

Friends of Sacei's

Newsletter

Saigon Arts, Culture, & Education Institute

November 10th, 2010 (# 25)

www.sacei07.org

To research, document, and promote Vietnamese Culture
A country stays alive when its culture is alive

SACEI NEWSLETTER is released the 10th of the month.

It updates you on the latest news about SACEI.

It serves as a LINK between SACEI members and those who are interested in the Vietnamese or Vietnamese-American culture.

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1. CHARLES ROMANO: THE CAPTAIN WHO SAVED 52 LIVES

Inside this issue:

Charles Romano:
The captain who saved 52

Book: Truong Buu Lam,
A Story of VietNam

Book: RU by Kim Thuy

Musical: Tale of Kieu

The American experience
in Vietnam

Twenty nine years ago (May 9, 1981), fifty-two boat people, including children, were stranded at sea on a leaking boat without food and water. Many ships passed them by without providing help. Only Captain Romano dared to stop his ship to rescue them. Romano, a former Navy seal had served in Vietnam in 1960, 1966-1968 and won five Purple Hearts. They lost track of one another until their reunion at the St Martin Episcopal Church in Providence, RI on October 3, 2010. Of the former boat people who came to visit the Romanos are Mrs. Lien Nguyen who is presently a dentist; so is her daughter. Her son is an internist practicing in California. Theresa Nguyen, now 51, is the Head Nephrologist at Boston University Hospital. De Nguyen works for a printing company in Hartford, CT. His son is an accountant.



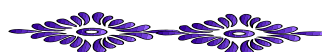
http://www.projo.com/news/content/VIETNAM_BOAT_REUNION_10-04-10_0CK6R9Q_v25.224840f.html

2. BOOK: RU by KIM THUY

.Born in Saigon in 1968 after the Tet Offensive, she escaped from Vietnam with her family in 1978. After a four month-stint in one of the refugee camps in Malaysia, she landed in a small town in the province of Quebec, Canada and eventually graduated with a degree in Letters (1990) and Law (1993) from the University of Montreal.

This is the first novel of this young lady who once was an interpreter, a translator, a magistrate, and a restaurant manager before immersing herself in writing. She recounts stories of people she had met as well as events in her life, of northern soldiers taking over her parents' home in Saigon. Despite their suffering and immense poverty, there was an immense beauty in these people's stories. After being published in Canada, the rights of her book were sold to France, Italy, Germany, and Sweden.

Her book won the 2010 Canadian Governor's Literary Award for fiction.



4. MUSICAL: TALE OF KIEU

The Vietnamese Poet – Nguyen Du

The renowned poet, *Nguyen Du* has been acknowledged by *UNESCO* as one of the greatest poets known to mankind.

THE POEM

The original *Tale of Kieu* is a Vietnamese Epic Poem written by Nguyen Du (1766–1820), and is widely regarded as the most significant work within Vietnamese literature. The poem recounts the life, trials and tribulations of Thúy Kieu, a beautiful and talented young woman, who had to sacrifice herself to save her family. She unwittingly sold herself as a prostitute to save her father and younger brother from prison.

The *Tale of Kieu* has been acclaimed internationally and selected as one of the study pieces within many universities. Many scholars feel that the poet, Nguyen Du, used *The story of Kieu* to relate to his own life. For example: Kieu sold herself to settle her family debt; whereas Nguyen Du considered the action of joining the new Vietnamese government as selling his own integrity. Kieu had to endure suffering and hardships; Nguyen Du suffered greatly due to his loyalty to his former king. Kieu stays faithful in her heart, to her first love, Kim Trong; Nguyen Du kept his loyalty to the Le Dynasty. Finally Kieu was reunited with Kim Trong and in like manner, Nguyen Du hoped for the return of his King.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQJmAT7iDws>

5. The American Experience in Vietnam

<http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2010/09/148410.htm>

The American Experience in Vietnam: Historical Conference

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger

Washington, DC

September 29, 2010

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Thank you very much. I must point out that I hold one record that will be hard to exceed, that during the period that I was both Secretary of State and Security Advisor, relations between the State Department and the White House were at an unprecedented high. (Laughter.)

Now, I have about 20 minutes to make observations and then answer questions. And when I heard that somebody picked up my book in 1958 that was turned down by eight commercial publishers and four university presses, had sold 1400 copies, it became clear to me that most people in this room weren't born when this book was read. And Dick Holbrooke and I were talking last night about the likely composition of this audience, and there are a few here who went through it all as a contemporary experience, and they will have experience, passions, and upheavals that were unique and that are impossible to recreate.

Then there's another group that learned of this from their faculties about most of whom were in the protest movement during the actual period and they have their view. And then there is a new generation for whom this is very far in the past.

And it occurred to me last night as I was thinking about it, for my aged generation in 1940 the fall of France was a shattering experience, especially for people who had lived in Nazi Germany.

But actually the Vietnam War is back from our period as far as 1900 was in 1940. For me, 1900 was an event with only the slightest relationship to any of my experiences. So what I thought I might do is to give you some description of how I got involved in this, what it meant to my generation, and then you ask me questions on any specific subject that you have on your mind.

First, you have to understand a personal thing. I had a very peculiar position as Security Advisor. It could never happen again today. I had never met Richard Nixon when he appointed me. And I had spent 12 years of my life trying to keep him from becoming President. (Laughter.) I was the principal foreign policy advisor of Nelson Rockefeller. So when I read some of these books of how carefully I plotted my ascent to that office, I think it is important to keep – to remember that I was a close friend of Nelson Rockefeller and, actually, I knew Hubert Humphrey a lot better. Well, I didn't know Nixon at all.

So it was an intellectual enterprise, a national enterprise how to deal with this issue. Also, as most of you know, I had worked for one year as a consultant in the Kennedy White House during the Berlin crisis, not on Vietnam issues but on Berlin issues. The result of that was that the key people of the previous administration were people I had known. They were my friends. I respected them. I had huge admiration for Dean Rusk's patriotism and his conduct in office. I had seen the anguish of people dealing with Vietnam.

So to me, the debates that followed were personally especially painful and never for me had the character of a civil war that they later acquired. To me, I knew why the generation that preceded me had entered the Vietnam War. I agreed with some of their views; I disagreed with others. But I did not think they were a moral issue dividing us and, indeed, I suffered from delusion when I entered the government that I could make a contribution to bringing the various views together.

To me, the tragedy of the Vietnam War was not that there were disagreements. That was inevitable given the complexity of the subject. But that the faith of Americans in each other became destroyed in the process. It was America's first experience with limits in foreign policy, and it was something painful to accept.

So what would be a natural critique of decisions that were arguable at various stages became transmuted into a moral issue, first about the moral adequacy of American foreign policy altogether, and then into the moral adequacy of America in conducting any kind of traditional foreign policy. That was the tragedy.

I'm absolutely unreconstructed on that subject. I believe that most of what went wrong in Vietnam we did to ourselves. And while I support the current policies of the Administration with respect to Vietnam, while I'm delighted to see Vietnamese representatives there, I thought then as I do now. I would have preferred another outcome, at least another outcome that was not so intimately related to the way we tore ourselves apart. And you have to understand that this was my view then and it is my view now.

I was – I have recently read a book that was published in Hanoi about my negotiations with Le Duc Tho, which is, I would say, 98 percent accurate. And where it is inaccurate it is not essential to the theme and maybe accurate even in those two points and simply a question of perspective. And they brought home – it brought home again one fundamental difference: America wanted compromise; Hanoi wanted victory.

One of, to me, interesting things if the ambassador will forgive me, is in my day-to-day dealing with Le Duc Tho, he was at the edge of obnoxiousness. I mean he operated on us like a surgeon with a scalpel with enormous skill, always courteous, but he occasionally would be told from Hanoi, according to that book, to remember that there could be no

negotiations until there had been a military change. And then his purpose was to get us to that point. I say that with great respect for him. It is very understandable. The Vietnamese had fought for 50 years not to make a compromise but to unify their country. The objective goal of American policy was to preserve a viable South Vietnam that would be given a chance to develop its own identity, and those were, in fact, daily concern objectives. That was a fact of life.

In all the discussions that took place about what we did or didn't do in negotiations, what more we could have offered or what less we should have put forward, there was really only one issue that was not soluble, and that issue was: Should South Vietnam have its own political identity, be permitted to develop its own institutions, or should it be presumed from the beginning that unification was the objective. All the various proposals that were hotly debated about – ceasefire and the various combinations – they were, in one way or another, very quickly more or less settled. What was not settled is whether the existing government in South Vietnam could survive, would be permitted to survive. When that was agreed, we settled very quickly. Some people in this room may think too quickly. But I'll be glad to answer questions on that and related topics. But that is the issue that needs to be understood.

Now once, when the Nixon Administration came into office, what was the situation? The war had gone on depending on how you count if you count back to the Truman period or to the Kennedy period or to the period when we sent combat troops. So you can have different starting points anywhere from four to fifteen years.

There were, at that point, 550,000 – or 536,000 to be precise – American troops in Vietnam. In '68, in the second half of '68, the casualties ran at about 400 a week. And the Tet Offensive had taken place in early '68. By most today considered an American military victory, but a psychological defeat and at that time, not considered a military victory either, but to prove that the war was unwinnable. No negotiation – the negotiations had just started. The formal position of the United States was mutual withdrawal in which ours would begin after that of the North Vietnamese. And the outgoing administration left papers written by Harriman and Vance, saying that after a settlement, 260,000 American troops would be needed to remain in Vietnam.

So we made – I'll just explain what the basic strategy was; what was attempted to be done. There were two schools of thought, of which really only one received serious consideration. My personal view was that we should make a very sweeping comprehensive peace offer. And if that was rejected, step up military action and then see where we were. It went – this proposal went this far as asking former Secretary Vance to go to Moscow to negotiate there with the Vietnamese. And we gave the Soviets a proposal that went far beyond anything that had been proposed at the time. That was never answered. The Russians never answered; the Vietnamese never answered.

We then sort of dilatorily studied enhanced military action, which is the subject of many investigative journalists. But the decision that was finally made was that we would withdraw gradually, negotiate concurrently, and hopefully reach a point at which the – Hanoi would agree to our basic political proposal. I won't go through all the steps. And over a period of four years we substantially achieved that objective.

One of my associates was Winston Lord. And when we – during the incursions of Cambodia, he wanted to resign. And I said to him, "Well, you can resign and walk around with a placard outside this building, or you can help me end this. And you have to ask yourself what you will feel better about 20 years from now." And he stayed. And sometimes people ask me what was my most moving moment in government, and I can tell you my most moving moment was when Le Duc Tho in October 1972, in effect, accepted the proposals that we had made in January of that year, about the structure of that government. In fact, he even read a statement saying, "This is, after all, what you've proposed." And when he was finished, I shook hands with Winston and said, "Well, we've done it." But it turned out we hadn't done it for many reasons. Maybe it was objectively never possible, which I deny. But anyway, reasonable people can make this argument. But fundamentally, when it was the combination of Watergate and our domestic divisions – the combination of Watergate

and domestic divisions which cut aid to Vietnam by two-thirds, while oil prices were rising – that prohibited any military assistance to Vietnam, something we have not asked any ally to do at any point. So that is my perception of what happened.

Of course, there were many stages in that process. It was – there were – I will just mention one. The Chinese and we had made an agreement on Cambodia that was supposed to go into effect as soon as Sihanouk came back from a trip. And the one part of it was the end of American bombing and in Cambodia, which was maintained because the Khmer Rouge did not observe the ceasefire.

So it was Senator Magnuson who was visiting China, and he had a meeting with Zhou Enlai, and Zhou Enlai was complaining about the American bombing in Cambodia which was his part of the deal. And Magnuson said, “Don’t worry about it. The Congress has just stopped it.” Whereupon, Zhou Enlai flew into a rage and started pounding the table because he – that it turned out, that an agreement he had made did not make him look very effective. But this is one of those episodes. The fundamental point I want to make is this: We cannot afford a divided country and go to war. We owe it to ourselves to have confidence, at least, in the good faiths of our government. We cannot turn these issues into a moral contest between people who claim a monopoly of goodwill and describe by absolute, not just incorrect assessments, but amoral attitudes.

We made – there are a number of lessons we have to learn. When we consider going to war, we need a global strategic analysis that explains to us what the significance of this is. The purpose of a war is some definition of victory; stalemate is not a strategy, and victory needs to be defined as an outcome that is achievable in a period sustainable by American public opinion.

I do not like the word “exit strategy”. We shouldn’t be in if all we want is an exit. It has to be presented to the President as a sustainable diplomatic framework. Diplomacy and strategy must be treated as a whole, not as successive phases of policy. And above all, the Administration, as well as the critics, should conduct their debates with the restraint imposed by the knowledge that the unity of this country has been and will remain the hope of the world.

And I want to say that – how happy I am that Dick Holbrooke is following me, because we shared some of these experiences not always from identical points of view, but always with great mutual respect. We met in Hanoi in Saigon when we were both promising young men, he more than I. (Laughter.) And when I was that age, I used to think that people of my current age were put into this world as old people – (laughter) – that they had always been that way.

So thank you for letting me come here. It’s been an extraordinary, moving experience in my life. And I want to express my respect to the Vietnamese who are here and my delight that relations between our two countries are as strong as they appear. But that does not alter my sadness at the way the Vietnam War was permitted to evolve.

Thank you very much, and I’ll take questions. (Applause.)

AMBASSADOR BRYNN: Thank you, Dr. Kissinger. Dr. Kissinger has opened up in a wonderful way an invitation for a discussion. Might I ask that the questions be questions rather than statements, that way we will be able to take full advantage of Dr. Kissinger’s presence here to answer a number of questions between now and close to 11 o’clock.

We have two gentlemen from the Historian’s Office who are going to be holding the microphones working from both sides. Raise your hand if you would like to ask a question, and upon payment of \$50, they’ll be glad to come to – (laughter) – let you ask them. Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Dr. Kissinger, I’d like to ask you about what’s known in the historian’s field as the decent interval strategy, namely the argument that the Administration’s policy was premised on the idea that a withdrawal of the United States

should be accomplished and that there should be a decent interval between then and the prospect of a communist takeover in the south, and I know you know some of the materials on this. I wondered if you would give your perspective as to whether you thought South Vietnam could sustain in existence as a viable state.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: First of all, as historians, what you should do when you see statements is to ask yourself about the context in which they were made. And you will find that all the statements that are sort of twisted into decent interval statements were made to the other side, almost all of them. And what they were attempting to say was we are willing to have a political contest, and we are willing to abide by the outcome of that political contest. But that didn't mean that we were resigned to the outcome of that political contest. We were going to support our allies in that political contest.

But you have this debate in America where people who, in effect, say, "You have to get out now. You were immoral ever to get in." But then you're accused of selling out when you say you are leaving, that you are fighting for the possibility of committing the people of South Vietnam an opportunity.

Now what did we think would happen? We knew it was a precarious agreement. We knew that the North Vietnamese had not fought for 50 years in order simply to become a North Vietnamese state, so we thought that the contest would continue. We thought – might be wrong there – that the South Vietnamese had proved in 1972 that when there was an all-out North Vietnamese offensive, that they could sustain a significant shock and survive politically and even militarily.

We thought – and I'm telling you what we thought on that. We thought that the South Vietnamese could – if you look, the structure of the agreement was that the North Vietnamese could maintain the forces they had, but they could not reinforce them and they could not add to them. We thought the South Vietnamese could handle it. We thought – we also expected that if there were an all-out attack, we would come to the assistance of the South Vietnamese, at least with air force and naval power. That was prohibited by a congressional action six months later. And when you make an agreement, which you can neither support with economic assistance nor with military force, you have, in effect, surrendered.

So yes, we could not commit ourselves for all eternity to maintain a government against all conceivable contingencies. So in that sense, the decent interval phrase has a meaning. But when you see what we did and how we acted and how important I thought it was that even in the last months we did not look as if we were simply throwing a frenzied people to their fate. You know what our preference was. We had to act, however, within what was possible. But this was a general outline of what we thought.

Yes.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) historian from the University of Minnesota. That's just to inform my question. You referenced in your remarks –

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I pointed in this direction, but I'm delighted to --

QUESTION: Oh, sorry. Hi.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Go ahead, please.

QUESTION: I hope I'm not – I'll just (inaudible).

SECRETARY KISSINGER: No, no, please.

QUESTION: You referenced in your remarks a couple of times the question of public opinion and the importance of the American public at large. I would like to ask you about the role of the media as informers and perhaps shapers of public

Opinion. What influence, if any, did contemporary news media have on the strategy and diplomacy implemented in Vietnam and possibly its outcome? Thank you.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I make a distinction between public opinion and the media. I think public opinion, insofar as one could determine that, was always basically supportive of the general direction of the policy. The media became extremely hostile and increasingly hostile and bought into the proposition that an evil government in both the Johnson Administration and then in the Nixon Administration was lying, tricking because it had some commitment to warlike policies. And that made it extremely difficult to conduct a policy because the Beltway consensus shaped – I mean, I was reviewing, in connection with another matter, some of the material that I know is also in these volumes of the discussions that went on within our government when it was perfectly obvious that the North Vietnamese were planning an all-out offensive in the spring of '72 and all the signs were there. But we cut back our action because we did not want to be accused of having triggered what we knew was coming anyway. So that was one of the battles.

On the other hand, it cannot be said that the Nixon Administration will go down in history for its skill in handling the media, and there was a confrontational aspect to the Nixon presidency that contributed to this atmosphere. And I'm not here to blame anyone or any group. I'm here to describe a situation that existed and that everybody has an obligation to prevent from recurring. But the role of the media, on the whole, was, of course, destructive.

But there are always exceptions. There was – I remember in *The Washington Post*, there was a writer called Chalmers Roberts. I don't know whether any of you remember him. And he had really studied the Vietnam issue. And he would call me up sometimes – not to get a great story, but to call my attention to something that had been said that might be significant. So I would not apply what I have said to every single journalist that we dealt with. But the media, sort of on their own, would not face the complexities that people – that one was facing and took an (inaudible) attitude to the Nixon Administration. That is Dean Rusk's son and grandson here. People like Dean Rusk, McNamara, and Johnson, whom I know – they were desperate about ending the war.

And so all of this debate about their intentions and their war-like attitude – they may not have had the right analogies, but fundamentally, once the war started, I think now if my Vietnamese friends here will forgive me, it could end only in victory or defeat. And victory was preserving some political structure itself, be it not – there was no negotiating position you could take that would deprive the North Vietnamese of something they had fought for for 50 years. And the media attempt to turn this into a detective story in which the North Vietnamese threw out great clues and we had to guess at the answer – and if we missed the answer, their feelings would be so hurt, that just isn't how they act.

They didn't survive a thousand years as neighbors of China by being very malleable. And so – well, take another question. Yes, sir.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY KISSINGER: They want – yeah.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Well, let me say this. I put forward this argument where, first of all, Nixon agreed to a comprehensive offer and we made it. Escalation was considered and rejected, so my own position, it's in small print in the appendix to *White House Years* where I expressed reservations about the Vietnamization strategy and other things. But I did not follow those memos into the Oval Office. So I didn't fight for it because I thought the opposition and the administration would be too great, and Nixon didn't act on it. And that doesn't mean – I just put it forward for intellectual completeness. I think the course we adopted was probably the only possible course.

QUESTION: Military --

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Let me alternate between people in front of this area and let me get somebody back there.

Yes.

QUESTION: Hello, Dr. Kissinger.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Yeah, anybody back there.

QUESTION: Nick Ters (ph), Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. In your 1973 Senate confirmation hearings, you said that the U.S. wasn't bombing Cambodians, just North Vietnamese and Cambodia. But in your 2003 book *Ending the Vietnam War*, you cite a figure from the Department of Defense of 50,000 Cambodian civilian casualties. I wanted to know how you would amend your testimony today.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Why should I amend my testimony? (Laughter.) Because what?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Oh, come on. It's – we weren't running around the country bombing Cambodians. We were fighting – we – oh, you – I think – why did we try to prevent the Khmer Rouge from taking over Cambodia? I don't quite understand the question except that I didn't tell the truth.

Well, when you talk about bombing of Cambodia, there's three different bombing operations in Cambodia. There's the so-called secret bombing that was so secret that there were seven newspaper articles in The Washington Post and The New York Times in May and June and – about which 24 senior members of Congress were briefed. That was in essentially unpopulated areas, and I don't believe it had any significant casualties. It might have been consequences in moving the – there's a debate whether it moved the Vietnamese deeper into Cambodia.

The second was the combat operations that resulted from the incursions of American and Vietnamese troops into Cambodia. And I would assume the casualties there were about what they were in similar operations in Vietnam. And I want to point out that no pictures ever of genocidal bombing were published, so I'm assuming that didn't take place.

And then there was a third period that was between February of '73 and June '73 in which we tried to stop the Khmer Rouge from taking over Cambodia and we – under the misapprehension that the Khmer Rouge were a tool of Hanoi and in which we wanted to use our bombing to negotiate a coalition government outcome in Cambodia. The rules of engagement for that bombing can be found in the appendix of my book on ending the Vietnam War and also in the appendix of Volume III of my memoirs. And the rules of engagement were that they could not bomb within a mile of occupied – of civilian settlements and that bombing had to be approved first by the Government of Cambodia and above all by our Ambassador on the recommendation on the local commander.

Were mistakes made? In that study from which I quoted the rules of engagement, they mentioned two mistakes, two cases where civilians were within this, but I don't (inaudible) for the brief for it. But those were the three different operations. And of course, they were not aimed at Cambodians as such, they were considered an aspect of how to end the Vietnam War.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: (In Vietnamese.)

INTERPRETER: Okay, hopefully I'll get these questions right. The first one he – the first question is regarding your comment

about that peace was at hand. And he was wondering why – if peace was at hand, what was the rationale behind the Christmas bombings? How do you reconcile the two?

The second question is about your comments about Le Duc Tho and, in particular – I didn't catch the – oh, he wants to know how did Le Duc Tho make you an old man which is what you said to them at the beginning.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: About what?

QUESTION: How was it that he made you an old man? How was it that they – that Le Duc Tho aged you? This was a comment that you had said to them in the beginning.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Oh, I said to the general when I came in that I'm really much younger than I look, -- (laughter) – that Le Duc Tho aged me. First, let me say something about "peace is at hand" and then I'll say something about Le Duc Tho.

First, the "peace is at hand." When I read books about this, it makes it sound as if I was hiding behind a curtain, came out, said, "Peace is at hand," and ducked right back behind that curtain – (laughter) – so that Richard Nixon could win an election where he was already leading by 20 points and where his nightmare was that I'd screw it up by getting the conservatives riled up.

Well, anybody who wants to know about the "peace is at hand" statement should read the press conference. It's a 10 page single-spaced document in which I go through every provision of the agreement and explain what was in the agreement. And with all due respect, the hotshot journalists there could have gone through this and pointed out what was sensible, what wasn't sensible, and they could have said it isn't. So secondly, I didn't know I was – it was a minor point – I thought this was a background briefing. I didn't know that it was live. Third, what is it I was trying to do? What was the purpose of the exercise?

We had made – come to an understanding with the North Vietnamese in Paris. It became apparent in Saigon that we could not implement it. We had always had the position that Saigon would have to agree. We had made a mistake in our judgment. We thought that Thieu would be so happy with the fact that he was preserved, that his government was preserved, that he would not haggle about all the subsidiary clauses. On the other hand, he had to live there. And so we decided not to impose it on him prior to an election. So we had to convince – first we had to convince Hanoi that we meant to stay within the framework of the agreement and this is why we affirmed most of the key provisions.

We had to convince Saigon that we meant to go through. And I think at the end of the press conference I said, "We will not complete this agreement until it is ready, until it meets its conditions, but we will not stop once it is ready," something like that. So that was the purpose of "peace is at hand." We faced a very complex situation. We wanted Hanoi to continue. We wanted Saigon to be convinced that we meant it. And we invited Hanoi to agree to some modifications.

Now, Le Duc Tho – this is like asking a patient what he thinks of his surgeon. I had high regard for Le Duc Tho. Here he was, the representative of a small country, with no huge international experience, facing the representative of the super power, always maintaining his calm, his discipline, pursuing his strategy. I knew exactly what he was doing, which was to exhaust us. And one of the typical moments was he had an opening statement which included a dramatic account of Vietnamese history which took about 40 minutes. And it was the same each time, so I knew it by heart. (Laughter.) And one of the phrases in his words, if you make a big effort, we will make a big effort. So one day he said, "If you make a big effort, we'll make an effort." So just to break the monotony, I said, "Mr. Special Advisor, I noticed that you dropped an adjective in what you have just said." And he said, "I'm so glad you noticed it." He said, "Because yesterday we made a big effort and you only made an effort." (Laughter.)

So he was skillful. He had his objective. In my judgment, his objective was there was no intention of Vietnam -- of Hanoi ever to settle unless we either overthrew the Saigon government, which was their basic term or they had had an offensive. We were not prepared to overthrow the Saigon government. So they had their offensive. And when the offensive didn't succeed, they went back to the negotiations. And one satisfaction I got out of this book that was published in Hanoi was that even then Le Duc Tho was given three options on which to settle, and he finally settled on the most forthcoming option from our point of view. So -- but it took three months he went back.

So it's an interesting study of -- but to sum it up, I had high regard for him as a skillful, determined strategist who always conducted himself with great politeness and great skill. I'd look a lot better if I'd never met him. (Laughter.)

AMBASSADOR BRYNN: Let me intervene. We have almost 11 o'clock. Mr. Rusk, if you want to make one quick question.

QUESTION: Yes, sir. Dr. Kissinger, my name is Rich Rusk. I'm Dean Rusk's number two son. Thanks so much for the words of respect for my father. I have the same great respect for all your years of public service, everything you did in office, everything you tried to do. I'm not one to take up for the critics of Vietnam policy. As a matter of fact, I hated with a visceral passion when all this was playing out, many of those who were critical of this war.

But Dr. Kissinger, when you say that most of what went wrong in Vietnam were just -- most of what went wrong we did to ourselves, it seems to me most of what went wrong was the decisions made by three administrations, a small handful of advisors of which my father was one. And it's these three administrations that sent American troops, American soldiers against a man and against a movement that had driven the Japanese out of Indo-China in World War II, that drove the French out in the aftermath of that, a man who had captured the spirit of Vietnamese nationalism. My father never denied his share of the responsibilities for those decisions. I'm not suggesting that you did either. Obviously, he had misapplied, I think, some of the lessons that he had learned from World War II.

My question to you -- I realize you need a question not a statement. My question to you is where have I gone wrong in my thinking, conversely, even at this late date? Or the other question is where have you gone wrong in yours?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: We did it to ourselves, that of course includes also judgments -- obviously judgments that were made. There were a number of mistakes, judgments about the relations between Soviet and Chinese strategy, between Chinese and North Vietnamese strategy that were made that involved us in the war in the first place. My point is these were not -- they were judgments that grew out of the experience of the previous period with containment in Europe. And they were understandable judgments that were made -- were wrong in some respects. They did not justify the bitterness and the viciousness of the ensuing debate, in my opinion.

We did not put troops in. We took the troops out. When we came in, there were 540,000 troops. We withdrew at the rate of 150,000 a year. And the problem of extrication, which I'm sure our Vietnamese friends will understand, we had 800,000 North Vietnamese troops in the country. We had a million South Vietnamese troops that could turn hostile if they felt we were abandoning them. And we had 540,000 Americans in these circumstances. So that was a tricky -- well, of course, mistakes were made in this process. I'm not here to claim that the -- I'm not here as a spokesman of the Nixon Administration. I'm here as somebody who has spent his life on American foreign policy and who, partly from personal history, believes that this country is a crucial component for peace in the world. And to see this process -- because once it got started, you could not be reverse like your father used to say. He said, "This isn't like turning off a television program."

So I found somewhere in Johnson's statements where he said, "I can't win and I can't get out." That was the dilemma that America faced towards every single decision that I'd -- of course not. Is there are any seminal mistake that was made that I know in the period in which I served, we had no choice about getting out right away. That was not a conceivable option.

It was never proposed by even the tough element in the Democratic Party. So once we decided to withdraw gradually, could it have been speeded up? I don't know. I -- the only way to speed it up was to overthrow the government. That we weren't willing to do. Was that a mistake? I don't think so.

And I have also more sympathy for the people who made the original decisions who were applying a model that didn't fit Southeast Asia and who didn't understand that the Soviet Union and China and Vietnam were different entities and that a victorious Vietnam was less likely to be an enemy of ours than an enemy of a lot of other countries. So, of course, mistakes will always be made in government. But the question for our society is whether we can have a serious debate about them or whether we have to turn it into a civil war. That seems, to me, the key point that I was trying to make.

AMBASSADOR BRYNN: Let me intervene. Let me thank Dr. Kissinger for an elegant and incisive presentation and what a standard he has set for the – (applause) – conference today. It has been brought to my attention that I failed to name the title of the book, *A World Restored*. I invited Chancellor Metternich to come, but he was indisposed today. (Laughter.)

