

# Amity Toward Vietnam

NYTimes

NOV 1 1975

By Gareth Porter

WASHINGTON—Now that the Vietnamese Communists have shown far more wisdom and compassion in victory than the United States Government had deemed possible, it is time for the United States at last to come to terms with the Vietnamese revolution.

For many years, American policy in Vietnam was based on the notion that the Communists, driven by doctrinaire hatred, would perpetrate a large-scale bloodbath against officials of the old regime, Catholics, landowners and anyone else who might be considered "reactionary."

It is now clear that this view of the "enemy" in Vietnam, which dominated both news-media interpretation and Congressional opinion, represented a triumph of the need for self-justification over objective perception of reality.

Recognition that the sentiments that would undergird the postwar Communist policy of reconciliation were genuine would have destroyed the official portrayal of the enemy that was central to the rationale for United States intervention. So the official experts ignored the evidence of the Vietnam Communist leadership's attitude and policy toward postwar treatment of its former foes.

That attitude owes more to the nationalist and anticolonialist origins and character of the Vietnamese Communist movement than to any Marxist-Leninist concepts. For the fundamental fact is that the Vietnamese revolutionaries viewed the war not as a war against a class enemy but as a war for national independence.

One of the most important ideological tenets of the Vietnamese revolution, never mentioned by the analysts, is the idea that all Vietnamese have patriotic feelings that make it possible for them to redeem themselves once the foreign power, whether French or American, no longer controls their lives.

"We must have generous tolerance," said Ho Chi Minh of Vietnamese collaborating with the French in a 1948 letter to the resistance in the South, "because everyone is a descendant of Lac and Hong [mythical parents of the Vietnamese nation], everyone has more or less patriotism. . . ."

He called on revolutionaries to use "affection to transform them" when they went astray to join the ranks of the French puppet regime. Twenty-seven years later, Ho Chi Minh's at-

titude was recalled by Col. Gen. Tran Van Tra, head of the Saigon Military Management Committee, who called on Vietnamese revolutionaries to help their former enemies rekindle "the flames of patriotism" that he said still smoldered in their hearts.

Saigon Government personnel were considered as victims of foreign aggression and war rather than as the objects of vengeance. It was American money and military power, in this view, that caused Vietnamese to work for American interests against their own compatriots.

"Of course people who have committed transgressions against the Fatherland and the people are in part personally responsible," said the party's theoretical journal, "Hoc Tap," in 1973, "but first of all and essentially their actions were the result of aggression and the neo-colonial regime."

These beliefs, which were impressed upon the cadres and rank and file of the Communist organizations through directives and training documents, help to explain not only why there was no policy of reprisals after the war but why the "re-education" of former foes is so different from the punitive process usually associated with the term.

It is not meant to enforce Marxist-Leninist ideology on former Saigon officers and civil servants but only to make them see clearly the revolutionary perspective on the war.

The re-education courses, consisting of classes, discussion groups, farm labor and entertainment, represents an effort to counteract the monopoly of political education that the United States and its client regime had in the Saigon zone of control for more than two decades.

By now, thousands of former officers of the South Vietnamese Army have completed these re-education courses. They have reported that they were well treated by the cadres and that the atmosphere in the camps was relaxed. Everyone was required to clear land for cultivation and to fill in bomb craters. Although this exposed them to the risk of injury or death from unexploded bombs and shells, it is usually forgotten that every peasant who tries to cultivate the war-scarred land faces the same risk.

United States postwar policy toward Vietnam still refuses to acknowledge the reality of the reconciliation policy. The two Vietnams are still treated as the "enemy." The United States has refused to extend diplomatic recognition to the two governments, to permit trade with them, or to help rebuild the economies that the United States itself did so much to destroy, and has even vetoed their membership in the United Nations.

The State Department has been unable to give a clear explanation to Congress or the public about why the United States pursues such a policy toward Vietnam. The reason may be that the policy is related not to future United States interests in Southeast Asia but to the defense of past United States policy.

The Ford Administration clearly feels that any move toward normal relations with Vietnam would be an implicit admission that the Vietnamese need not have been the enemy at all. Thus, it seeks to delay reconciliation with Vietnam primarily in order to forestall political discussion of the terrible, useless folly that was the Vietnam war.

Gareth Porter, author of the forthcoming book "A Peace Denied," about the Paris accords on Vietnam, is director of the Indochina Resource Center, a private research organization. He is also a long circuitous route to Changsha, a long circuitous route Caroline Sservice lived in China from