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Bao Dai Revisited

AFTER 17 YEARS of discreet silence, Bao Dai, the self-exiled and almost forgotten Vietnamese emperor, has been heard from.

He has spoken out in favor of ending the seemingly interminable war in Vietnam, which he finds "fratricidal" and a bearer of ruination to the entire country, north and south.

But Bao Dai offers no means to that end, and this is truly discouraging. For Bao Dai, emperor of Annam and chief of state for all Vietnam while the French ruled, has the reputation of a seer and true prophet. This he acquired when the French departed after Dien-bien-phu, when he surveyed the scene, accurately foresaw the sequel, gathered up his substantial treasures and silently stole away to the French Riviera for 17 years of peaceful, undisturbed, luxury living.

There are Vietnamese of long memory who feel that if Bao Dai cannot see a way out of endless warfare, nobody can.