

April 8, 1965

Senator Birch Bayh
U. S. Senate
Washington, D.C.

Dear Senator Bayh:

We, the undersigned, professional scholars in the field of Asian Studies at Indiana University, feel under an obligation publicly to record our anxiety about the course of events in Vietnam. The United States is engaged in a war in Vietnam. For what may well be sufficient reasons, our government has chosen not to release all of the information available to it. While we outside the government are thus at a disadvantage in attempting to evaluate American policy and actions, certain aspects of what is happening in Vietnam seem to us as Asian specialists to be of overriding importance.

Perhaps the most basic of these involves the conflict between ends and means. Whatever the substantive details, we question both the morality and practicality of achieving the objectives of peace, stability, and a democratic society which our government announces are its aims in Vietnam, through the support of repressive regimes. Our democratic objectives will also not be served by attempting to outdo the communists in the use of terror, coercion, and mass destruction. The Viet Cong's employment of terror neither justifies nor requires a similar counter policy.

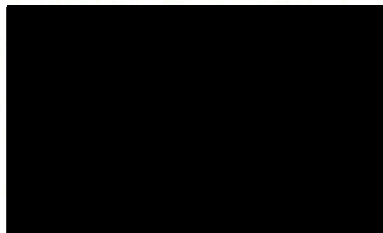
In attempting to fight Viet Cong communism, we are also fighting a main stream of Vietnamese nationalism. Vietnamese have been fighting for their independence since the 1930's - against the French, against the Japanese, and now, many Vietnamese feel, against the Americans. Although American aid was legally requested by the Government of South Vietnam, many Vietnamese agree with the Viet Cong in viewing the United States as the Western successors to the French colonialists. The Viet Cong and the communist government of North Vietnam which supports it may legitimately claim to speak for Vietnamese nationalism more effectively than does the U.S.-supported government of South Vietnam. The Viet Cong is not solely a military or a communist problem. It represents social and political alternatives which seem to be gaining support from an increasing part of the South Vietnamese population. These alternatives do not appeal to Americans, but they cannot be destroyed by military means, especially from the outside. Few South Vietnamese have confidence in their government's representative character or concern for the welfare of the people, while that government's military campaigns, dependent on massive American support, continue to wipe out villages suspected of harboring "the enemy". "The enemy" are fellow Vietnamese.

We are well aware of the role played by the communist Government of China, in support of the Government of North Vietnam and of the Viet Cong's efforts to win control of the south. We are aware of Chinese pressures and infiltration in Laos and northeast Thailand as well. But we question the potential effectiveness of the present American role in

Vietnam as a bulwark against Chinese influence or against Communism. Without Vietnamese support, our actions cannot achieve their objective of containment. Local nationalism is the best bulwark against Chinese pressures. The Vietnamese have successfully contended with Chinese power for a thousand years. We recognize that Vietnamese nationalism is now represented and led primarily by Vietnamese communists, but this does not make its resistance to Chinese pressures less real.

Our anxiety over the present course of events in Vietnam is matched by our conviction that a more effective as well as a morally more acceptable policy can be found, and that the U.S. Government is willing to seek earnestly for such an alternative. Without full access to the information and other considerations on which policy decisions and their timing must be based, we cannot make detailed recommendations or establish any timetable. But we are persuaded that purely on practical grounds the present policy of violent confrontation which attempts to produce a military solution to a political problem cannot succeed. Many Asians would like to believe that the United States still supports self-determination. We are in danger of damaging what could be a powerful American influence. Bombs cannot weaken nationalism, but can only intensify it. Our recent escalation raises the additional risk of rallying further support, and probably increased influence, from other communist powers.

We do not believe that a military solution is possible in Vietnam. We do believe that the United States has a legitimate and effective role to play. It can help to produce and support a more stable, peaceful, and constructive set of conditions in Vietnam and in Southeast Asia. It can help establish an acceptable modus vivendi with Chinese policies and actions in this area traditionally subject to pressures from the huge neighboring Chinese state. The present hostilities do not mean that talks cannot be held, with all states and groups concerned, toward a more viable solution. The overwhelming military power of the United States makes it possible for the American government to pursue the initiative, in our own interest, in the interest of the Vietnamese people and the democracy which the United States is endeavoring to protect, and the interest of the world at large. We urge our government energetically to press the search for all available means to make American aims effective in these terms, and to substitute for the present policies, with their frightening risk of an escalated war which would destroy the interests of all parties, a set of approaches with greater promise of success. To this end, we offer whatever assistance we can provide.



Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana