

NYTimes

APR 20 1972

Vietnam—History Turned Upside Down

To the Editor:

In the Soviet Union, when it becomes necessary to revise history, the government can direct libraries to remove and replace certain pages of their encyclopedias (as was done with the biography of Lavrenti Beria).

In the United States the procedure is much simpler. It suffices for the President, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of "Defense" to keep repeating the new version of history. Newsmen who know better are generally too polite or too intimidated to contradict them. And the public quickly accepts the new version of history.

For example: the Nixon Administration now tells us, as did the Johnson Administration, that North Vietnam has invaded South Vietnam in "flagrant violation" of the 1954 Geneva Accords. To believe this, one must first accept the Lyndon Johnson version of history in which the Geneva Accords created a "North" and a "South" Vietnam.

But the one recurrent theme of these accords was that "the military demarcation line [between the northern and southern zones of Vietnam] is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary." The

accords provided for general elections under international supervision in 1956 to bring about the unification of Vietnam.

The elections were never held because our protégé Ngo Dinh Diem, with United States approval, refused to permit them. The United States considered these elections to be a "well-laid trap" of the Communists.

The full text of the Geneva Accords can still be found in almost any library. See, for example, "Documents on American Foreign Relations 1954" (Harper 1955, pp. 283-314) or "Vietnam" by M. E. Gettleman (Fawcett 1965, pp. 137-154). The "Final Declaration" of the 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina also appears in the U.S. Department of State Bulletin (Aug. 2, 1954, p. 164).

In these same sources one also finds the United States pledge "to refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb [the agreements]."

Nowhere in the accords is there any statement that "North Vietnamese" should not be in "South Vietnam"; and nowhere is permission granted for American forces to go to Indochina, much less to kill people there.

How then were Johnson and Nixon able to convince the American public that "North Vietnam" had invaded "South Vietnam"? And how have they managed to convince people that we have the right to conduct wholesale killings of North Vietnamese, South Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians?

One might argue that a North Vietnam and a South Vietnam came into existence, de facto, after we foiled reunification in 1956. But then, before accusing North Vietnam of attacking South Vietnam in 1965 or in 1972, one must explain away our attacks on North Vietnam which date back to 1961 or earlier. Air Commodore Nguyen Cao Ky once boasted of these raids to newsmen, while a nervous American official tried to shut him up.

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Exeter, R. I., April 5, 1972