

J. ROBERT KERREY  
NEBRASKA



UNITED STATES SENATE  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

June 22, 1989

Dear Walter,

Gary Barnett says the man is a  
first rate witness. Santa Barbara  
is too far away!

Say hello to everyone  
of the Capps' for me.



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With these points in mind, I am in favor of immediate normalization with Vietnam.

I am aware of the irony of my position. During the war years I fought to drive Americans from my homeland, but today I want them to return. But, in fact, my goals today are not so different from what they were then. During the war, I wanted the Americans out because I believed they were an obstacle

Some of the Vietnamese community in the United States is opposed to normalization. They see our policy of non-recognition as a fitting punishment for the communist invaders. But in fact it is a policy that harms the Vietnamese people more than the Hanoi government.

Normalization should not be a gift we give Hanoi. It should not be the end of a policy of isolation, but the beginning of a policy intended to encourage a more democratic and more independent Vietnam.

## INTERVIEW: DOAN VAN TOAI

**Q:** How do you feel about the prospect of normalizing relations with Vietnam?

**A:** Some conservatives opposed to Vietnamese communism, and some liberals concerned about Vietnam's continuing abuse of human rights and occupation of Kampuchea, oppose normalization with Vietnam. They believe that normalization should be withheld as a reward for good behavior, and that immediate recognition would only encourage Hanoi to be more repressive internally and aggressive externally. Further, many of them see international isolation as a fitting punishment for Vietnam's misdeeds.

As a Vietnamese who experienced communist rule, spent two-and-a-half years in the Vietnamese gulag, and who had to leave my native land for this country, I believe that the above argument, though correct for many years, is now out of date.

- Isolation punishes the Vietnamese people more than the government, which can use its isolation as an excuse for its failures, and for its reliance on the Soviet Union. In any case, recognition alone is simply not a powerful tool in dealing with Hanoi, particularly since the United States has not been able to convince most other Western nations to join in this strategy. It is an ancient principle of diplomacy that keeping the lines of communication open is at least as important among enemies as it is among friends. The United States maintained relations with the Soviet Union after the invasion of Afghanistan, and China maintained relations with Vietnam during and after their war in 1979.
- An American presence would help monitor human rights violations. Normalization would allow American organizations to establish and maintain contact with dissidents inside Vietnam, thereby encouraging human rights, political, and economic reforms. The presence of Americans would provide chances for low-level contacts between the United States and soft-line factions of the Communist Party, thereby encouraging quiet cooperation on the MIA and POW issues.



"It is time for the United States to normalize relations with Vietnam and Cambodia. If we do not change this policy and persuade others who have followed our lead, then the return to power of the Khmer Rouge and another blood bath will inevitably follow. All the rhetoric in the world won't hide the fact that the United States is a silent accomplice."

—John F. Terzano, President  
Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation

Normalization need not automatically entail American aid, credits or other support. These are the real levers we have over Vietnamese behavior and should be used in order to encourage political and economic reform.

As a prerequisite to normalization, we should require that the Vietnamese guarantee freedom of movement and access for our embassy staff, and allow face-to-face contacts between Americans and ordinary Vietnamese.

With these points in mind, I am in favor of immediate normalization with Vietnam.

I am aware of the irony of my position. During the war years I fought to drive Americans from my homeland, but today I want them to return. But, in fact, my goals today are not so different from what they were then. During the war, I wanted the Americans out because I believed they were an obstacle

to an independent democratic Vietnam. Today, I believe that the American policy of isolation is an obstacle to those same goals.

I am not alone in this. The feedback our Institute receives from those inside Vietnam, particularly those who have recently been released from reeducation camps, is that they, too, would love to see the Americans return.

Some of the Vietnamese community in the United States is opposed to normalization. They see our policy of non-recognition as a fitting punishment for the communist invaders. But in fact it is a policy that harms the Vietnamese people more than the Hanoi government.

Normalization should not be a gift we give Hanoi. It should not be the end of a policy of isolation, but the beginning of a policy intended to encourage a more democratic and more independent Vietnam.

**Q:** How is the United States viewed in Vietnam today?

**A:** One irony of the Vietnamese situation is that most of the Vietnamese people, including those who opposed the American war in the 1960s, are eager to see the Americans return. A common story, recounted by Americans who have visited Vietnam in recent years, is that they are first treated with rudeness and suspicion by ordinary Vietnamese—who take them for Soviets. Once they are recognized as Americans, they are treated with warmth and respect. This happens not only in the South but also in the North. For those living in a closed society, one that is among the poorest nations on Earth, the United States represents freedom and prosperity.

It is also true that Indochina has left an indelible impression on the American people. Three million Americans served in Vietnam. Over 50,000 died, and over \$300 billion were spent, in a cause that failed. We cannot refight the war, and can never recall all that treasure and blood. But we still have a role to play. Hanoi won the war, but through arrogance, mismanagement, corruption, and naivete, they lost the peace.

America lost the war, but it still has a chance to win the peace. Today, Vietnam is in flux. Buffeted by the reform movements sweeping the communist world, by grinding poverty and bureaucratic gridlock, Hanoi is more amenable to American influence than at any time since 1954. The people of Indochina only knew the Americans as warriors. They had little or no contact with American culture, and especially with America's democratic traditions. These are the true strengths of this country, and they embody the values we need to transmit if we are to encourage meaningful reform in Vietnam.

**Q:** What do you think our policy should be in Cambodia?

**A:** For a decade, America's primary policy goal in Indochina has been to induce the Vietnamese to withdraw their troops from Cambodia. This is now taking place. Over the last few years, the Khmer Rouge has reemerged as the most viable contender, should the Vietnamese-backed Hun Sen government fall. The non-communist resistance movements, led by Son Sann and Prince Sihanouk, are militarily weak compared to the Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge. Accordingly, we must add another goal: to prevent a new Khmer Rouge regime,

During their few years in power, the Khmer Rouge murdered roughly one-fourth of the Cambodian population. The cities were emptied and the surviving populations were forced into slave labor camps. The auto-genocide of the Cambodian people was a disaster without precedent even in this bloody century.

The American people have always believed that their government's foreign policy should be based not only on questions of security and power politics, but also on the principles of human decency and human rights. These principles demand that we play as active a role as possible in preventing a Khmer Rouge take-over. But today we have limited influence in the region. Without the involvement of the Soviet Union, China and the United States, and without the cooperation of Thailand and Vietnam, the conflict in Cambodia will never be solved. A negotiated solution between the regional powers should include the following elements:

- withdrawal of Vietnamese troops conducted in an orderly fashion and overseen by the United Nations, in order to avoid panic and military opportunity for the Khmer Rouge, and to insure the real withdrawal;
- an end to Thai trans-shipment of military supplies, and Chinese support, to the Khmer Rouge;

- national elections, internationally sponsored and overseen, in which all political factions have an equal opportunity (provided that they agree to disarm) possibly overseen by a U.N. peacekeeping force; and
- an economic aid program, with contributions from Japan and the West, aimed at rebuilding the Cambodian economy and supporting the new elected regime.

*Doan Van Toai was a Vietnamese student activist in the 1960s. He was imprisoned several times by the Saigon regime for anti-American and human rights activities. He was imprisoned again by the communist regime after 1975 for 28 months. Since Toai came to the United States in 1980, he has written extensively. His articles have appeared in various newspapers, including the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. His first book The Vietnamese Gulag was internationally acclaimed and printed in many countries. He currently is writing his fourth book, a history of the Vietnam war. Toai is a visiting scholar at the University of California at Berkeley, and also is executive director of the Institute for Democracy in Vietnam and the Vietnam Experience Study project. ■*

## The China Syndrome

by Daniel M. Crane

**F**or centuries, Vietnam was China's vassal state, periodically sending envoys to Beijing with tribute for the Emperor.

The Chinese imperial system officially ended in 1911, unofficially at least a half century earlier. Still, to those charged with shaping U.S. policy towards Vietnam, China remained a dominant factor.

Shock and a sense of betrayal accompanied the communist takeover of China in 1949. We had assumed a "special relationship," and the "loss" of China, followed shortly by the Korean War, generated extreme bitterness in the United States. It was the cry, "who lost China?", now almost forgotten in U.S. politics, that inspired the anti-communist hysteria led by Senator Joseph McCarthy. A desire to avoid another McCarthy era was understandable, but our obsession with the past made entanglement in Vietnam virtually inevitable.

We don't know what John Kennedy would have done had he lived, but evidence suggests there would have been no U.S. pullout until at least after the 1964 election. President Johnson was clearly concerned that withdrawal from Vietnam would expose him to attack from the right. In 1964, George Kennan justified America's involvement with Vietnam as necessary to stop "a group of embittered fanatics (the Chinese communists) . . . consumed with the ambition to extend to further areas of Asia the dictatorial authority they now wield over the Chinese people themselves. . . ." As we now know, the Chinese hardly controlled their Vietnamese compatriots.

U.S. policy towards Vietnam was to a significant extent a by-product of Sino-American relations and domestic politics. A policy dictated by extraneous factors can lead to unintended results. As we contemplate reestablishing relations with Vietnam, it is a lesson to remember.

*Mr. Crane, on the staff of Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, received his Ph.D. in History, specializing in Sino-American Relations. ■*