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ADDRESS BY THE HONORABLE U. ALEXIS JOHNSON,  
DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE,  
BEFORE THE CANADIAN CLUB OF MONTREAL,  
WINDSOR HOTEL, MONTREAL, QUEBEC, CANADA,  
MONDAY, MARCH 14, 1966, AT 1:00 P.M., E.S.T.

I am deeply honored at this opportunity to discuss Viet-Nam before such a distinguished Canadian audience. I know that, just as with my own countrymen, many of you are concerned with the situation there and have difficulty in sorting out seemingly contradictory assertions and conflicting news reports regarding Viet-Nam. Perhaps all too often people on one side of the issue or the other succumb to the temptation to make categorical statements that this course or that course is the only honorable course of action. I hope to avoid this temptation today and rather to discuss with you out of my own experience as factually as I can what is going on there and the role of the United States.

I first want to state plainly why we, the United States, are in Viet-Nam; then to address some of the other questions. Why are we in Viet-Nam?

~~The real question is not whether Viet-Nam, or indeed Southeast Asia, is of such political, strategic or economic importance as to justify the loss of American lives and treasure.~~

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Rather the question is the world-wide issue of preventing the Communists from breaking by force any of the lines that were drawn in the various post-war settlements. Since the end of World War II, when the United States was propelled on to the center of the world's stage as a leading power, our goal, which is to say our policy, has been to develop and maintain a stable relationship among the world's powers in this uncommonly volatile period of the world's history.

Since 1945 we have committed the integrity of our nation to a variety of agreements specifically designed to maintain that stability; a stability whose purpose is to preserve the freedom of each nation to devote its assets and energies to its own development. As far as South Viet-Nam is concerned, acting through our representatives, we committed ourselves by a Senate vote of 82 to 1 to the SEATO Treaty of 1954, reaffirmed by a vote of 502 to 2 in Congress as a whole in 1964. (In assessing attitudes in the United States, you will want to note that two weeks ago a motion to repeal this latter resolution was defeated 92 to 5 in the Senate and was never brought to a vote in the House.) This is the issue. This is the goal. This is our purpose -- and our ability to honor these commitments is, we believe critical to the well-being of every free man, woman and child--for failure to honor our commitments one place cannot but call into question our commitments elsewhere, and thus encourage miscalculation by the other side.

Many of the questions coming out of the present debate concern the NLF, or the so-called National Liberation Front. Statements are made that what is going on in South Viet-Nam is a purely internal revolt against an

unpopular

Some "History" - No mention of Hanoi's position to Hanoi!

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unpopular government by a discontented population.

Any discussion of the NLF also involves the issue of whether or not the Viet Cong represent an indigenous uprising. What are some of the facts?

Before 1960 no one in or out of Viet-Nam had even heard of the NLF. It was in that year that Hanoi radio announced the formation of the NLF. Perhaps a bit of history is in order here.

In bringing about the termination of hostilities in Viet-Nam, the Geneva Agreement of 1954 separated North and South Viet-Nam from each other by a five-mile demilitarized zone. The northern part of the country, with its capital at Hanoi, was under the control of the Viet Minh while Saigon became the capital of what had been central and South Viet-Nam. The two separate entities were obliged not to interfere with each other until agreement could be reached between them on when and how they could be unified. In this, the situation was very similar to that of Germany and Korea.

However, we have since learned quite dramatically that Ho Chi Minh's government in Hanoi never had any intention of allowing the South Vietnamese freely to choose their own government and run their own affairs until agreement could be reached on unification. There were areas of South Viet-Nam nominally under Viet Minh control at the time of the 1954 Agreement. These Viet Minh were ordered by Hanoi to hide their arms and to do what they could do frustrate the attempts at administration made by the South Vietnamese Government. Ho Chi Minh was reasonably convinced that the South Vietnamese Government would easily crumble with the help of the subversion which he directed.

In connection with the charge that the United States violated the 1954 Geneva Accords by not supporting elections in 1956, I might note that such elections were indeed the goal set by the final declaration of that conference. The declaration stipulated that free elections should be held throughout Viet-Nam in July 1956 under international supervision.

In 1955 and 1956 the South Vietnamese government maintained that it would agree to such elections if they were genuinely free and internationally supervised throughout Viet-Nam and not just in South Viet-Nam. The United States, although not a party to the Geneva Accords, consistently favored genuinely free elections under UN supervision, as has been our consistent position and that of most members of the UN with respect to Korea. It was clear however in 1956 that, no more than any other Communist Government, was the Hanoi Government prepared to allow such elections and accordingly the elections were not held. Thus it is a travesty on the truth to allege that the present situation was brought about by the failure of the South to carry out the 1954 Accords. In fact, it was the North that was not willing to submit itself to the test of free elections under international control.

By 1956 Ho Chi Minh had realized that he would be unable to subvert the Saigon-led government without military action. As a result, in 1956, Hanoi began rebuilding, reorganizing and expanding the military machine which they had left behind in South Viet-Nam when the Viet Minh had supposedly withdrawn to the North.

To supplement

To supplement the revitalized Viet Minh in the South, southern-born former Vietnamese who had gone North were conscripted for intensive training and political indoctrination and were returned to South Viet-Nam to serve as the hard core of the so-called "indigenous force" of the Viet Cong.

By 1959-1960, Hanoi had built up a military capability in the South which enabled them to step up their actions considerably beyond the small-scale guerrilla activity to which they had confined themselves up to that time.

Their hopes of a cheap and easy victory now gone, the Communist regime in the North made some far-reaching decisions which they made no effort to conceal.

At the Third Lao Dong (Communist) Party Congress in Hanoi in September 1960, Ho Chi Minh said that the North must "step up the national democratic people's revolution in the South." Other similar speeches were made, and at its conclusion the Party Congress called for the formation of a "National United Front" in the South.

Three months later, that is in December 1960, Hanoi radio announced the formation of a "Front for Liberation of the South." This is the origin of the so-called "National Liberation Front" in South Viet-Nam.

It was then, and still is, a pure creature and tool of the North Vietnamese regime. Its so-called leadership contains not a single nationally-known figure. In a true sense, it is as faceless to the outside world as it is to the Vietnamese people. Thus it is not a "National Front" and it is certainly not a "Liberation Front" for its purpose has nothing to do with "liberation" -- quite the opposite.

Of real significance on this point is the fact that no one South Vietnamese political figure of any note whatever has ever associated himself with the NLF. No member of any Saigon government has ever defected to the NLF. And religious, labor and student leaders have consistently refused to associate themselves with the movement.

It is also important that we understand the distinction between the NLF and the Viet Cong armed forces. The NLF has little or nothing to do with the command of the Viet Cong, especially the main force, or regular Viet Cong battalions and regiments in the South. These main force units and other Viet Cong elements are supported, supplied and controlled from Hanoi, and only Hanoi can direct them to cease their aggression. The NLF is purely the political facade or, as the name plainly states, the political front for Hanoi. It cannot bring about an end to the fighting. This can only be done by Hanoi itself.

The movement of military personnel from North Viet-Nam into the South became so flagrant after 1960 that it was noticed and publicized by the Legal Committee of the International Commission for Supervision and Control, which, as you know, is composed of India, Poland and Canada.

The Legal Committee, with only Poland objecting, reported in 1962:

"There is evidence to show that arms, munitions and other supplies have been sent from the zone in the North to the zone  
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in the South with the objective of supporting, organizing and carrying out hostile activities, including armed attacks, against the armed forces and administration of the zone in the South.

"There is evidence that the PAVN (i.e., the North Vietnamese Army) has allowed the zone in the North to be used for inciting, encouraging and supporting hostile activities in the zone in the South, aimed at the overthrow of the administration in the South."

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the "Aggression"*  
I might note that at that time there was not a single American combat soldier in Viet-Nam or elsewhere on the mainland of Southeast Asia.

In the three-year period from 1959 to 1961 the North Viet-Nam regime infiltrated 10,000 men into the South. In 1962, 13,000 additional personnel were infiltrated. And by the end of 1964 North Vietnamese may well have moved over 40,000 armed and unarmed guerrillas into South Viet-Nam.

Today we have every reason to believe that nine regiments of regular North Vietnamese forces are fighting in organized units in South Viet-Nam.

So you can clearly see that our whole involvement in South Viet-Nam is based on the fact that the Viet Cong is not an indigenous revolt -- quite the contrary.

It is as much a case of outside aggression as if Hanoi had boldly moved those nine regiments in marching formation across the 17th Parallel.

That is the heart of our involvement.

Another question frequently raised in recent days is the attitude of the South Vietnamese toward now entering into a political coalition with the NLF or the Viet Cong as a means of bringing the fighting to an end.

To understand the attitude of the South Vietnamese leaders in this regard they do not have to refer to the experience of Czechoslovakia, Poland, or other such Western experiments in the post-war period. They look to their own experience.

The Hanoi government, or the Viet Minh, as recognized by the French in 1946, was originally a coalition of both Communists and non-Communist nationalists opposing the French. But the image of the Viet Minh as a true representative government vanished in the eyes of anti-French but non-Communist Vietnamese as they were systematically liquidated or expelled in the period between 1946 and 1950. Many of the political leaders I met in South Viet-Nam spoke with great bitterness of their experience in seeking to work with the Viet Minh during that period and of their relatives and friends who were dispossessed or assassinated as the Communists sought to establish their absolute control. It is thus not hard to understand how they feel on this subject.

It is also interesting to note what the Viet Cong has publicly said on the ways to gain control of the government. They have said that

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there are three ways. One method is to have a general uprising if the proper political base can be prepared. In this they have clearly failed. Another method is the famed Mao-Giap three-stage revolutionary guerrilla war; that is the strategy they are now pursuing. Or the third possibility is for the Viet Cong to become a part of a coalition government. This they would clearly prefer if it became possible.

Also pertinent to the South Vietnamese attitudes is the brutality and terrorism which they have experienced at the hands of the Viet Cong. From 1958 to the present, the Viet Cong has assassinated or kidnapped an estimated 61,000 Vietnamese village leaders and government representatives. Just this last January, for example, Viet Cong terrorists massacred 26 men, women and children, and wounded 56 others in a brutal sweep 40 miles south of Danang. The Viet Cong has systematically intimidated anyone who had a position of leadership in the community. Their war is not just directed at the South Vietnamese armed forces, but equally important, against the administrative structure of the Vietnamese Government. One must bear this fact in mind when assessing the performance of the Vietnamese Government, which is also faced by the problems of any newly independent country, especially one that had no real preparation for independence.

Others have raised the question of whether the United States is fighting in Viet-Nam when the non-Communist Vietnamese will not fight for themselves -- or whether the United States is "going it alone" in South Viet-Nam.

The simple truth is that this is just not the case. The South Vietnamese armed forces are at a strength approaching 600,000 men. 11,000 South Vietnamese soldiers lost their lives in battle last year -- and it is very much their cause. All but two members of SEATO are substantially and directly contributing to the cause, and one non-member, Korea, has already contributed more than one full division and has announced plans to contribute another division of ground forces.

The Government of South Viet-Nam is very much aware that the battle they fight is only partially a military one. They realize that if they are to gain and hold the political confidence of an ever-increasing portion of the population they must assure that a real social and economic revolution takes place successfully in Viet-Nam. This is the problem that they took the initiative in discussing with us at Honolulu last month. I want to quote to you from the Declaration of Honolulu for this sets forth more succinctly than anything else I know our purposes there.

"The President of the United States and the Chief of State and Prime Minister of the Republic of Viet-Nam are thus pledged again:

to defense against aggression,  
to the work of social revolution,  
to the goal of free self-government,  
to the attack on hunger, ignorance, and disease  
and to the unending quest for peace."

Of particular

Of particular significance is the fact that this statement came almost verbatim from Prime Minister Ky's own opening statement at the conference. Prime Minister Ky and his government are keenly aware of the magnitude of the task they face.

The Saigon Government is faced with not only fighting a war but with making compatible the complicated regional differences between the southerners, the northerners and the people of the center. They must deal with a great diversity of racial groups, such as the Khmers, Chams, Nungs, as well as the so-called mountain peoples.

Add to this the complication of the ever-growing refugee population. Even without the present fighting, they were already faced with caring for nearly 1,000,000 refugees who fled to the South from North Viet-Nam following the 1954 Geneva Agreement. In recent months hundreds of thousands of other refugees have left Viet Cong-controlled areas, particularly in the central part of the country.

Another significant but relatively unpublicized development in recent months has been the success of the Chieu Hoi or "open arms" amnesty program of the South Vietnamese Government. This is a program designed to persuade the Viet Cong and their supporters to return their loyalties to the Government.

While this program has been nominally conducted since 1963, it has this last year begun to enjoy the kind of success that had been hoped for.

The 1965 results are most impressive. More than 42,000 persons defected from the Viet Cong to seek Government protection last year. A substantial percentage of these were full or part-time Viet Cong military and sympathizers. These figures represent a dramatic increase over 1964, and the first two months of this year indicate that the number seeking Government protection continues to grow.

*No more givers - too high !!*  
In this connection you should not be misled by the figures sometimes published on so-called desertion rates in the South Vietnamese forces. As with any young army this is of course a problem and a serious one, but this should not be mistaken for popular sympathy with the Viet Cong. Many of these "deserters" are what you and we would term AWOL or "absent without official leave." Many return to their home areas to tend their crops and then re-enlist in the citizens militia in a local unit, or return to their own units. Some leave to tend to family matters for a time and then reappear. Deflection to the Viet Cong is very rare.

We are all hopeful that an ever-improving esprit de corps will steadily decrease the number of men who absent themselves in this manner.

Now just a word on the bombing of North Viet-Nam. The purpose of these air raids has been and remains an attempt to restrict the ability of the North Vietnamese to move, equip, and supply their troops in South Viet-Nam. At no point has it been the mission of these air raids to destroy the North Vietnamese regime.

Our action has consisted of a careful, precise and restrained application of air power against military targets and military lines of supply and communication in North Viet-Nam. It is not directed at the civilian population of North Viet-Nam, but at the means by which the

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Hanoi Government is attempting to support its aggression in the South. It is not directed at the destruction of North Viet-Nam, but rather at the will and ability of the leaders in Hanoi to continue their aggression.

While retribution or revenge is not its purpose, many of the people of South Viet-Nam feel that it is small repayment for what Hanoi's agents have inflicted on them over the years -- the sabotage and destruction of the thousands of bridges, and miles of roads and railroad, and the tens of thousands of victims, military and civilian. I am satisfied that this action, together with the action in the South, ultimately will assist in demonstrating to Hanoi that their present course is untenable.

Bombing raids were suspended on December 24 and remained suspended until January 31. Many had said that such a suspension of air raids would open the door for negotiations with Hanoi. We had been told that such a move could possibly result in the suspension of North Vietnamese efforts to infiltrate South Viet-Nam or could reduce their attacks there. The result was quite the opposite. During the pause in the bombing, they stepped up their supply activities and made every possible move to reinforce their garrisons in the South. There was no reduction in the level of their terrorism and military activity in the South.

As their supply efforts intensified, our decision to renew the action against facilities and supply routes supporting their aggression in the South became imperative for the protection of all of the forces opposing the Viet Cong in the South.

When announcing the resumption of air action, President Johnson said:

"Our effort has met with understanding and support throughout most of the world, but not in Hanoi and Peking. From those two capitals have come only denunciation and rejection.

"The answer of Hanoi to all, is the answer that was published three days ago. They persist in aggression.....Throughout these thirty-seven days, even at moments of truce, there has been continued violence against the people of South Viet-Nam, against their government, against their soldiers, and against our own American forces.

"We do not regret the pause in the bombing. We yield to none in our determination to seek peace. We have given a full and decent respect to the opinions of those who thought that such a pause might give new hope for peace in the world."

No one in the United States Government believes that the real victory in Viet-Nam is primarily to be a military victory. For we know that any significant, lasting peace -- the kind of peace that will permit individual and social growth -- is so intricately woven to the complex patterns of political, social, religious and economic life as to make reforms in these areas mandatory, even while the necessary military pursuits are taking place.

You are all familiar with President Johnson's oft-repeated pledge of \$1 billion in economic aid to the Southeast Asian region, including  
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the rebuilding of the war-torn land of South Viet-Nam and North Viet-Nam. You know of the provisions recently made through the Asian Development Bank to further similar goals.

In fact, even our programs and personnel are taking every opportunity to try to improve the poor economic and social conditions under which so many of the Vietnamese people live. United States armed forces have to date given medical treatment to 4 1/2 million Vietnamese. They have distributed over 1,600,000 tons of foodstuffs plus 100,000 tons of other commodities. New hospitals are being built in many parts of the land. The United States AID Mission is rapidly expanding its medical assistance programs. During the past year these programs included training some 270 Vietnamese doctors and nurses, providing serum for the inoculation of 7 million persons, mostly children, and furnishing logistical support and medical supplies for Army medical teams operating in six provincial hospitals.

On the conviction that a truly free people must be literate people, a significant portion of our aid to Viet-Nam is now in the area of education. School enrollment has dramatically increased so that now over 2,000,000 students are enrolled in schools as compared to just over 1.3 million in 1960. With assistance from Australia and the Republic of China, we have produced some 8 1/2 million school textbooks written in Vietnamese by Vietnamese educators for the benefit of these and future students. By the end of this year we hope that 14 million texts will have been distributed -- at least four books for each child in school.

The Government of South Viet-Nam is keenly aware that economic growth and land reforms are imperative. The industrial production index rose 2 1/2 percent between 1962 and 1964. Since 1957, 600,000 acres of farm land have been distributed to 115,000 farmers, and Prime Minister Ky has recently inaugurated a new phase of the program which will distribute a further 650,000 acres to some 150,000 farmers.

Herein lies the irony of the whole predicament. President Johnson pinpointed this for us in a speech last week when he said, "It is more than a shame; it is a crime -- perhaps the greatest crime of man -- that so much courage and so much will and so many dreams must be carelessly flung on the fires of death and war."

I am convinced that, with our continued support, these valiant and courageous people will be freed from violence and terror to pursue that normal life to which every man under God is entitled.

Part of the strength of these people without question is their patience and endurance. Theirs is the kind of patience and determination displayed in a letter recently received by one of my staff from an Asian student. The student, undaunted by the frustrations of learning English, wrote, "Slow by slow, in the long of time, we will success."

If Thomas Paine were alive today, he could indeed say that, "These are the times that try men's souls." But which of us would not agree with the words of the late President Kennedy when he said, "I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people of any other generation."

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The integrity of freedom and peace in Southeast Asia is no less important to free people than it was in Berlin or Korea. Aggression is no less aggression because it is taking place in what seems a distant Viet-Nam. We need not repeat the words of Neville Chamberlain, who described the German assault on Czechoslovakia as "a quarrel in a far-off country between people of whom we know nothing." Aggression is no less aggression because it moves by stealth beneath an Asian jungle cover or in the dark of the night.

The U.S. Government has and will continue to meet this situation soberly and responsibly, as I am convinced this is what the American people always expect of their Government. As with any enterprise worth our blood and treasure, there are risks. We have and will continue to do all we can to minimize these risks but we cannot shrink from those not of our making, for to do so would leave the field to the aggressor. This, I am sure, is not the wish of most Americans. An essential element of this course is at all times to leave open the door to an honorable, just and peaceful solution. This we have and will continue to do. As Secretary Rusk said the other day, we have offered everything except to turn South Viet-Nam over to the Communists. It is my conviction that the American people do not want to do that. We ask for no surrender by Hanoi; we ask only that they stop what they are doing to the people of the South.

Our Government has made its position known repeatedly around the world in our recent and continuing peace efforts. Our officially-stated position has come to be known as the Fourteen Points. Perhaps a reiteration of these points is in order.

1. The Geneva Agreements of 1954 and 1962 are an adequate basis for peace in Southeast Asia;
2. We would welcome a conference on Southeast Asia or on any part thereof;
3. We would welcome "negotiations without preconditions" as the 17 nations put it;
4. We would welcome unconditional discussions as President Johnson put it;
5. A cessation of hostilities could be the first order of business at a conference or could be the subject of preliminary discussions;
6. Hanoi's four points could be discussed along with other points which others might wish to propose;
7. We want no U.S. bases in Southeast Asia;
8. We do not desire to retain U.S. troops in South Viet-Nam after peace is assured;
9. We support free elections in South Viet-Nam to give the South Vietnamese a government of their own choice;
10. The question of reunification of Viet-Nam should be determined by the Vietnamese through their own free decision;

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11. The countries of Southeast Asia can be non-aligned or neutral if that be their option;
12. We would much prefer to use our resources for the economic reconstruction of Southeast Asia than in War. If there is peace, North Viet-Nam could participate in a regional effort to which we would be prepared to contribute at least one billion dollars;
13. The President has said "The Viet Cong would not have difficulty being represented and having their views represented if for a moment Hanoi decided she wanted to cease aggression. I don't think that would be an insurmountable problem."
14. We have said publicly and privately that we could stop the bombing of North Viet-Nam as a step toward peace although there has not been the slightest hint or suggestion from the other side as to what they would do if the bombing stopped.

I do not minimize the trials that may lie ahead. However, I do feel that the tide has begun to turn and that, with a determination and perseverance no less than that of the other side, we can achieve the objectives of ourselves and the free people of South Viet-Nam without a larger war. I am satisfied that the American people do have that determination and perseverance. When Hanoi and Peiping are convinced that this is the case, a peaceful solution can be found. I am sure that you join me in the hope that that day will soon come.

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