1. Vietnam is suffering an ill economy, trade deficit, discontent, and anger from the people, as well as serious threat from China. In that context, Hanoi is looking to the TPP to save its tattered economy and sagging regime. However, the current situation in Vietnam on human rights, labor rights, transparency, intellectual property rights, etc. DO NOT meet the requirements of the TPP. To participate, Vietnam needs to carry out fundamental reforms in these areas. We are looking to Congress to make sure that those reforms become reality before Vietnam is admitted to the TPP. There should be no waivers or delays implementing the TPP requirements.
2. Beyond written or verbal agreements with Vietnam (since the Vietnamese communist leaders are known for breaking their commitment and promises, as exhibited after entering the WTO), international monitors need to strictly enforce treaty provisions.
3. The reforms that Vietnam must carry out in joining the TPP will eventually help to democratize Vietnam. Only a democratic Vietnam can be U.S.'s true reliable strategic partner in Asia. Therefore, this is a golden opportunity for the U.S. to convince the Hanoi government to embark on this win-win journey for all, which would allow Vietnam to become a member of the TPP and to

*Continue on next page*



**Dr. Nguyen Quoc Quan ...**

simultaneously secure a comprehensive strategic partnership with the United States. This will prosper Vietnam, bring peace and stability to the region, and neutralize the pressure from the China. VN should seize this opportunity and react positively by ensuring more human rights. I

have been lucky to live in a free society like America where I can express my own opinions without being intimidated or harassed. Therefore, I believe that it is my responsibility to speak for my compatriots back home who do not have these privileges. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to do so today.

Respectfully yours,

Quan Nguyen, M.D.

Chairman, Rallying For Democracy in Vietnam

An interview with Dr. Quan:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rn6HQSh-YR8>

**But Ga's Comments about VIETNAM STUDY GROUP (VSG)****In Vietnam, former enemies must accept responsibility fo...**

Remembering Vietnam should be a time for self-reflection and less finger-pointing on all sides.

View on [www.seattletimes.com](http://www.seattletimes.com)

Preview by Yahoo

<http://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/in-vietnam-former-enemies-must-accept-responsibility-for-war/>

Professor Giebel:

Your opinion essay appears revealing a posture of political neutrality maintained officially in American academia for years. Your projects for Vietnam on behalf of your institution have shown where your priorities and inter-

ests are otherwise.

While not engaging with local Vietnamese American community, you seem demonstrating an effort to perform as a public intellectual through this essay. Such endeavor fails--not only due to your implicit conjecture of knowing about far-off ordinary folks as "nationalist" is simplistic and so dead wrong, but also because of your biased emphasis of who are the main "actors".

By ignoring the roles of other "parties" ("to this horrific war" of course)—China, Soviet Union, and both the Western conservative and anti-war leftist bystanders (journalists, professors, activists, and devotees, etc.) during and after the Vietnam War—your pro-reconciliation essay ironically becomes another catchy sound bite.

Why is "the grip of Cold War sound bites" "outdated" when the past is always in the present? Your assertion on American exceptionalism and neo-colonialist aggression is only part of a complete picture. Maybe those "sound bites" have become passé in your academic field because of other competitive emerging approaches such as historical revisionism and memory. But the current international politics show otherwise--not only in Southeast Asian territory with Chinese expansionism but also in East European region with the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

In addition to an insufficient recognition of (1) ongoing institutionalised brutality in Vietnam and (2) systemic racism toward Vietnamese Americans (the group disavows your "immigrant" label identified for their political and social struggles), your logical proposal for an idealistic outcome from "self-reflection" does **not** flourish on **how** to reach such reconciliation finales either.

**Your essay lacks of attention to power analysis especially.** Not the three main "actors" addressed in your essay have the same power in reality. In the eyes of these "victors"—here and there, the "other" does not exist and never existed. "Sogar die Toten wurden betrogen" (Even the Deaths were cheated) in the West/the North and in Vietnam.

Victims of oppression—both here or in Vietnam—do deeply know and feel that their circumstances need to change. However, your pro-reconciliation rationality does not help them to actualize power of leverage.

Furthermore, it looks as if you missed the point: the focus should be on how to establish and sustain an urgent yet substantial reconciliation between the one-party red capitalist regime—who continues operating either by gun or subterfuge—and the oppressed—who encounter widening income disparity, police violence, corruption scandals, land disputes, silence- and self-censorship culture in Vietnam. This reconciliation—not between the Vietnamese Americans and the Vietnamese communist government—should be the utmost concern for real social and material transformation.

*Continue on next page*



Ironically, the complicit and complacent intellectual “bystanders” have so far profited most from the processes of neo-colonialism and transnational capitalism during and after the war. The psychic costs of active bystanding toward violence and oppression are less well recognized. Yet, this position that many academic spectators unwaveringly occupy prevents efforts to change exploitive status quo arrangements at both political and cultural levels.

## VIETNAM STUDY GROUP (VSG) ...

Your intent of speaking up as an innocent outsider, and hence, refuse being considered a part of any of the mentioned parties who engaged in the bloodbaths appears disingenuous.

Hopefully, your “mature engagement” grounded in self-reflection (different from the “Vietnam in the Rearview Mirror” project) will be conveyed in the near future not only in writing but praxis as well.

### Bút Gà

#### 40 years after the Vietnam War, move past name-calling



#### 40 years after the Vietnam War, move past name-calling

Vietnamese refugees still suffer from the loss of their homeland and identities. Columnist Thanh Tan, the daughter of refugees, writes about the need to hear and ho...  
View on [www.seattletim...](http://www.seattletim...) Preview by Yahoo

Ms. Tan, your personal story of family pain is completely understood and so empathized. Yet, your own desire of ending the “modern McCarthyism” by urging the Vietnamese former refugees to share stories and honor “the struggles” does not sound convincing.

How could the Vietnamese refugees' collective experience be situated only within the American context of McCarthyism?

**Their collective experiences complicated and full of struggles refuse to fit in with a particular place/land and a specific frame of time.**

Indeed, their collective experiences reject any deliberated conformity even before they faced “name-calling” as “Saigon crooks”, or “South Vietnamese puppets”, or confronted labelling as “economic refugees”.

At the beginning (once being betrayed by their allies), they were judged not “civilized” enough to be able to “assimilate” in this country, according to some elites/journalists who were/are anti-war and pro-North Vietnamese communists, and attempted to control the public discourse on the Vietnam war and perception on “foreigner”. Now (once being bombarded with the messages of insubstantial reconciliation with the communist regime), they have been also told repeatedly “Go back to your country!” if they choose speaking up through activism against racism, discrimination and stereotype for the last 40 years.

Why was the first generation's past fear of communist infiltration (during the Vietnam/American war) minimized down to a current “worry” toward VCP's Politburo 36 since 2004? Why downplayed such serious concern? Why there was no space in your essay for such detailed description and its impact? We are not surprised however.

Moreover, the Vietnamese “others” (another name-calling by the dominant)--who survived in various refugee camps, and were sent back for not deserving to resettle to any “civilized” country regardless of their perilous exodus--are still living with more than name-calling acts. In fact, they endure terrors from dehumanized treatments and mass killings under communist tyranny for years. How's about their stories then?

How's about the present stories of the oppressed (ranging from the harassed dissidents, dispossessed peasants, the anonymous protesters, to striking workers and more) whose “name-calling” as “reactionary” by Vietnamese communists in Vietnam???

Your descriptive opinion essay seems unable to go deeper into the lives of Vietnamese exiles whose collective experience encounters a double silence--imposed and enforced within the arrogant yet ignorant American context glittered with flashing syndromes of Vietnam/American war AND inflicted and coerced by Vietnamese communist manipulative discourses.

How could the Vietnamese speak for certain American projects even their “mixed legacy of incredible survival and unspeakable pain” was acknowledged in your essay?

*Continue on next page*

## VIETNAM STUDY GROUP (VSG) ...

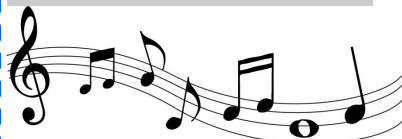
Their “unspeakable pain”, not because of the “bitter past” as framed by mainstream media, resists coherence shown through hi-tech packaging and only through English.

**For your story that sees the light of day, untold collective others remain in the shadows concealed or suppressed.**

Nonetheless, with all said and done, it does not mean that the Vietnamese rebellious spirits are not fierce enough to resist oppression from the powerful in their own ways of storytelling, not name-calling.

## Bút Gà

## Duong Dinh Hung's Music



Exodus

<https://youtu.be/pXmWEHZKEVY>

Vietnamese words by Duong Dinh Hung

Cai Vang Ben Song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHpE3LS9ipQ>



## Last Days in Vietnam: Rory Kennedy

## Last Days in Vietnam

Directed and produced by Rory Kennedy for American Experience Films/PBS (2014) *In English with Vietnamese subtitles. 98 minutes.*

Nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature; Writers Guild Documentary Screenplay Award; and Critics Choice Award by the Broadcast Film Critics Association.

*Last Days in Vietnam* chronicles the chaotic final days of the Vietnam War and tells compelling stories of bravery and resilience on the part of the South Vietnamese who escaped, and the U.S. military personnel who, in many cases, disobeyed orders in an effort to help save lives.

See: <http://www.lastdaysinvietnam.com/>

“Masterpiece” —The New Yorker

“Deftly woven...a concise and gripping film” —The New York Times

“Plays like a wartime thriller” —The Washington Post

“A documentary triumph” —Newsday



## Panelists

**Lam Lê** was born in 1950 in Vietnam and came to France in 1970 to pursue his university degree in mathematics. He later studied painting at the Beaux Arts in Paris. He has written and directed a number of films. His latest effort, *Công Binh : La longue nuit Indochinoise*, is his first documentary and signals his return to Vietnamese subjects.

**Kiem Do** was a Navy captain in South Vietnam. He served as the Navy's deputy chief of staff for operations during the war.

**Paul Jacobs**, retired Commander, U.S. Navy, was a captain and Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. *Kirk* at the time of the Vietnam War.