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Vietnamese, Called Ellsberg Co-Conspirator, Termed 'Brilliant'

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UNITED NATIONS, N. Y., Dec. 30 — Vu Van Thai, named today as a co-conspirator with Dr. Daniel Ellsberg in the case of the Pentagon papers, is now in Dakar, Senegal, working as a consultant on a river development project for the United Nations Development Program.

Mr. Thai, who was Ambassador from South Vietnam to Washington in 1965, is described by United Nations officials here as an exceptionally gifted economist whose services as adviser for engineering and related works were in great demand. Two high-level officials here used the word "brilliant" in describing him.

He had two terms at the United Nations, before and after his service as Ambassador from Saigon to Washington. But in both instances he worked as an expert or consultant and was not a full-time member of the international staff.

One United Nations associate said he had heard reports that Mr. Thai might be brought in to the Pentagon case because he was a friend of Dr. Ellsberg. But others here said they knew of no tie between the two and were surprised to hear that the Vietnamese had been named.

A long-time associate who had known Mr. Thai in Saigon and also in the United States described him as being "anti-Communist, but not professionally so, and one of the most decent men I know."

He said Mr. Thai had on occasion expressed doubt about that the Vietnam war and added that "he probably shifted his position around, but he certainly was pro-South Vietnam."

Mr. Thai presented his credentials as Ambassador to President Johnson in December, 1965, and during the next year



Vu Van Thai
United Press International

was active in seeking support in the United States for South Vietnam's cause, making fre-

quent speeches to college students and civic groups.

In one speech, given at Cornton and Saigon as the most workable approach available and was applauded by most of 2,300 in the audience. Outside, 200 antiwar pickets from the Students for a Democratic Society marched in protest.

A month after his appointment to Washington, the Vietnamese Ambassador spoke at the Overseas Press Club in New York, saying at one point: "The search for peace should not bring us into any step which could be used by the Communists for advancing their advantage in the war."

Mr. Thai was replaced as ambassador in December, 1966, at the time that W. D. Averell Harriman, as Washington's roving ambassador, was taking sound-

ings abroad on the possibility of negotiating a Vietnam peace settlement.

However, there was no indication that the shift reflected dissatisfaction with Mr. Thai's efforts. On the contrary, news reports from Saigon said that he had been offered but had refused a post in the Cabinet as Minister of Economics over the newly created Department of Commerce and Industry.

Moreover, the Government of Premier Nguyen Cao Ky felt that Mr. Thai's speeches in the United States had stirred significant support for their cause.

His replacement as Ambassador was Bui Diem, one of President Ky's closest advisers. Mr. Thai was reportedly being considered for another government post, possibly a roving ambassador. Instead, he apparently chose to return to the United Nations.