

This country, as you know, was divided between Communist North Vietnam and free South Vietnam as a result of the Geneva agreements of 1954. Following the division of the country, the United States extended substantial assistance to the government of President Ngo Dinh Diem in an effort to stabilize and protect the southern part of the country from further Communist aggression.

The joint efforts of our two governments realized a considerable degree of success in the years following the first Geneva Conference. Per capita income went up about 20 percent, food production rose more than 30 percent, the foundation for a modest industrial base was laid, with production in such key industries as textiles increasing from near zero to near self-sufficiency. In this same period, the Vietnamese wrote a constitution, elected a National Assembly, undertook an ambitious land reform program, tripled their school enrollment, and successfully resettled nearly a million refugees from Communist North Vietnam.

We all know the Communist reaction to this success story. In late 1959, certainly by 1960, it was clear that the Communists intended to overthrow the Government of Vietnam by force, and take it over in violation of the Geneva agreements. The strategy was that of organized terrorism—hit and run, night attacks, ambushes, assassinations, and intimidation of the civil population. The network of Communist subversive agents and cadres left behind in 1954 was activated, and new cadres, terrorists, and even whole military units were infiltrated across the border, and through the mountains and jungles of Laos.

By the fall of 1961 Communist attacks were running at the rate of well over 100 a week. A provincial capital was overrun and held overnight. The flow of commerce into Saigon was choked off to the point where we had to send Public Law 480 rice to what is normally one of Asia's rice basket areas.

The Vietnamese then requested increased American assistance to meet what had become an almost overwhelming threat to the continued existence of free Vietnam. They did not request American combat forces. And let me make this very clear, our role in Vietnam is not a combat role. The Vietnamese are fighting the war and they are directing the war. American assistance has been limited to technical, advisory, and logistic support.

We have a substantial number of American servicemen in Vietnam serving these functions. And although they are not combat forces, they have suffered casualties. This is because there are no front and rear areas in a war of terrorism; because to be effective as advisers our people must often be at or near the scene of fighting; and because the Communists have made our advisers a special target. The result is that we have suffered a total of 35 killed and 162 wounded to date as a result of enemy action in Vietnam.

For this reason alone, the Vietnam situation is one about which the American people need to be well informed. It is essential that the American people have available the fullest possible picture of what is happening in Vietnam and our role there. This has been the first principle of our press and information policy from the outset.

However, primary responsibility for access to the news in Vietnam rests with the Vietnamese. As I have said before, this is their struggle. It is their country, and to a very real degree, information on the Vietnam situation is their information.