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An Open Letter to President Johnson on Vietnam, 1966.

AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT JOHNSON ON VIET NAM

An Address Given by Dr. Daniel Jeremy Silver

The Temple

February 20, 1966

My dear Mr. President:

Canaan was a turbulent land, a place of endemic violence. Those whom the camp of Israel sent out to spy out Canaan were unnerved by the omnipresence of armed bands and by the constant wailing of orphans. Their fear was reflected in their report. "This land" they said, "is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof." Though written 3,000 years ago and of quite another place I know of no better description of that bedeviled country we now call Viet Nam.

I submit to you, Mr. President, that on this shrunken globe no nation can sit idly by and be indifferent to the agony of another. And when your own nation has played a major role in a national tragedy, no citizen can turn away or be silent.

In the Bible that you and I, Mr. President, deeply cherish there is contained this phrase: "There is a way which seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." You believe, I know, that our policy of military intervention in South Viet Nam is right; and you are troubled, I know, that the ends thereof are the ways of escalation, search and kill, burning and terror in the night - the ways of death. I understand and I appreciate your urgent effort to secure a political solution to this tragic military confrontation. I appreciate and I understand your frustration that tenders of negotiation have been met with cold silence. I believe, Mr. President, that the greatness of a great leader is measured by his ability to accept frustration, and I would submit to you, Sir, that there is nothing to be gained by acerbating the war. Believing as I do that military involvement was not and is not an effective policy in South

East Asia, I would urge now not the escalation of conflict, but patience, restraint, realism. I would emphasize that if there are privileged sanctuaries to the North, the Red River Delta, the cities of Haiphon and Hanoi; there are also privileged sanctuaries to the South, the shipping lanes of the South China Sea and the estuaries of the Saigon Harbor. That if terror strikes to the North terror can easily be spread to the South. I would emphasize too that though you have pledged unconditional negotiation and though there is no reason to doubt, as indeed I do not doubt, the sincerity of your offer; in effect you seem to be demanding that we win at the conference table what we have not been able to win on the battle field - the political integrity of that nation called South Viet Nam, carved out arbitrarily by the Geneva Conference in 1954^{AND} under a government in Saigon. We pledged that we will remove our troops to the sea if the Viet Cong remove their troops to the north. But I submit to you, Sir, as you well know, that the Viet Cong not only include North Vietnamese insurgents and subversives, but South Viet Nameese rebels, some of whom have fought for a dozen years and more against what they consider to be a tyrannical, undemocratic, unrepresentative and corrupt government in their capitol, ~~in Saigon~~.

I do not believe, as some seem to believe, that terror will bring about the conference table. I do believe that restraint and patience may.

Mr. President, you have asked your critics for practical suggestions. I confess that I have none. As an historian I know that there are times which are inauspicious - where^N tempers have frayed and the balance of power is such that neither side is prepared to give an inch. But there are also changes in the tides in history. There are shifts of the political climate and shifts in the economic and political realities. I am firm in my conviction that given steadiness, patience and realism; a political solution will be found for South Viet Nam and peace will be brought to that benighted God-forsaken land. For that land cries out for peace. Its plantations are overgrown. Its fields are fallow. Its irrigation ditches are trodden under. Poverty and disease are rampant. Death is

the daily companion. Every day men die, women die, children die. What will we have gained, Mr. President, if we save this small land from Communism, only to have returned a broken, desperate people to a scorched and shattered place?

"There is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death." I believe that there will be a political solution in South Viet Nam. My concern is that the United States does not trap itself into any other similar situation. Therefore, I should like to raise with you, Sir, the question, whether the way which seemeth right to you, the way of military involvement, the way of containment is, in effect, the right way? It seems to me that it is an unreasonable response to an irrational fear. I label it unreasonable because I am firm in my belief that the United States lacks the human resource to fight a land war on the Asian mainland. I make no claims of being a military expert, but I am given to understand that the Joint Chiefs of Staff, our military experts, did, in fact, make that judgment in 1954, when war in South East Asia was first proposed within the government. It was held then that we could not win a technological victory simply by putting our planes and our ships into action. Men would have to be put into the jungles, into the river valley and into the hill country, and it was held then by all (except Admiral Radford) in the highest level of our military, that we lacked the logistic support and the manpower reserve to achieve victory under such conditions. I submit that the validity of this judgment still holds.

I believe that our policy of military effort in South East Asia is an unreasonable response to an irrational fear. What is the irrational fear? It is the almost phobic concern by many in this nation that there is a controlled, unified, cunning, international Communist conspiracy - World wide, effective and aimed at the overthrow of all free peoples and governments. Now conspiracy and

Communist domination are part of the doctrine of Communism. But, Sir, there is doctrine and there is reality. And as we have seen in recent years, nationalism, ethnic consciousness and the concern of individual nations within the Communist Bloc for their own political advantage has blunted and disorganized this doctrine. There has been the breakup of Peking and Moscow. Our own government has found it advisable to give foreign aid to Communist Yugoslavia and to Communist Poland, and has found it advisable to trade with Communist Roumania, Communist Hungary, Communist Yugoslavia and with the Soviet Union itself. There are Communist subversives in many nations of the world. There are CIA agents in many nations of the world. The era of the Cold War is one which has made the paramilitary venture part of the international practice of every government. But I wonder if ~~is~~ this fear of a Communist conspiracy and subversion is a truly rational fear and a sufficient basis for our policy? It is said that we are in South Viet Nam in order to prevent the takeover of Viet Nam by a Communist government. Our fear seems to be that if South Viet Nam becomes Communist today, Thailand will be undermined tomorrow, the Phillipines next week, Japan next month, and within the year we may be fighting subversion in Hawaii and on our own West Coast. Now I submit to you, Sir, were the worst to come about and a truly Communist government been established in all of South Viet Nam, are we so certain that the government would have been a willing handmaiden and tool for Peking or Moscow? Viet nationalism for a thousand years has stood in the way of Chinese expansion to the South. History reveals that the Chinese have never been able to establish effective hegemony and suzerainty there. Recent events ^{indicate that among} ~~tell us one of~~ the reasons Ho Chi Ming accepted the 1954 Geneva Conference and the International Control Commission ^{in his} ~~land~~ was that Control Posts were established along his northern border to prevent the incursion of Chinese agents, ~~into his land~~. I wonder too if the reason that he has not summoned Chinese armies now does not lie in the fact that he fears that those

who come to aid will stay to rule.

I wonder, Sir, if our policy of military inter-position has not in effect hastened the very situation that we fear? That ~~in~~ in countering American ~~military~~ military strength Hanoi has had to fall more and more within the Chinese nationalist expansionist sphere? Whether we have not made Viet nationalism less possible?

Last year, Mr. President, you said in a speech at the Johns Hopkins University, "Americans and Asians are dying for a world where each people may choose its own path to change." I believe that there is truth in this statement. I believe that American policy has, indeed, been interested in allowing peoples the freedom to establish their own form of government. I believe that there is truth, to the charge that for a long time now the North Viet Nameese have been encouraging the revolution in South Viet Nam, if not, in effect, wholly supporting it. But I wonder, Sir, if it truly can be said that North Viet Nameese infiltration precipitated or required ~~the~~ massive military retaliation by our government? More to the point, I wonder if our twelve years of support for the Diems and Kys in Saigon was a policy designed so that this people might choose its own path to change? How does the support of one who oppresses and suppresses dissent, how does such a policy, and it has been our policy, jibe with our concern that each people may choose its own path to change?

I submit, that for all of our posture of concern for the interest of the Viet Nameese people, to protect, as you have put it so often, this brave little people in their freedom, the overriding concern of the United States and of all parties who have ^{PLAYED A PART IN} ~~inflicted~~ on the tragedy of South Viet Nam, has been ~~the~~ Their geopolitical ^{CONCERNS} ~~concern~~ in the Cold War. The Viet Nameese have suffered, horror and worse because they ^A ~~have~~ become chess pieces in the game of international politics. Let me try and make this point.

In 1945 the victorious Allied nations met at Potsdam to organize a postwar world. In 1945 in the power vacuum which came about with the Japanese surrender,

those Viet Nameese who had for thirty years and more fought French Colonial rule, and who had during the forties fought Japanese military rule, united in a Popular Front Government and created the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. There were Communists in the Government, there were Socialists in the Government, there were revolutionaries in the Government, there were Mandarins in the Government; even the French puppet Bao Dai pledged ^{his} ~~an~~ allegiance. In September, 1945, the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam proclaimed its Declaration of Independence modeled in language, at least, after our own. Included in that declaration were these two or three paragraphs. "The whole Viet Nameese people, animated by a common purpose, are determined to fight to the bitter end against any attempt by the French Colonialists to recover their country.

We are convinced that the Allied Nations which at Terhan and at San Francisco have acknowledged the principle of self determination and the equality of nations will not refuse to acknowledge the independence of Viet Nam." But that is precisely what the great powers proceeded to do. At Potsdam Stalin sold Ho Chi Minh down the river. Such is the monolithic Communist conspiracy that Russian nationalism preempted any concern for a popular front Communist leader far away in South East Asia. Stalin's concern was with Eastern Europe. The British concern was with Eastern Asia. So a convenient arrangement was arrived at. Stalin gained his freedom in the Satellite nations. Viet Nam was divided between a Chinese sphere of influence to the North and a British sphere of influence to the South. The Chinese and the British were given a mandate to restore law and order in South East Asia. Subsequently, the United Kingdom in one of the most ignoble acts of the post war period interpreted the restoration of law and order to mean the restoration of the French government. Newly-surrendered Japanese troops were ordered to storm the Republic's government buildings and barracks and to hold these buildings and barracks until French transport could

arrive. Washington spoke of national sovereignty and of the independence of the nations, but made no official protest. General MacArthur in Tokyo did. "If there is anything that makes my blood boil it is to see our Allies in Indo-China and Java deploying Japanese troops to reconquer the little peoples we promised to liberate."

In 1945, the Popular Front Government, a government such as will inevitably be established by whatever negotiations are now achieved after twenty years of bloodshed and horror, could have been, and was, in fact, a reality. But in that year as in every subsequent year, the appetites and ambitions of the great powers overrode the needs of the Viet Nameese people. French power was reimposed. Eight years later we had suddenly discovered that this Ho Chi Minh, who had been sold down the river by Stalin eight years before, was the major agent of Communist conspiracy in South East Asia, and the United States was supporting the French Colonial battle to the tune of 80% of the cost of that bloody war. In April of 1954 Secretary Dulles checked with our Allies and with the leaders of Congress whether they were willing to accept military action against the Viet Nameese rebels. No pretense was made then that we were trying to create a world where each people must choose his own path to change. Secretary Dulles minced no words: "The imposition on South East Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Communist Chinese Allies by whatever means must be a great threat to the whole community. The United States feels that it cannot possibly be passively accepted and that it should be met by united action." In other words, we arbitrarily limited the options available to the Viet Nameese people. If they wanted a ~~united~~ front government with all of its dangers we would not tolerate that choice. It ran against our own line-drawing policy symbolized then by the South East Asia Treaty Organization that Secretary Dulles had just brought into being.

The questions which we must ask are two. Was the fear which has motivated our policy, and seems to be motivating it today, realistic? Is the method of military intervention an effective way to achieve the ends which we seek?

Is this fear realistic? I have already indicated, Sir, that I do not believe that it is. I will not be backed into the position of describing Communists as angels. They are not. I despise the authoritarianism, the lack of human dignity^{AND} the lack of concern for the individual which exists under many Communist regimes as much as any other man and probably, as a man of faith, more. But I do not believe that by drawing lines around a contagion, a philosophy which you do not like, you can deny its existence or contain it. And I do not believe that fear of this philosophy ought to be the underlying thrust of our American policy. Military intervention to support anti-Communist governments is often short-sighted and self-defeating. This is especially true when it applies to governments which exist in the emerging, underdeveloped nations of the world. For ten years we supported such a government in South Viet Nam. The government of Diem was autocratic, tyrannical, imperious and corrupt. Our aid which should have brought about an economic revolution was slowed down so as to preclude revolution. There was progress, to be sure, but slow, too slow. And quickly our concern for the protection of that government lead to vast military support of that government far exceeding the economic support of the people. Those who were arrested by ~~that government~~ and imprisoned for dissent, were arrested by police trained by Americans and armed ^{with} ~~by~~ ^{weapons} Americans, and incarcerated in jails which had been built with and made secure by American firms. Communism breeds where there is want, where there is poverty, where there is fear, where there is misery, where there is a tyrannical government which is supported by an American government ^{SO THAT} and anti-Americanism becomes a byword of the revolution.

I trust, Sir, that you understand that the present hearings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee are far more than a niggling critique of mistakes

which may have been made by your Administration in the past and far more than a suggestion of this or that subtle change in your policy today. Rather, Sir, your critics have raised a challenge to the entire basis of our foreign policy. It is our belief, and it is certainly my belief, that a policy of military support for governments which stand athwart the progress of their people is self-defeating and that such a policy must be changed before we are trapped again in another Viet Nam.

You have already announced, Sir, that there is evidence of subversion, of Communist subversion, in Thailand, especially in the northeastern provinces of that country. You have already committed to Thailand 12,000 American military personnel and several wings of our Jet aircraft. There is in Korat, near the northeastern province, enough armor to equip within twenty-four hours an entire American division. The military commitment in Thailand has been made in support of an anti-Communist government and that government, is, in fact, anti-Communist. But it is also oligarchical, repressive, and privileged. It has never held an election. It has never allowed a constitution to be promulgated. It has never convened a parliament elected by the people. It is a government of the elite. A government which outlawed^s labor unions. A government which has closed the dissident press. Like Viet Nam, Mr. President, Thailand is a country which is cleft by deep ethnic and economic and religious divisions. There are in those very north east provinces, which you have pointed out as the place of subversion, some seven million Laos who live on the poorest land and are the poorest citizens of the country, who have no representation in Bangkok. Only in the last year and a half has some of our aid been allowed to trickle through to them. There are, in the long narrow southern end of the peninsula of Thailand, some seven million Indonesian Moslems who have no representation in the government, no say in their affairs, and who, too, are among the poorest in the nation. And there are in the

great urban centers of Bangkok and the provincial capitols, several million Chinese who have no representation in the government. Chinese, who by law, are prohibited from entering into many areas of commerce, industry and craft. We have never used in Thailand our aid as a weapon to force this government to break out of its lethargy and break free of its habit of corruption. Bangkok, like Saigon, seems to be a capitol without a country. The Prime Minister governs a nation that has no electorate.

Thailand never knew the dislocations of colonial rule and has not suffered as deeply as Viet Nam. Perhaps war may be avoided in Thailand, but all of the incendiary conditions are there. If revolution comes Communist subversion will only apply a match to the existing timber. Subversion cannot be effective unless people are discontented and have nothing to lose. If that revolution comes, it will be a Communist revolution because it will be an anti-American revolution because we are inexorably bound up with the present government; the government of the few, the government of the past.

Mr. President, I am fully aware that if the policies some of us are suggesting are accepted anti-Communist governments ^{might} ~~would~~ fall. Your administration has emphasized aid to governments and containment. We would emphasize aid to peoples and humanity. We are fully aware that this is a tumultuous world. Our own nation, Mr. President, had to go through Revolution and Civil War before we came into our freedoms and into our maturity, and surely none of these feudalistic, tribalistic states will emerge into the Twentieth Century without some kind of convulsion and turmoil. Still we plead with you Sir, not to align us now with the few ^{Past} ~~AND The~~ but with the people, the mass and the future. Will Communist subversion win out in some of these countries? It may.

I remind you Mr. President, of another warning in our Bible, ^{The} "Violence of the wicked shall drag them away because they refuse to do justly." Each nation

has its own bundle of human hopes. In this century of burgeoning prosperity, where the example of freedom is just across the border, no people will long tolerate an ideology which destroys its freedom, saps its hopes, and limits its opportunities. When a leader goes ideologically too far, as Sukarno did in Indonesia, the people rise up and pull him down. Communism may be a way station for some of these underdeveloped nations on their way into the future. If such, it must be accepted, and outgrown.

Mr. President, I am fully and humbly aware of the awesome burden of responsibilities that you bear. I am of the conviction that you have borne them honorably and that you have made your decisions according to your best judgments. But as a man of faith to a man of faith, I plead with you to have faith. To have faith in men - their hope, their hope, their decency and their humanity. To allow our government to stand abroad for that which we enjoy at home - justice, opportunity, freedom and hope

Respectfully yours,

DJS:mgn

Kaddish

Friday Jul 18 1966
Sunday 20 1966

Those who passed away this week

HARRY A. MYERS

Jahrzeits

MEYER WEIL

BERNAT A. HUEBSCHMAN

ROSE BUBIS ROSKOPH

ANNA G. REDER

SADIE A. RIGELHAUPT

GABRIEL SCHAFFNER

JANE ELLEN UDELF

EARLE M. LIEBERMAN

DR. MORTON MORGENSTERN

SIDNEY S. WOLFE

DAVID STROMBERG

BELLE BLOOM GELLNER

ARTHUR KELLER

ARCHIE PALEVSKY

CHARLES A. MELSHER

That Americans and Asians are dying for a ^{WORLD WHERE} ~~cause~~ each people may choose its own path to change.

The whole VietNameese people animated by a common purpose are determined to fight to the bitter end against any attempt by the French colonialists to recover their country.

We are convinced that the allied nations, which at Terheran and San Francisco have acknowledged the principle of self-determination and equality of nations, will not refuse to acknowledge the independence of Viet Nam.

If there is anything that makes my blood boil it is to see our Allies in Indo China and Java deploying Japanese troops to reconquer the little peoples we promised to liberate.

The imposition on South East Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist Ally by whatever means must be a grave threat to the whole free community. ~~The United States~~ ^{FEEL} that that possibility cannot be passively accepted but should be met by united action.

~~We want nothing for ourselves only that the people of South Viet Nam be allowed to guide their own country in their own way.~~

The violence OF The wicked
Shall drag Them AWAY
BECAUSE THEY REFUSE
TO DO JUSTLY

My Dear Mr. President,

An acute concern seen in Turkey land - a place of unending
misery. The ^{unending} reports of constant killings were everywhere. Those who
had been sent out by the camp of death to spread the land were
unmanned and boldly shaken by the kill much and unending of the camp.
Their report reflected true fear. "This land is a land that outlets
up the unending camp"

Through unending over 2,000 years ago
and of unending place, I know of no better description of land
be described place and and V.N. - unending of death
& destruction is certainly observed and the unending destruction problem
the unending destruction of the place of regulation, unending on the
unending place, Mr. President, unending to unending camp -
and when he feels that the unending unending unending
he can not and unending unending unending

Mr. President, the place and you and dearly unending unending

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But the unending unending unending unending unending

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unending - and you are unending, unending unending

and thereby are the unending unending, unending, unending, unending

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the recent months to and the unending unending unending, unending

unending unending unending unending unending unending unending

I regret that the unending unending unending unending

[illegible]

2 was not on under ~~under~~, Mrs. ~~Robert~~, and ~~the~~

Yes
" That business which has been ~~done~~ ^{done} for a ~~number~~ ^{number} of years and people may come out and make a change."

and a place our constant opposition to the United Front
Popular Front & our demand of support to those who
opposed ^{unilateral} unilateral judgments & unilateral unilateral
elections, or elections.

V.N. is a legacy of the Colonial & the V.N. has been suffered
because they became ^{prisoners} prisoners of Colonial Colonial as that
global ^{along with} along with for Colonial, Colonial to Colonial Colonial
Colonial.

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organize the post war world. These V.N. who had
fought in the 20's & 30's for independence from Colonial
Colonial Colonial - & Colonial Colonial Colonial
Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial
the Democratic Republic of V.N. This Colonial Colonial Colonial
Colonial - C., Colonial, Colonial, Colonial, even the Colonial Colonial
Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial, Colonial Colonial
Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial
a Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial Colonial.



a C. from of guilt doesn't make any sense in the C.
known since the same time. The same example of war,
in Tito's Yugoslavia - But there is evidence of success
in ~~the~~ ^{is called} ~~many of the~~ ~~Attitude~~ - C. Palmer, Romero,
Uguy & Cybernetics, Mitchell & related articles on
the small volume to C. articles & Romero. There are
no large recently in London, Wanted & regular font or all
a Can you at UW have found in presented? To
S. Green is to be in the US and US
be same over needed time see ec. change to China -
~~Trotsky~~ ~~was~~ ~~not~~ ~~there~~ - But Unit intention

have a 1000 year history of writing to Chinese scribes.
Unit Nam my have not yet been mentioned in S.E. area -
The other European people are in contact with the East after the area is open, but
but it is not clear what the main idea has been putting
hand mail, Wydawn to the most day can now live in China
Chinese area for the future - is it not too
few land some needs have to be met - made it to
make.

For four decades as done of Chinese literature is being
S. Green - 2 year on related intention to be made
it, N.U.M. can not put on unfulfilled and own

resources,
2 decades to contribute to the development of human
life which is implied in modern C as well as any

man - perhaps in a sum of 10000 overestimated man - but
2. You that are policy of not extending ^{at} ~~the~~ possibilities
~~for more than it does for~~
it.

Common opinion among us is discontented, as opposed to the
disappointment, as opposed to those who have nothing to
lose. Our Foreign Office program was designed to cut
you as suffering as poor with conditions, more, as
re-education and days would come about to new needs,
needs, But as with has been it to multiply into our
concern will be to be for entering of
Contract has after read in U.S. and
the support of a good which is the people's
here.

Mr. President, I merely submit that you will understand
the current policy which has been set by you and the people
only as a policy of not withdrawing from the policy of slavery
defeated strategic position in U.S., The policy has been
of our foreign policy in the underdeveloped section
as well as the policy of not withdrawing from the policy of slavery
and to the underdeveloped section in U.S., and to use it

to the world and the world

Dear Mr. President

There is a very serious problem in the world

But the world is very much in the hands of the people

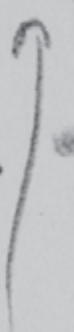
but it is not the world that is the problem

The problem of the world is the problem of the people

Because they refuse to do right.

Even if it is a very long time - and we must do it
through the little people of the world and the
to freedom ~~the world is in the hands of the people~~
and we must do it.

~~and we must do it~~



~~and we must do it~~



Sincerely yours
David J. Fein

They will not do it

and we must do it