

# The Aim: 'A 3-Sided Coalition'

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The following is the text of Newsweek correspondent Arnaud de Borchgrave's interview with North Vietnam's Premier Van Dong held on Wednesday and issued by the magazine yesterday.

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**De Borchgrave** — A high Vietnamese officer told me in Hanoi that the American blockade of your ports and estuaries as well as massive bombing raids against the Democratic Republic has caused enormous difficulties for you but that you were surmounting them. Could you give me specific examples?

**Pham Van Dong**—I think you have seen for yourself what we have been able to do. Thousands of trucks are moving. Our jet fighters are constantly criss-crossing the sky. These are all things you have witnessed. Despite a horrendous pounding from the air, we have surmounted obstacles that defy the imagination. And we are surmounting those that remain.

**Q.** On March 30 [when the current Communist offensive began], you set out to prove that Vietnamization was a failure. Do you think you have succeeded?

**A.** The U.S. press itself has said it was a total failure.

**Q.** One recent article from Saigon by a British correspondent said that despite their reverses, Saigon's army today was in a stronger position than before March 30.

**A.** [Laughing] You must read other articles besides that one. The world press is unanimous on that point. The fact that the United States was forced to impose a total blockade and massive bombing to save Saigon's hide was proof enough. If Vietnamization had been a success, then why bother? Unbelievable means have been brought to bear on us. And that's the most eloquent proof of failure.

## Changed U.S. Policy

**Q.** Why didn't you wait until March 30 next year before launching your offensive, by which time all American forces would have been out of Vietnam and Mr. Nixon's foreign policy would have been re-engaged along new lines? That's what your Western friends cannot understand.

**A.** You must concede that the March 30 offensive precipitated events—and the liquidation of America's old Vietnam policy. In any event it is better to make history than to write it. Let future historians decide whose strategy was correct.

**Q.** Do you see any common ground between your position and Washington's on the composition and duration of a three-sided caretaker government of transition?

**A.** Negotiations are in an extremely important phase. We have done everything humanly possible for a successful conclusion. And that means peace with independence and freedom. This is what we have fought for for almost three decades. Our intentions are serious. So must be the other side. A peaceful settlement must be just for both sides — not to serve temporary political ends. We won't allow it and we will fight against it. But we will do nothing to jeopardize a happy conclusion at this stage by talking out of turn.

**Q.** Would you agree that Thieu could be part of the Saigon administration component in a three-sided

coalition government pending elections, provided he was no longer president?

**A.** Thieu has been overtaken by events. And events are now following their own course.

**Q.** What about the idea for two administrations in the South—the National Liberation Front's and Saigon's—each administering the areas under their control—a cease-fire, total American military withdrawal and direct negotiations between the two principal Vietnamese adversaries?

**A.** Yes, here I can say something useful. All your questions reflect the present evolution. One must accept that there are two administrations, each in control of their own zones. It's an undeniable fact. Everyone must respect this state of affairs.

## Three-Sided Coalition

**Q.** Then a cease-fire followed by American withdrawal will take place first and then direct negotiations between the Provisional Revolutionary Government and the Saigon regime?

**A.** That is the present evolution, and it is a positive one. The situation then will be two armies and two administrations in the South. Given that new situation, they will have to work out their own arrangements for a three-sided coalition of transition and defense the situation in the wake of the American withdrawal. They must work out arrangements that will promote democracy and speed national concord in the South because without this there will be no race. Now is the time for both sides to dare and forge ahead.

**Q.** What would you consider a reasonable delay between the installation of a transitory regime and general elections?

**A.** It is important to determine this delay precisely, not leave it up in the air. Somebody has put forward a delay of about six months between the cease-fire and general elections and this seems reasonable to us.

**Q.** Why wouldn't you attempt to transform a three-sided coalition regime into a Communist government? Or at least a government fairly certain to become a Communist regime?

**A.** We wouldn't do such a foolish thing. You cannot do the impossible. And we are not stupid. We don't want to do anything dangerous that would imperil national concord. We now want to avoid internal divisions and a resumption of hostilities. That's our objective.

## Will of Iron

**Q.** You say you will not do anything to impose your will on the South. But observers who have followed your activities in the South have seen a will of iron and a determination seldom equaled in the history of the world. How do you explain this apparent contradiction?

**A.** It is only an apparent one. Our iron will is being applied to bring about a three-sided coalition which will lead to national reconciliation is now paramount.

**Q.** You mean that if you had achieved all your objectives during the Tet offensive in 1968, you would have shared your victory with the vanquished and the neutralists in a coalition government?

**A.** The political situation in the South is such that one must have a government that reflects the realities. You must realize that war in the South has meant

that an entire generation has known no other way of life. There has been terrible suffering in every family. No one has been spared. Families are divided, father on one side, son on the other. Those are the realities. One must now try to abolish these divisions and not by imposing our will. That's why national reconciliation is now paramount.

**Q.** If you are not interested in the rapid Communization of South Vietnam, how then do you explain the rapid Communization of North Vietnam in 1954?

**A.** The situation in the North was quite different. Our society was unanimous against the French colonialists and for our regime. That's not the case in the South today. We are realists. Don't worry.

## Scores of Executions

**Q.** In the light of your previously stated assurances that a three-sided coalition will be a government of national reconciliation and that there will be no settling of accounts, how do you explain what happened in Quangtri while your forces held the city? And in Hue in '68 during the Tet offensive? Journalists not noted for pro-Nixon sentiments wrote about scores of people executed in Quangtri for collaboration with the enemy.

A. I am not informed precisely about what you say. But the Front's policy is crystal clear. It is inconceivable that the Front would allow reprisals after a settlement; that would be diametrically opposed to its policy of national reconciliation. It would jeopardize everything. These are errors that have to be avoided at all costs. Besides, reprisals could only be against their own families in many cases. If in America and Western countries one talks about a blood bath, it is simply a matter of bad faith.

Q. How can one organize really free and democratic elections in such a climate?

A. First, one must re-establish peace, concord, democracy and stabilize the situation.

Q. Isn't six months a very short time to do all that?

A. I don't think so. Transition must not last too long or it could break down.

Q. How will free elections in the South differ from the elections you hold in the Democratic Republic from time to time?

A. The situation is entirely different. Here we have a country that is unified politically and well organized. Elections are not so difficult in a country like ours. Not so in the South. There is no possible comparison. You Westerners cannot understand our unity in the North forged through decades of combat. Look at our country. Everything appears normal, well policed, disciplined, simple, serene.

#### Free Elections Sought

Q. From what you know about how the people in the South really feel, roughly what percentage would you guess will vote Communist? More than half, or less than half?

A. All we ask for is really free elections—whose freedom must be guaranteed.

Q. What sort of guarantees?

A. You will see.

Q. At what stage will the American prisoners be released.

A. When the general agreement has been reached.

Q. You mean after the completion of our withdrawal?

A. No, we will not wait until the complete realization of the accords. It's a very simple issue, actually. All military and civilian detainees, not only American, on both sides must be released at the same time. For us there are no complications at all on this problem now.

Q. How do you see the role of the United States in the postwar reconstruction period?

A. Two ways. First, America is responsible for all material damages inflicted on us. Second, it is an imperative obligation for America to contribute to the rebuilding of our devastated economy.

Q. Could you explain, step by step, the process of reunification? To begin with, would each half of Vietnam have its own government, its own constitution, its own army and police and diplomatic representation abroad? And then do you envisage a confederation? How would its president be picked? What would happen to the two presidents of North and South? Where would the confederal or federal capital be located?

#### War's End First

A. [Holding his sides with laughter] We have not even begun to think about such details. Reunification is in our blood, in our hearts. But no one is thinking about practical details.

Q. Why not?

A. It will happen eventually. We have lots of time to think it over. Our No. 1 priority is putting an end to the war with a just solution for all parties.

Q. You don't have any planners working on reunification problems?

A. We can't spare them. You Americans have so much money you can afford to have planners even for nonexistent problems. We operate on the basis of first things first.

Q. How does one re-establish peace in the entire Indochinese peninsula? What comes first: Vietnam before Laos or Laos before Vietnam? Can you really have peace in Indochina before accords have been negotiated for the three countries?

A. You have distinct problems for each country. Don't confuse them.

Q. But surely Laos is linked to South Vietnam through the Ho Chi Minh Trails problems.

A. Of course they are linked, but they must be resolved separately.

Q. Do you think that a negotiated settlement and the end of the war are near?

A. I hope so. And we are working very hard at it, with goodwill and good faith. And this must be reciprocal. I would like to conclude our talk on an optimistic note. Following our agreement, we will form new relationships between our two countries and our two peoples on a new basis. Some of our detractors always wrote and said that we were trying to humiliate the world's mightiest power and that this war had gone to our heads. Well, my friend, this has never been our intention. This was imposed on us. We fought intelligently and heroically, not to humiliate you, but to end American intervention in our affairs and to establish friendship between our two peoples. Together, we must inaugurate a new era.