

# US Press on the Vietnam War

*Material for Day 4*

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From Bertrand Russell, *War Crimes in Vietnam* (Monthly Review Press: New York, 1967), ‘**Chapter 1: The Press and Vietnam**’, <http://www2.prestel.co.uk/littleton/br67wcv1.htm>

The role of the Western press in the Vietnam controversy has been important and revealing. It is from Western newspapers that I derived my earliest understandings of the involvement of the United States, and it is from these same reports that I first became aware of the barbarous character of the war.

On October 21, 1962, for example, the New York Times reported: ‘Americans and Vietnamese march together, fight together, and die together, and it is hard to get much more involved than that.’ Earlier, Mr Homer Bigart, a leading correspondent of the New York Times, had spoken of the ‘senseless brutality’ of the war. In an article which appeared on July 25, 1962, Mr Bigart stated: ‘American advisers have seen Viet Cong prisoners summarily shot. They have encountered charred bodies of women and children in villages destroyed by napalm bombs.’

Indeed, the use of chemicals in the Vietnam war had been reported in the New York Times as early as January 1, 1962. On January 26, 1962, the New York Times went so far as to refer to the use of chemicals as a ‘crop-killing programme’, in the manioc and rice fields of South Vietnam.

Although many of these highly revealing articles were buried in inside pages of the newspapers, a careful reading of the Western press every day made it possible to assess the character of the war from evidence and documentation which could not be easily dismissed. My method in accepting this material was the familiar procedure of ‘evidence against interest’. I assumed that when the New York Times stood to gain nothing from the publication of an article, it was likely to have no other motive than a desire to print a truthful account. Rarely does anyone fabricate reports an evidence which are inimical to his interest.

I was soon to discover, however, that although some newspapers were prepared to publish isolated pieces of horrifying information, they had no intention of forming a coherent picture of the war from these reports and every intention of preventing others from doing so. The informed press knew that there was something seriously wrong about the war, but restricted themselves to pedestrian comments and peripheral criticisms. This course preserved their ‘responsible’ stance but prepared the ground for a later volte face when their earlier attitude was widely discredited. (Anyone who thinks this a far-fetched description of how the fourth estate goes about its business would do well to recall the press’ attitude to dissenters in other fields - for example to early critics of the Warren Commission report.)

Repeatedly the press gets away with such disgraceful behaviour through the helplessness of the public. Most people have no access to facts in matters about which their suspicions are aroused nor the resources to gather information independently. Even if they can remove these formidable obstacles, they still have no means of communicating their findings to the public. I have tried to overcome these difficulties in three ways: first, through a thorough study of the war as reported in Western, Vietnamese and other publications; secondly, by sending observers regularly through the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation to travel widely in Indo-China and return with first-hand reports; [One such report appears at the end of this book] and thirdly, by raising my voice whenever possible.

Meanwhile, I have learned certain rules that must be observed in reading the newspapers.

1. Read between the lines.
2. Never underestimate the evil of which men of power are capable.
3. Know the jargon of ‘terrorists’ versus ‘police actions’, and translate wherever necessary.

Experienced newspaper readers may care to compile their own glossaries of terms used for ‘our’ side and ‘their’ side.

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**The Paris Peace Accords** / 27 January 1973 / <http://www.uml.edu/proj/UN/Conference/Scenarios/Peace/VN.html>

*Article 21*

The United States anticipates that this Agreement will usher in an era of reconciliation with the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam as with all the peoples of Indochina. In pursuance of its traditional policy, the United States will contribute to healing the wounds of war and to postwar reconstruction of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam and throughout Indochina.

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**Nixon’s letter to Prime Minister Pham Van Dong** / 1 Feb 1973 / [http://www.miafacts.org/nixon\\_letter.htm](http://www.miafacts.org/nixon_letter.htm)

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Former President Nixon’s Message to Prime Minister Pham Van Dong

Department Announcement

The Department released on May 19, 1977, the text of a message dated February 1, 1973, from former President Nixon to the Prime Minister of the former Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Mr. Pham Van Dong.

**TEXT OF MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM.**

February 1, 1973

The President wishes to inform the Democratic Republic of Vietnam of the principles which will govern United States participation in the postwar reconstruction of North Vietnam. As indicated in Article 21 of The Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam signed in Paris on January 27, 1973, the United States undertakes this participation in accordance with its traditional policies. These principles are as follows:

- 1) The Government of the United States of America will contribute to postwar reconstruction in North Vietnam without any political conditions.
- 2) Preliminary United States studies indicate that the appropriate programs for the United States contribution to postwar reconstruction will fall in the range of \$3.25 billion of grant aid over five years. Other forms of aid will be agreed upon between the two parties. This estimate is subject to revision and to detailed discussion between the Government of the United States and the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

...

7) The United States considers that the implementation of the foregoing principles will promote economic, trade and other relations between the United States of America and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and will contribute to insuring a stable and lasting peace in Indochina. These principles accord with the spirit of Chapter VIII of The Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam which was signed in Paris on January 27, 1973.

#### NOTE REGARDING OTHER FORMS OF AID

In regard to other forms of aid, United States studies indicate that the appropriate programs could fall in the range of 1 to 1.5 billion dollars depending on food and other commodity needs of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

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*Washington Post* / 25 Mar 1977, p. A12 / **Carter: 'Nothing but Sympathy for Families' of MIAs** / Following are excerpts from a transcript of President Carter's press conference yesterday:

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Q. Mr. President, with that understanding and your hesitancy to disclose a position before negotiations are started, beyond that do you still feel that if that information on those American servicemen missing in action is forthcoming from the Vietnamese, then this country has moral obligation to help rebuild that country, if that information is forthcoming?

A. The destruction was mutual. We went to Vietnam without any desire to capture territory or to impose American will on other people. We went there to defend the freedom of the South Vietnamese. I don't feel that we ought to apologize or to castigate ourselves or to assume the status of culpability...

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*Washington Post* / 1 Apr 1977, p. B1 / **CBS' Ed Bradley: The Anchorman-Reporter as Symbol** / By Jacqueline Trescott

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Standing in the front row, his head-tipped to the ceiling, Bradley asked, "Mr. President, on the subject of Vietnam, do you feel... any moral obligation to help rebuild that country?"

President Carter, who seemed very solemn and slightly uncomfortable, said, "The destruction was mutual" and "I don't feel we ought to apologize or castigate ourselves."

Later Bradley said that briefly, very briefly, images of Vietnam had flashed across his mind while Carter answered. Again, his feelings represent his independence, as he says. "When he said 'we don't have a debt' those pictures unintentionally came back, no particular person, just quick images. I thought I would get a good response because of Carter's moral stand. And right or wrong, the United States destroyed that country."

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*New York Times* / 6 Jan 1994, p. A20; Editorial desk / **Vietnam: An Outdated Embargo**

Put aside, for a moment, the emotional claims of a war a quarter-century ago that nearly tore America apart. The best reason to end the U.S. economic embargo on Vietnam is that it no longer serves American interests.

With the rest of the world trading freely with Hanoi, the embargo punishes American businesses far more than it punishes the Vietnamese. And if the embargo were effective, it would be perverse. Present Vietnamese economic and foreign policies warrant encouragement, not punishment. But as the Clinton Administration is again discovering, the emotional claims are not easily put aside. Washington's top Asian diplomat, Winston Lord, recently returned from Vietnam reporting that Hanoi is cooperating in the search for information about Americans missing in action since the war, in exactly the ways Washington has suggested could bring a relaxation of the embargo. The commander of U.S. Pacific Forces, Adm. Charles Larson, will also be visiting this month. But before responding to Hanoi's latest efforts, the Administration has decided to consult its political advisers. This news has already restarted the old debates.

Arguing against relaxation are many families of American M.I.A.'s who feel that Hanoi's cooperation has not gone far enough. While about 2,000 Americans are officially listed as missing in action, all but about 100 are now reasonably presumed to have died in battle or captivity before the end of the war. The fate of the rest is less clear. While both Hanoi and the Nixon Administration declared that all surviving American prisoners of war had returned in April 1973, newly declassified information suggests that the Pentagon believed some might have been left behind, especially in Laos.

That suggests duplicity, by Washington and probably by Hanoi, which promised to return all Americans held in Indochina. But does it suggest that Hanoi still holds American prisoners? No one has found hard evidence to support such a claim, despite a yearlong Senate investigation and the Pentagon's own search missions under the Reagan, Bush and Clinton Administrations.

It is understandable that M.I.A. families remain skeptical, given the evidence that they have been lied to. But how long should American policy be driven by suspicion of old misdeeds that no one today can do anything about?

On the other side of the argument is the reality of Vietnam today. It has transformed its economy along capitalist lines. It has abandoned military interventionism. And it enjoys warm relations with such anti-Communist neighbors as Taiwan, South Korea and the Philippines. In many ways it is as if Saigon, not Hanoi, had won the war. Today's Vietnam represents a deferred victory for some of America's original policy goals.

More than two decades ago, when America was agonizing over how to extricate itself honorably from Vietnam with many of those goals unmet, a Republican Senator from Vermont, George Aiken, offered a simple suggestion: Declare victory and get out. Today America has a much more attractive option on Vietnam, if only it is bold enough to take it: Declare victory and get in.

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*New York Times* / 3 Feb 1994, p. A8 / **Vietnam and U.S. Businesses Eager to Trade** / By Philip Shenon

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Reports that President Clinton would lift the embargo within the next few days circulated quickly in Hanoi, the Vietnamese capital, with Vietnam Government officials and the representatives of American corporations sharing faxes and telexes carrying the latest news and rumors from Washington.

The reaction to the reports from American businesses was one of relief that they would finally be able to enter one of the world's fastest-growing markets, one that their Asian and European competitors have been able to exploit for years.

...

“This will be an excellent development for the United States and for Vietnam,” said James Rockwell, managing director of Vatico, a Hanoi-based consulting concern that represents the Chrysler Corporation and other large American companies who are expected to seek a market in Vietnam.

“The timing is good,” Mr. Rockwell said. “The Vietnamese like and respect Americans. I don’t know why. It’s just a fact. They see us as fair and trustworthy and they want to do business with us. But if the embargo had gone on another six months to a year, there would have been trouble. Americans would have been very, very small players in Vietnam.”

The Hanoi representative of Citibank, Frank Hawke, said that while some American investors seemed to believe that they had already “missed the boat” because so many competitors had already moved into Vietnam, the truth is that “there are lots of boats out there – some of them missed, some of them not.”

“The Vietnamese are emphasizing key infrastructure areas such as petrochemicals, telecommunications, transportation and power generation, all areas where U.S. companies excel,” Mr. Hawke said.

#### *Embargo Began in 1975*

The United States imposed an economic embargo on Vietnam in 1975, when the American-backed Government of South Vietnam was toppled by the invading North Vietnamese Army. Washington has since used the embargo as a way of persuading the Vietnamese to cooperate in the effort to determine the fate of more than 2,200 Americans missing from the war.

As Hanoi has expanded its cooperation to account for the missing, the United States has gradually eased the embargo, most recently last July, when President Clinton lifted an American veto that had blocked billions of dollars in loans and aid from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

While American corporations are now allowed to open offices in Vietnam and to bid on large infrastructure projects underwritten by the World Bank and the I.M.F., they are still barred under the embargo from selling their products in Vietnam and from conducting other types of business.

The many American products that do reach the Vietnamese market – from Coca-Cola to Apple Computers to American Tourister luggage – are sent in by foreign middlemen who rake off profits that would otherwise go to American manufacturers.

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*New York Times* / 4 Feb 1994, p. A8 / **OPENING TO VIETNAM; In Clinton’s Words: ‘Fullest Possible Accounting’ of M.I.A.’s** / Reuters

Following are excerpts from President Clinton’s announcement today that he was lifting the trade embargo against Vietnam, as transcribed by the Federal News Service, a private company:

From the beginning of my Administration, I have said that any decisions about our relationships with Vietnam should be guided by one factor and one factor only – gaining the fullest possible accounting for our prisoners of war and our missing in action. We owe that to all who served in Vietnam and to the families of those whose fate remains unknown. Today I am lifting the trade embargo against Vietnam because I am absolutely convinced it offers the best way to resolve the fate of those who remain missing and about whom we are not sure.

...

Last April, and again in July, I sent two presidential delegations to Vietnam to expand our search for remains and documents. We intensified our diplomatic efforts. We have devoted more resources to this effort than any previous Administration. Today more than 500 dedicated military and civilian personnel are involved in this effort under the leadership of General Shalikashvili, Secretary Aspin, and our commander in the Pacific, Admiral Larson. Many worked daily in the fields, the jungles, the mountains of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, often braving very dangerous conditions, trying to find the truth about those about whom we are not sure.

Last July, I said any improvement in our relations with Vietnam would depend on tangible progress in four specific areas: first, the recovery and return of remains of our P.O.W.s and M.I.A.'s; second, the continued resolution of discrepancy cases, cases in which there is reason to believe individuals could have survived the incident in which they were lost; third, further assistance from Vietnam and Laos on investigations along their common border, an area where many U.S. servicemen were lost and pilots downed; and fourth, accelerated efforts to provide all relevant P.O.W.-M.I.A.-related documents. Today I can report that significant tangible progress has been made in all these four areas.

...

I want to be clear: These actions do not constitute a normalization of our relationships. Before that happens, we must have more progress, more cooperation, and more answers. Toward that end, this spring I will send another high-level U.S. delegation to Vietnam to continue the search for remains and for documents.

...

Whatever the Vietnam War may have done in dividing our country in the past, today our nation is one in honoring those who served and pressing for answers about all those who did not return. This decision today, I believe, renews that commitment and our constant, constant effort never to forget those until our job is done.

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*New York Times* / 5 Feb 1994, p. 20; Editorial desk / **Opening to a New Vietnam**

President Clinton did the right thing for the United States this week in ending the 19-year-old ban on Americans' doing business with Vietnam. For Mr. Clinton, it was an act of political courage. Had his predecessors been able to take a larger view of American interests, they would have lifted the embargo years ago.

Vietnam has been changing dramatically for nearly a decade. Most of the differences that drove Hanoi and Washington to war in the 1960's and 1970's and kept them at odds through the early 1980's have disappeared. In fact, almost all have been resolved in America's favor. Vietnam's troops are out of Cambodia. Its markets are open to the world. And it has turned away from what remains of the Communist bloc to seek new links with the Association of South East Asian Nations, formed during the Vietnam War as an anti-Communist bloc.

Vietnam is still a one-party state with an appalling human rights record, but so are some of America's best friends and trading partners in Southeast Asia. What has kept Washington at arm's length from the new Vietnam is, of course, the legacy of an old war.

Only a small part of that legacy was substantive. While every single case of a soldier lost without remains or information is a family tragedy, the number of Americans still unaccounted for is unusually small given the scope and duration of American involvement.

The war's larger legacy has been political and psychological. The dead and the missing were not, as in past wars, redeemed by an American military victory. For many Americans this was humiliating;

for some, even dishonorable. Refusing to acknowledge Hanoi meant refusing to certify Washington's defeat. As the years passed, and Vietnam found the trade and aid it needed elsewhere, making the embargo pointless, only a minority remained irreconcilable. But successive Republican Presidents indulged this minority, while successive Democrats feared provoking them.

It is thus remarkable that Bill Clinton, whose own opposition to the war and avoidance of the draft made him especially vulnerable to attack on this issue, became the President who finally recognized reality and acted in the national interest.

Hanoi made it easier for him with its vastly improved cooperation in recent years on searching for remains of missing Americans. So did American business leaders clamoring for a share of the growing economic action before European and Asian countries locked any more of it up for themselves. And Mr. Clinton has prudently held back on such steps as diplomatic recognition and special trade and aid agreements, holding them out as inducements for further Vietnamese cooperation and human rights progress.

But give this President the full credit he deserves, for at last ending America's self-imposed, self-punishing exile from the new Vietnam.

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*New York Times* / 11 Mar 1997, p. A8 / **Hanoi Agrees to Pay Saigon's Debts to U.S.** / By David E. Sanger

The Vietnamese Government, increasingly anxious to strike a broad trade accord with Washington, has agreed to repay to the United States millions of dollars in debts incurred by the former South Vietnam for roads, power stations and grain shipments during the Vietnam War, Administration officials said today.

The agreement, struck on Saturday in Hanoi, ends several years of negotiations with Vietnam over its assumption of debts, now worth about \$140 million, incurred by the Saigon Government before it fell to North Vietnamese forces in 1975.

Many of those debts were incurred to bolster the South's war effort, including the country's main railroad and water system, and a major power plant for Saigon, the former South Vietnamese capital, now called Ho Chi Minh City.

But the repayment does not include the vast sums – roughly estimated at \$1 billion – in direct military assistance that Washington transferred to the South during the war. In fact, in the negotiations conducted by Treasury and State Department officials, Vietnam balked at repaying \$12 million in outstanding loans for the "Food for Peace" program, arguing that through a series of complex transactions the United States used money that was ostensibly earmarked for grain purchases to help finance the war.

Today Administration officials said that the accord was a sign of how far the dialogue between the United States and Vietnam has moved beyond the single issue of identifying the remains of prisoners of war, and toward questions of how the Communist Government will be integrated in the world economy.

"The Vietnamese leaders have a clear economic agenda," one senior Administration official said today. "And they knew that resolving this debt issue was one of the hurdles they had to get past before they get the trading rights they want."

Under the terms of the accord, Vietnam will have 20 years to pay back the loans that were issued to the South.

The Vietnamese were also motivated by the impending visit of Treasury Secretary Robert E. Rubin, who is scheduled to travel to Vietnam in early April.

Since President Clinton normalized relations with Hanoi in July 1995, the two countries have been negotiating over the many ways in which the Vietnamese economy must change before the Administration is ready to grant most-favored-nation trading status to Hanoi. Most-favored nations are granted the ordinary trading rights – including low tariffs on imported goods – that the United States gives to almost all its trading partners.

...

The first payment is due next month, shortly after Mr. Rubin's visit to Hanoi, which comes at a time when American companies are exploring large investments in Vietnam, though they have been hesitant because of many of the country's trading barriers. But Conoco Inc. is reportedly nearing an agreement to win rights to one of Vietnam's most promising offshore oil sites, as part of a consortium with Vietnam's state-owned oil company and South Korean and French interests.

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*Associated Press* / 11 Mar 2000 / **Cohen says he'll make no apologies for war in Vietnam**

US Defense Secretary William Cohen said Saturday he will make no apologies for the war in Vietnam when he visits Hanoi next week.

"I don't intend to go into any apologies for the war itself," Cohen said here. Cohen's visit to Vietnam Monday and Tuesday, the first by a US defense secretary since the Vietnam war, comes as the Vietnamese are preparing to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the fall of US-backed South Vietnam.

Cohen said there was "no perfect time" for his visit but said the fact that Vietnam invited him was a positive sign that the two countries can move forward.

"Both nations were scarred by this. They have their own scars from the war. I think we certainly have ours," he said.

"I'm not going to go back and review the past," he said.

The US scars from the war will be on dramatic display Monday when Cohen visits the site where a joint US-Vietnamese team is excavating for the remains of a US pilot whose F4B aircraft was downed over North Vietnam.

Cohen said the visit would "symbolize to all concerned that this search is not going to be discontinued and that we place the highest priority upon that."

The visit also is expected to move US military relations beyond its current focus on accounting for the more than 2,000 US servicemen missing in action in the Vietnam War.

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*Agence France Press* / 12 Mar 2000 / **Cohen visit to Hanoi evokes scars of Vietnam war** / by Jim Mannion

The United States returns to the scene of its most painful military defeat Monday with the first visit by a US defense secretary to Vietnam since the end of the Vietnam War 25 years ago.

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His first stop will be a rice paddy 30 kilometers (18 miles) southwest of Hanoi where US soldiers and Vietnamese workers have been picking through mud for the remains of a US F-4 Phantom pilot shot down in 1967.

The aircraft's radar intercept officer survived the crash and nearly six years as a prisoner of war. But the pilot, US Navy Commander Richard Rich, never was seen again by his fellow crew member.

The visit to the excavation site will show that the United States intends to keep faith with families of the 2,030 US servicemen still missing from the war in Indochina, including some 1,500 in Vietnam, Cohen said.

"I will point out that we place at the very highest priority recovery of the remains of the missing in action," he said.

"I don't intend to go into any apologies, certainly, for the war itself," he said.

...

The move to broaden military ties comes five years after the United States normalized diplomatic relations with Hanoi.

The war that once aroused bitter divisions at home and abroad is an increasingly distant memory for many Americans.

One living legacy of the war that is certain to come up during Cohen's visit is exposure to Agent Orange, a highly toxic herbicide that US forces used from 1962 to 1973 to defoliate the countryside.

The chemical dioxin in the herbicide has been linked to a variety of cancers and congenital birth defects in offspring of US veterans of the the Vietnam war.

Some 5,000 US veterans have been received disability pay for diseases related to Agent Orange exposure but that is believed to be only part of the total numbers affected, US officials say.

In Vietnam, where dioxin contamination is still believed present in the soil and water near former US base camps, the government estimates that a million people are suffering the effects of exposure.

...

The visit may also open the way for a joint investigation into the effects of Agent Orange, the defoliant used extensively by the US forces during the war to clear jungle areas used by Hanoi's troops.

In February Hanoi decided for the first time to offer compensation to an estimated one million victims of Agent Orange which is believed to cause various cancers and birth defects.

Between 1961 and 1971 the US Air Force sprayed some 44 million litres (12 million gallons) of the defoliant, which contained the carcinogen dioxine, over south Vietnam.

The Vietnamese government has never officially asked for compensation from the United States but the issue could be raised with Cohen, diplomats said.

Cohen will also visit Ho Chi Minh City in the south, where in 1999, the US opened a consulate on the site of their former embassy.

At the end of the war the embassy was the scene of frantic operations as the US evacuated personnel and dependents from the compound by helicopter as the northern troops fought their way into the city, then called Saigon.

The aftermath of the war, with its repercussions in the United States, led to sanctions against Hanoi by Washington. It was not until August 1995 that diplomatic relations were restored, 20

years after one of the bloodiest wars this century which left three million Vietnamese dead, two million of them civilians, and 58,000 US troops killed.

The war left the country unified under the communists after a total of 10,000 days of fighting, first against Vietnam's former colonial rulers the French and then against the US-backed southern government.

Cohen's visit will come three days after official celebrations to mark the communist victory at Buon Me Thuot in the centre of the country, which opened the way for the drive on Saigon which fell on April 30, 1975.

Melvin Laird was the last US defense secretary to visit Vietnam in the early 1970s.

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*Washington Post* / 14 Mar 2000 / **For U.S., Past Is Present in Vietnam; Cohen Speaks of Future, but Can't Escape History's Lingering Shadow** / by Thomas E. Ricks

DONG PHU, Vietnam, March 13—Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen stood on a rough wooden platform today in a rice paddy 20 miles southwest of Hanoi, looking at a spot where a U.S. Navy pilot crashed and died more than 30 years ago. But his words on this visit, the first to Vietnam by a U.S. defense secretary since Melvin Laird came in 1971 to plan the U.S. withdrawal, were about moving into the future.

Cohen's meetings in Hanoi, the Vietnamese capital, are aimed at getting the U.S. military more involved in Vietnam. Moving in just as cautiously as Laird moved out a quarter-century ago, the United States is mainly engaged in small-scale humanitarian projects such as the one at this crash site. To that end, Cohen met with Defense Minister Pham Van Tra and Prime Minister Phan Van Khai before coming to Dong Phu.

U.S. Ambassador Pete Peterson told reporters the talks were "very cordial, very comfortable" and pointed toward an improved relationship in the future. But actions all around Cohen as he visited this site were focused on the past and the legacy of an overwhelming U.S. military role that ended nearly 25 years ago. But actions all around Cohen as he visited this site were focused on the past and the legacy of an overwhelming U.S. military role that ended nearly 25 years ago.

Some 250 Vietnamese laborers have been employed at this crash site, one of nine being examined in Vietnam, digging out hundreds of dime-size and quarter-size bits of twisted metal. Their 15 days of excavations thus far have yielded two bits of bone that may or may not be from the American pilot who died here in a fiery explosion.

"Both are about the size of your thumbnail," said Dennis R. Danielson, the sole American veteran of the Vietnam War working at this crash site.

Most of the roughly 20 other Americans involved in the excavation grew up well after the war ended. Even in Cohen's official party, the war is outside the memory of some. Amy L. Blagg, the number two official on the Pentagon's Southeast Asia desk who is on her first trip to Vietnam, was 2 years old when the war ended in April 1975.

Cohen came to this paddy in the wetlands outside the Vietnamese capital because on the morning of May 19, 1967, Navy Cmdr. Richard Rich took off from the USS Enterprise in a F-4 Phantom fighter jet for a flight over what was then North Vietnam. Near Hanoi, Rich's aircraft was hit below the left wing by a surface-to-air missile. He said something over the radio: "I can't..." A few seconds later another missile detonated against his Phantom. At that point his wingman lost communications with him.

Based on interviews with villagers here, Defense Department officials believe Rich's plane came in from the south, spinning out of control, and smashed into the watery fields in a violent explosion that hurled chunks of the warplane over 1,000 feet into Dong Phu, a small huddle of brick huts surrounded by banana trees and rice paddies. One villager was killed by a piece of the engine. A neighbor has turned that fragment into a kind of altar where incense is burned, said Army Capt. Michael J. Higginbotham, leader of the U.S. team here.

Now, almost 33 years later, Higginbotham's team is at the bottom of a 10-foot-deep hole, using buckets to pass up chunks of pungent red mud from the crater made by that doomed Phantom. The heavy black buckets are passed along by a score of Vietnamese women, most of them wearing the conical hats of the rice-growing peasantry. They are emptied onto wire mesh tables, where more women hose down the mud and collect the shreds of aluminum, plastic and steel.

The excavation has filled the equivalent of about four shopping bags with bits of a plane, including rivets. A few larger pieces also have been unearthed, the biggest being a heavy, two-foot-long curved section of an engine turbine blade.

Danielson, the Marine veteran who is a forensic anthropologist, explained that the greenish mud at one corner of the pit is evidence of contamination by JP-5 jet fuel. All the evidence indicates that this is the spot where Rich died. But the U.S. government wants to be certain, so it is pouring its efforts into finding more evidence, such as the DNA from bones, or numbers from parts inside the aircraft that would identify it as Rich's F-4 rather than another one that was downed in this general area.

If definitive evidence can be pieced together, Rich's fate will be resolved and he will no longer be among the 2,000 U.S. servicemen from the Vietnam War still listed as missing in action.

Christopher Rich, Rich's youngest son, applauded the efforts to get to the bottom of the matter. "What the POW and MIA families are looking for is closure," said the pilot's son, 37, a mental health counselor in Augusta, Ga., "and truth."

At the same time, he said there is hardly a doubt in his mind about the circumstances of his father's death. "He either died in the crash, or very soon after that."

There are more than 300,000 Vietnamese still missing in action from the war, and the U.S. government has made some efforts to help figure out what happened to them. The woman who owns the paddy where the digging is going on is the widow of a North Vietnamese soldier listed as missing, but the efforts to resolve those cases fall short of what is being done here.

"This is an expression of power," one American official said with a trace of embarrassment as he surveyed the scene. He was struck, he said, that the United States could dedicate so much time and effort to the fate of one pilot. U.S. investigators probed 61 such sites in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia last year, unearthing what they believed to be remains of 40 Americans listed as missing in action.

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*Baltimore Sun* / 9 Apr 2000, p. 4C; Perspective / **Vietnam – who won?; Myth: The view that the war was lost due to U.S. military bungling ignores the realities of the conflict.** / By Bob Buzzanco

AS WE approach the 25th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War on April 30 and the reunification of Vietnam under socialist rule, memories of that conflict are still alive and a vital part of American political discourse.

During a recent visit to Vietnam, Defense Secretary William S. Cohen pointedly refused to apologize for the U.S. military action there, explaining, as he put it, “Both nations were scarred by this. They (the Vietnamese) have their own scars from the war. We certainly have ours.” Cohen’s words echo those of President Jimmy Carter, who in 1977 refused to normalize relations with Vietnam because, in his words, “the destruction was mutual.”

Vietnam has also been a major part of this year’s presidential politics. With the rival major candidates, George W. Bush and Al Gore, respectively, explaining his service in the National Guard or touting his time in Southeast Asia. Even more than Bush and Gore, Sen. John McCain put Vietnam into a central place during his run for the presidency. As the son and grandson of admirals and a prisoner-of-war in Vietnam for nearly six years, McCain’s opinions on the war gained significant press attention and carried great weight.

In particular, McCain believed that American troops in Vietnam, as a common complaint holds, fought with one hand tied behind their backs, that it was “senseless” and “illogical,” in McCain’s words, to not carry the ground war over the 17th parallel into North Vietnam or to not wage a totally unrestrained air war, especially with B-52 bombers.

Cohen and McCain tap into rich myths about the war, views which still resonate after 25 years but also, and unfortunately, are misguided and wrong and keep us still from coming to terms with Vietnam.

There is no basis to even suggest that the fallout from the war affected the United States and Vietnam similarly.

While the United States suffered serious losses – more than 58,000 killed and billions of dollars spent – Vietnam’s losses were staggering. More than 3 million Vietnamese died during the American war, with at least that many wounded. More than 15 million Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians became refugees. American weapons – especially the 6.5 million tons of bombs dropped from the air on Indochina – destroyed more than 10,000 hamlets and 25 million acres of forest in South Vietnam (the land of the U.S. ally in the war); additionally the United States dropped more than 11.2 million gallons of Agent Orange and 400,000 tons of napalm on South Vietnam, a nation roughly the size of New Mexico or Arizona.

Since the end of the war, thousands of Vietnamese continued to be killed every year from contact with unexploded bombs from the war, and their environment continues to feel the effects of dioxin and other herbicides. There is nothing “mutual” about such destruction; “their – scars” run much deeper than “ours.”

McCain’s point is equally troubling, for it offers a “stabbed in the back” explanation in place of a reasoned examination of a war that was morally, politically, and strategically wrong. Indeed, many of America’s ranking military officers, the comrades of McCain’s father and grandfather, had warned against a war in Vietnam from the 1950s forward.

In 1954, amid the Dien Bien Phu crisis, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized that the Nationalist-Communist Viet Minh, led by Ho Chi Minh, held the military initiative and were successfully identified with “freedom from the colonial yoke and with the improvement of the general welfare” of the Vietnamese people.

By 1963, as the Kennedy administration was escalating the U.S. commitment to Vietnam, the incoming Marine Commandant, Gen. Wallace Greene, lamented to fellow officers that “we’re up to our knees in the quagmire” in Vietnam and warned “you see what happened to the French,” which had lost its colonial hold over Indochina in 1954, “well, maybe the same thing is going to happen to us.”

Officers held similar fears regarding the way the war was fought, but not because they had “one hand tied behind their back.” “If anything came out of Vietnam,” Gen. Harold K. Johnson, the Army Chief of Staff, observed, “it was that air power couldn’t do the job.”

Even the American commander in Vietnam, Gen. William Westmoreland, believed that a totally unrestrained air war would not have been decisive, writing after the war: “I still doubt that the North Vietnamese would have relented.”

Westmoreland was attacked by the Marines, who believed his strategy of attrition, as Gen. Victor Kulak put it, was “wasteful of American lives and promising a protracted, strength-sapping battle with small likelihood of a successful outcome.”

And on it went; throughout the entire U.S. experience in Vietnam, from the end of World War II until the 1970s, American officers were never enthusiastic about fighting in Vietnam, were always aware of the perils of war there, remained deeply divided internally over intervention and strategy and were not optimistic that they would succeed

Far from fighting with their hands behind their back, they were able to unleash the technological might of the United States on a small country without forcing the enemy there to yield to their power, an outcome they expected long before the war ended.

Why then, amid the historical evidence to the contrary, do the Cohen and McCain myths persist?

A deep examination into the historical record on Vietnam shows that the destruction was far from “mutual,” and that military leaders complained about intervening in the war itself, not that they were fighting shorthanded.

Perhaps politicians and many media members feel more comfortable with these explanations than with the truth, than with the recognition that the United States intervened into a war of liberation and revolution against the Vietnamese.

While claiming to be the champion of freedom and self-determination, the United States waged a brutal and bloody war on the people of a small country, both ally and enemy alike, to warn them of the perils of self-determination, be it nationalist or socialist. Rather than allow the Vietnamese to choose their own political system, government, and social organization, the United States tried to violently force its preferred system on a people who were not receptive to it.

So, 25 years later, the “destruction” is to the historical legacy of Vietnam, and unless we are able to see the full picture of the war, we all are studying Vietnam with our metaphorical arms behind our backs.

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*Boston Globe* / 17 Nov 2000, p. A21 / **US crafts Vietnam education proposal** / By Charles A. Radin

President Clinton is poised today to advocate a plan that would use Vietnam’s debt payments to the United States to fund science and technology education for Vietnamese students, said sources familiar with the proposal.

Backing for the proposal will probably be a prominent part of Clinton’s speech at Hanoi National University, the sources said.

Vietnam agreed in 1997 to repay the United States \$145 million in nonmilitary debts incurred by the US-backed government of South Vietnam, which was abolished when the country was unified under a communist regime in 1975. The pact calls for repayment to be made over a 22-year period, ending in 2019. About \$40 million has been repaid.

The idea to use most of the money to finance educational opportunities for Vietnamese evolved out of the desire of the six US senators who are veterans of the Vietnam War to further reconciliation and normalization of relations.

The senators consulted with the staff of the Fulbright Economic Education Program, a State Department-financed program run through the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. More than 600 Vietnamese have graduated from the program, which is based in Ho Chi Minh City.

The proposal developed by the center is modeled on a 1908 program under which the United States returned to the Chinese a portion of the indemnity China was forced to pay for the Boxer Rebellion of 1898-1900 against Western nations. A similar program with Japan has been in operation since 1975.

Vietnam is currently paying the United States about \$9 million a year. The proposed new program would place \$5 million of this sum under the authority of a congressionally created Vietnam Education Foundation, which would finance graduate and post-graduate education for Vietnamese students in the United States and send American professors to teach in Vietnamese schools.

Areas of study would be restricted to science, technology, medicine, and mathematics.

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*Washington Post* / 19 Nov 2000, p. A01 / **Clinton Faces War's Open Wounds; In Vietnam, President Chokes Up While Searchers Dig for U.S. Pilot's Remains** / By Rajiv Chandrasekaran

A day after urging the Vietnamese "not to be controlled" by history, an emotional President Clinton today stood transfixed at the edge of a muddy rice paddy where forensic experts continued to search for the remains of a U.S. pilot, witnessing firsthand the lingering scars of America's military involvement that continue to cloud Washington's rapprochement with Hanoi.

His eyes welling with tears, Clinton watched as American experts directed Vietnamese laborers as they strained buckets of mud through a large sieve in a laborious effort to find aircraft parts and pieces of bone belonging to Air Force Capt. Lawrence G. Evert, who was shot down 33 years ago as he tried to bomb a nearby railroad bridge.

Although Clinton spent the first day of his historic visit telling the Vietnamese that making economic and political changes would be crucial to strengthening ties with the United States, his schedule today highlighted the formidable challenges that confront America as it seeks to build stronger bonds with its former enemy.

After his trip to the rice paddy and a brief meeting with Communist Party chief Le Kha Phieu, the country's senior leader, Clinton was exposed to the war's enduring effects on Vietnam. He viewed a stark ceremony detailing the dangers of the 3.5 million land mines and 300,000 tons of unexploded bombs that remain buried here and cause more than 2,000 casualties a year. This evening, Clinton shifted his focus back to missing U.S. servicemen, attending a ceremony at the Hanoi airport to send home three sets of remains that were recovered earlier this year. An honor guard carried three small wooden boxes of bones, placing them in aluminum caskets covered by American flags.

Clinton then boarded Air Force One for a two-hour flight to Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon, capital of the U.S.-backed government in South Vietnam that now is the country's economic hub. Although he arrived around midnight, the streets from the airport to his hotel were lined with thousands of people who cheered and waved as his black limousine sped by.

Obtaining what U.S. officials call a "full accounting" of missing military personnel remains the top priority for the U.S. government in its relationship with Vietnam. In a speech at the rice paddy this morning, Clinton said the United States is "committed to keep at it until we bring every possible fallen hero home."

The Vietnamese government has cooperated extensively with U.S. military officials in their search and recovery efforts, informing U.S. officials when farmers stumble upon possible remains and providing workers for excavation projects. That cooperation was crucial for the Clinton administration to win congressional support to lift a wartime trade embargo and normalize diplomatic relations. But some Vietnamese officials bristle at the unrelenting U.S. emphasis on locating those listed as missing in action.

"Continuing to make the MIA issue the top priority in the relationship rankles the Vietnamese," said Carlyle A. Thayer of the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu, a Defense Department-sponsored research organization. "Even with his presidential visit, it doesn't fully normalize relations. The MIA issue is always there for any administration to use if there are any problems."

George C. Duggins, president of 50,000-member Vietnam Veterans of America, who visited the crash site with Clinton, said, "To say this is a dark cloud over the relationship is true. As we continue to work on this issue, the cloud will evaporate. It will help bring our countries closer."

The United States still lists 1,498 servicemen as missing. The U.S. military has engaged in 63 separate, month-long recovery operations, flying in dozens of anthropologists and forensic experts at an annual cost of nearly \$ 20 million. During Clinton's presidency, the remains of 283 servicemen have been found, nearly half the total accounted for since U.S. troops left and the last known prisoners of war were sent home.

The Vietnamese, who have more than 300,000 soldiers listed as missing, express mild envy over the scope of the U.S. operation. "We can't afford to dig this way," said Nguyen Ba Hung, a Foreign Ministry official who is in charge of American MIA issues. He said Vietnam spends "hundreds of times" less than the United States on recovery operations.

Some Vietnamese who have missing relatives have urged the U.S. government to assist them in their recovery efforts. "America has a responsibility to help the Vietnamese people with this issue," said Nguyen Duc Thanh, a shopkeeper who lost his father during a B-52 bomber attack on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in 1968. "They have the modern technology and the money to help."

To that end, Clinton presented the Vietnamese government with 350,000 pages of documents that list battle dates and locations, along with medical records, that could help Hanoi locate some of its missing soldiers. He promised a million more pages of documents by the end of the year and noted that some of the U.S. recovery missions have led to the discovery and identification of Vietnamese fighters.

"This common endeavor we make as friends is unprecedented in all of human history," Clinton said. "Once we met here as adversaries. Today we work as partners."

Although they welcome the help, Vietnamese officials have said it would be difficult for them to launch a full-scale, American-style search for hundreds of thousands of sets of bones. Soldiers from

Communist North Vietnam, unlike their American counterparts, did not wear metal dog tags, and they rarely carried any other identification that would resist decomposition. Vietnamese of that generation rarely had dental records, and DNA tests are too costly.

Vietnamese officials have more strongly urged the U.S. government to tackle two other issues: unearthing the vast amount of unexploded munitions and treating people the government believes are suffering from birth defects caused by spraying of the defoliant Agent Orange.

The U.S. government has provided more than \$ 3 million in mine-removing equipment to Vietnam this year, and it is developing a computer database to pinpoint the location of mines and other munitions. It is also convening a group of international scientists to look into the effects of Agent Orange. In a private meeting with Clinton on Friday, President Tran Duc Luong said he hoped the United States would provide greater assistance with both problems.

At the land mine ceremony, Clinton met four children maimed by old ordnance, including an 11-year-old boy whose left hand was blown off by a bomb. The boy nevertheless extended both his arms in a traditional Asian greeting.

Clinton began the second day of his three-day visit by driving along a rutted dirt road to a small village about an hour outside Hanoi to observe one of six sites being excavated for MIA remains. He was accompanied by the missing pilot's two sons, Daniel and David Evert of Chandler, Ariz.

Escorted down a long bamboo and plywood bridge to the excavation site, Clinton and the Evert brothers received a lengthy explanation of how the forensic specialists search for clues. It is like an archaeological dig, with 50 local workers, clad in conical hats and purple smocks, scooping large chunks of mud into black buckets that are passed by hand up a wooden ramp, where they are put through a sieve.

The dig, which began Nov. 3, has uncovered several bone fragments and pieces of an airplane believed to be the same type of F-105D that Capt. Evert flew the night he was trying to blow up a railroad bridge. After getting hit with antiaircraft fire, the 29-year-old pilot sent one last radio transmission, saying, "I'm hit hard."

U.S. forces were not able to search for Evert at the time because the area was controlled by the North Vietnamese. Although U.S. military officials identified the site as the possible crash location several years ago, they initially encountered resistance from Vietnamese officials who worried that a dig might destabilize the nearby railroad tracks. They relented after U.S. officials presented detailed engineering studies.

Leaders of the excavation mission told Clinton the wreckage likely is buried deep in clay soil, complicating the recovery.

The president stood at the edge of the dig site with the Evert brothers, talking privately and staring quietly. All three were visibly choked with emotion.

"We believe we owe them and all Americans like them what they came here for: a chance, finally, to take their father home," the president said in brief remarks a few minutes later.

"I think we all want to know where our loved ones are buried," Clinton said. "I think we all want to be able to honor them and be able to visit their grave site."

Daniel Evert said the opportunity to view the crash site was "a moment of healing for us."

"When we were younger, about 6 and 8, we used to talk about how we would come over to Vietnam and come . . . get him and take him home and rescue him," David Evert said. "And we kind of feel like that's what we're doing right now."