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"The Peace Must Be 'Vietnamized'"

By Nguyen Khanh

PARIS—History, we are told, never repeats itself. Yet we can remember as yesterday the end of Kuomintang China on the mainland, we have just witnessed the end of Lon Nol's "republican regime" in Cambodia, and tomorrow will see the end of "nationalist" South Vietnam.

Innumerable errors have been committed. But this is not the time to assess the blame attached to the successive American and Vietnamese administrations. They all without exception share responsibility. Time is short. We have to pull ourselves together, and quickly. We must resolutely face our obligation to honor the solemn word we gave when we signed the Paris peace accords in January, 1973.

We have to make hard choices—between continuing a policy of war or inaugurating a policy of peace; between the "shiftless, unimaginative" solution of the past or a more dynamic, effective solution that demands effort and sacrifice; between a Nguyen Van Thieu and his team of warmakers—the quintessential symbol of corruption, ineptitude and despotism—or the millions of South Vietnamese who desire only peace and national reconciliation; between politics in the style of Louis XV (*Après nous le déluge*) and an intermediate solution that would safeguard the principles of democracy and freedom.

In the face of the failure of the war policy—both Americanization and "Vietnamization"—the only reasonable, logical option is peace. Everything humanly possible must be done to achieve a peaceful solution. The peace must be "Vietnamized."

Every obstacle to this must be eliminated. Every organization and individual that has served as active instruments of the war policy must be removed from the scene. A new administration must be installed, one dedicated to peace, reconciliation, and national concord, resolved to apply the Paris accords strictly.

This new government, composed of those nationalist elements known for their active and open opposition to the war, would immediately begin talks with the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam to implement forthwith the military and political provisions of the Paris agreements.

An agreement on a cease-fire in place could be concluded within 48 hours after the resumption of negotiations between the two South Vietnamese parties. The cessation of hostilities would spare the lives of thousands of courageous soldiers and of millions of refugees and civilian war victims. The South Vietnamese armed forces would then turn their full attention to their peacetime mission, the maintenance of peace, order and security. South Vietnam would be able to forget its total concern with military aid and concentrate on humanitarian and economic problems.

In addition, the implementation of the political provisions of the Paris agreement would make possible the establishment of the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord in which a third element, besides the P.R.G. and the Saigon regime, would participate with all the prerogatives set forth in the agreement.

The release of political and military prisoners, along with the establishment of democratic liberties in both zones, would allow families that have been scattered by the fighting to be reunited and the initiation of attempts to solve the immense humanitarian problems of the refugees.

Finally, really free and democratic elections would confirm the Govern-

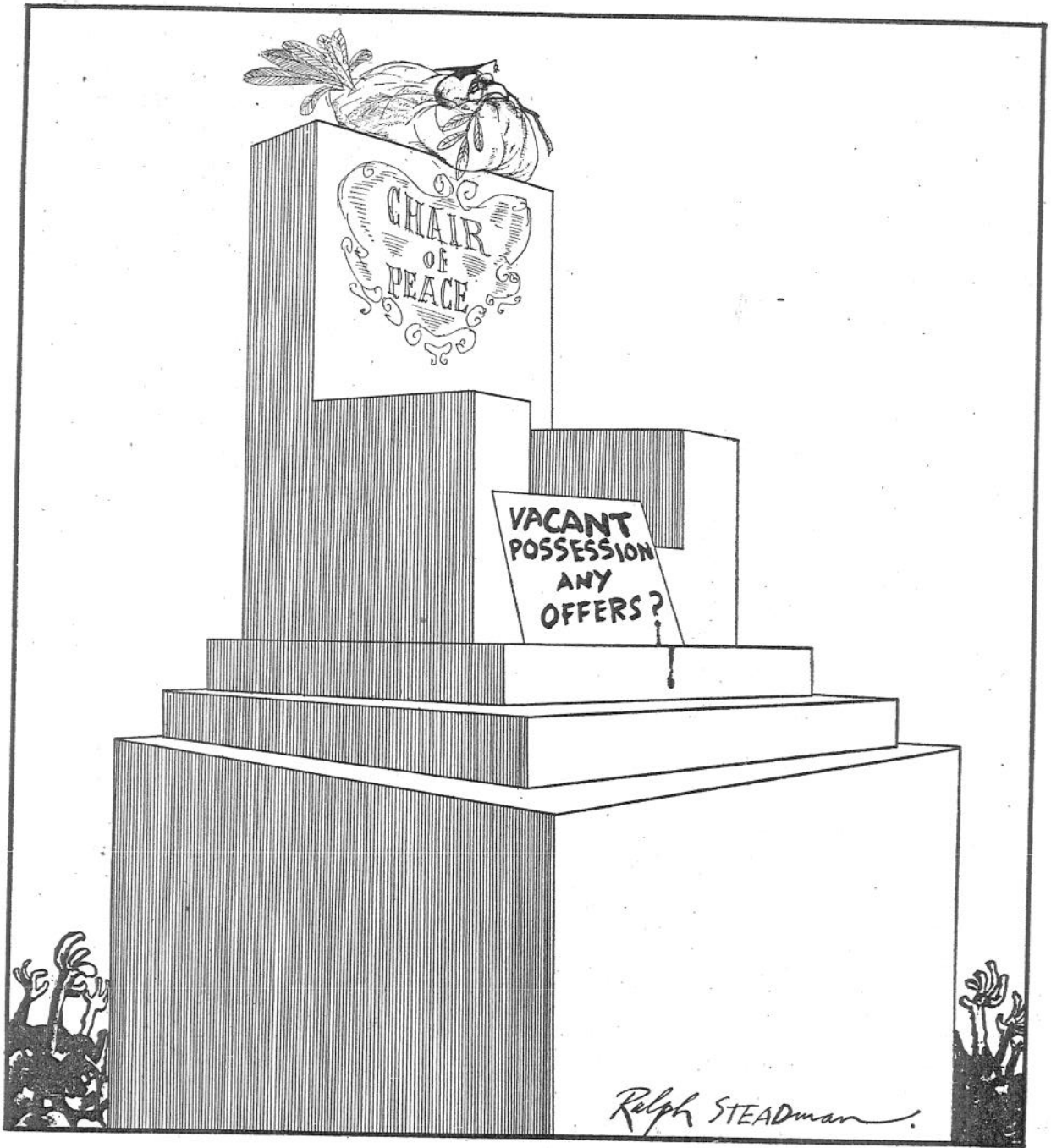
ment's absolute respect for the right to self-determination of the entire South Vietnamese population, with nobody excluded and no foreign interference.

Whatever the results of the elections, the formation of a government of national unity in Saigon would be most desirable. This government should include persons who belong to all three groups represented on the National Council. The equitable distribution of power is the essential condition of a lasting peace in South Vietnam. Only such a government could create a truly independent, free, democratic, non-aligned South Vietnam.

A regime like this in Saigon would naturally encourage the investment of foreign capital to foster the quickest possible development of the country's natural resources, especially oil. A properly conceived development program could pave the way for a prosperous future in Indochina, and that in turn could guarantee the equilibrium of Southeast Asia.

In my opinion, this solution would serve the best interests not only of the Vietnamese people but of the entire world, because the explosive situation we have been living with could cause a third world war.

I am profoundly convinced of this position. During my ten-year exile in Paris, I have been in constant touch with a number of interested parties, in particular with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam [North Vietnam] and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam. From these contacts, which have continued up to the present, I can affirm that we are as close as ever to a political solution.



The strategic retreat of Saigon's military forces has left us with a situation that is, in fact, balanced between the two contending South Vietnamese parties.

Saigon and the Provisional Revolutionary Government control almost the same proportion of the population; the "useful territory" under their governance is roughly of the same order; and even their armed forces are close to being balanced both in numbers and in matériel.

But this precarious balance risks being thrown off-center again, this time toward the left. In such a situation, the Paris accords would be dead once and for all and the prospect of lasting peace in South Vietnam would disappear forever.

For this reason, I am certain that all the dynamic elements of the South Vietnamese community—political and religious groupings of every kind, the armed forces, citizens both at home and abroad—will unite in support of a policy of peace and reconciliation.

We refuse to leave the fate of our country in the hands of one man, Nguyen Van Thieu, whose ten years of power and past several weeks of grievous miscalculations have led the country to the brink of disaster.

Important voices have been raised throughout the world in favor of a just peace in South Vietnam. I am confident that the American people as a whole, including the Congress and executive branch, are aware of the seriousness of the political and military situation in the Indochinese peninsula. I am certain that they will, as a consequence, exert every effort to support the Indochinese people in their

efforts to achieve peace. We can only achieve such an overwhelmingly important goal by joining forces.

I feel justified in my faith that we shall find a solution that will lead to peace and reconciliation—a solution that Huynh Tan Phat, the present president of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, and I advocated as long ago as 1964.

Gen. Nguyen Khanh led the Government of South Vietnam in 1964 and commanded its armed forces. Translated from the French by Leonard Mayhew.
