

MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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Press Department

Statement on Foreign Policy in Prime Minister Olof Palme's opening speech in the general political debate in the Riksdag, January 31, 1973.

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My opening speech in this Debate will be dealing with solidarity, both across the borders and in our own country.

Today our thoughts go to our Nordic brothers in Iceland. They have been struck by a terrible disaster. The people of Iceland will not need to stand alone as they seek to overcome their difficulties. We immediately contacted the Government of Iceland and expressed the sincere sympathy of the Swedish people and our willingness to show our solidarity with them and to assist them in their adversity. We also contacted the other Nordic Governments.

Our aim is to give immediate emergency aid and to contribute towards reconstruction. We are at present making enquiries with the Icelandic Government as to what form our help should take. Preparations are being made with all possible speed.

I am convinced that all the parties in the Swedish Riksdag and the entire Swedish nation stand united on this issue.

At last an agreement has been reached on the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam.

We are now starting along the arduous and difficult road leading towards reconciliation and reconstruction. The many years of war have created bitterness and wounds which will take a long time to heal. The news of fighting during the last few days has worried us all. But we hope that the killing and destruction will cease, that the children of Vietnam will be able to look up at the sky without fear, that the night will no longer mean terror and anguish but rest and quiet, that the days will no longer be filled with the clamour of war and fleeing refugees but with work in the rice fields, with the rebuilding of devastated towns and villages.

The war has been going on for many years. Its aftermath is terrible.

Eight million tons of bombs have been dropped on Indochina since 1965. That is three times as much as the allied forces dropped on all fronts throughout the second world war.

How many have been killed and wounded we do not know with any certainty. According to American sources, the number of dead and wounded combatants was 2.8 million. The number of civilians killed in South Vietnam is estimated at 400 000, the number of wounded at 900 000.

The war has made 8 million people in South Vietnam refugees in their own country. That is nearly half of the population.

The material destruction is tremendous.

The ecological environment, that is to say the very conditions essential to human life, has been seriously damaged. Ninety thousand tons of chemical weapons have been dropped on Indochina.

The bombing, the streams of refugees, the removal of people to strategic villages, urbanization and the growth of the slum areas in South Vietnam have shattered the social structure.

What remains is the will to live and to shape a future of their own. What remains is the solidarity and the will to resist, which aroused the admiration of the many visitors to Vietnam.

The possibilities of creating a lasting peace are founded on this selfrespect and dignity and on safeguarding the terms of the agreement which has now been reached.

The agreement now signed corresponds almost entirely with the preliminary agreement drawn up in October.

The first Article establishes the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Vietnam as already prescribed in the 1954 Geneva agreement. This appears to be the most important political issue in the long term. These are the principles the Vietnamese nationalists have always fought for, whether they have been communists, socialists, Buddhists or members of any other movement. The principles were confirmed in Geneva when the long struggle against the French was over and the colonial power of France was broken in this area. These principles have now, once again, been confirmed.

By and large, the Agreement means that one is back to when the French left Vietnam.

Consequently, this war has not only been cruel and destructive. It has also been meaningless. If the provisions of the Geneva agreement had been observed there would have been no war.

What now faces dismantlement, if this agreement is observed, is colonial power. After the second world war the French tried to re-incorporate Indochina into the French empire. They failed. Later developments meant that the USA took over the war the French had lost. The motives were different. But their allies in South Vietnam were the same as those who had backed up the French: the landowners, the privileged classes. Their adversaries were the same as those who had fought the French: Ho Chi Minh, the nationalists, the people who wanted land and bread.

Therefore, the US war became a war fought in the shadows cast by the past. It could never be won.

While colonial might had fallen and while it was accepted elsewhere that nations became free and determined their own policies, their own form of government, the fate of the Americans was to take over the role of the old colonial imperialism.

The American entry on the scene meant that the process of liberation from colonialism and internal strife were drawn into the field of conflicting global interests. Whereas nearly everybody could agree that the British did the right thing in leaving India and the African colonies, that the Dutch were right in leaving Indonesia and the French in leaving Indochina and Algeria, it was much more difficult for the Western democracies to dissociate themselves from American intervention in Indochina.

Criticism of US involvement in Vietnam has been regarded as anti-Americanism. The demand that the people of Vietnam be given the same self-evident right to national independence as gained by other formerly colonized peoples has been depicted as support of communist expansionism. If the USA left Vietnam, then European security would be in danger. Grossly inaccurate parallels were drawn with the situation of Europe after the second world war. But that meant that the support of a brutal oppressive régime could be presented as an effort to defend democracy. This has caused infinite damage to the ideas of democracy.

If this attitude had been applied in other parts of the world it would have meant that the West had remained and fought on the barricades of colonialism. Fortunately, it has not. The states which have gained national freedom have come to apply widely differing social orders. This fact has not been used as a reason for military intervention. It is not possible to compel by force a developing country to adopt a western social order. And it is still an illusion to believe that demands for social justice can be met with violence and military force.

The war in South Vietnam has been regarded as an attempt on the part of North Vietnam to force a particular kind of social order on another state. Such a view overlooks the fact that the war started as a revolt of the people against a hated oppressive régime. Moreover, this view implies in fact that, in conflict with the Geneva agreement, the provisional line of demarcation is regarded as a permanent political boundary.

Great efforts to mould opinion and a great deal of information has been necessary to clarify the causes of a war which was gradually foisted on to the world, a war, which to start with, was practically unknown, which was gradually escalated and which was later defended on the grounds of the democratic ideals with which the USA is so rightly associated.

I shall not go into the public debate of the Sixties here in Sweden on this war, a debate in which so many of us have been deeply engaged.

I should like to stress the role played by the young people. They have made a tremendous contribution, been responsible for a political and intellectual spring-cleaning which augurs well for the future of a democracy. It is a clear-sighted and ideologically conscious younger generation which will shape the future. That is the main impression which should be in the foreground today.

The role of the popular movements, of the trade union movement and of the churches, should also be acknowledged. Thanks to them our efforts have been given breadth and stability.

Journalists have also played an important part in giving the facts and analysing the situation. To mention only one of many in Sweden: Caleb J. Andersson wrote a series of articles in SIA, the trade union journal, as far back as 1961 - 1963 where he gave a detailed analysis of the political situation and came to the conclusion that "in any case the Americans will sooner or later be compelled to leave South Vietnam".

The work done in enlightening the public has resulted in Swedish public opinion being united in its attitude to the war in Vietnam. This unanimity has been a source of strength when we have presented our views in the international field, when we have made our contribution to moulding public opinion beyond our own borders, which has undoubtedly played an important role. The collecting of signatures, which was a concrete expression of national feeling, was an outstanding success. The far more than 2 million signatures show the massive support of the Swedish people for the demand for peace.

This unity is also one strength as we now do all within our power to assist in reconstruction work in Vietnam. One sign of this unity is the nation-wide collections being made for the people of Indochina and for the reconstruction of the Bach Mai Hospital. For a number of years we have been co-operating in the field of aid programmes with the one side where the preconditions have been present for planning and practically carrying out assistance programmes on a larger scale. So far our assistance has been of a humanitarian nature. Now, conditions are being created for assistance in reconstruction. Further, we plan to increase our assistance in South Vietnam. I also hope that there will be a world-wide effort in this field.

Our unity and our openly expressed opinions on this question are also of importance when it comes to matters of principle, fundamental to our own position as a small nation.

For the conflict in Vietnam has also concerned the right of a small nation to live and survive.

There is the risk in our time of a hegemony of the superpowers in the world. One divides the world into areas of interest and attempts to maintain the status quo. A small nation which tries to assert its own individuality and its particular interests in this order of things runs very serious risks. We have seen frightening examples of this both in the East and in the West. No one in this House has forgotten Czechoslovakia.

This is a development to which we, a small nation, must object. To keep silent about what has been happening in Vietnam could be interpreted as acceptance of the principle that the small nations of the world shall not voice their demands or assert their rights. Our united opinion on the conflict in Vietnam thus means that we have also upheld our own fundamental interests, our own demands for security.

We have not hesitated to speak our minds about the American policy in Vietnam. This we have done for reasons of humanity. This we have done also because we have believed that certain principles were at stake, principles that are important when considering how relations between states in a peaceful world should be and which, in the final analysis,

are also important to our own security. They are principles we have consistently upheld in all quarters.

For a long time we have had differences of opinion - and grave ones - with the United States. The American Government has chilled down our diplomatic relations. This was not our wish. Our wish is that normal diplomatic relations shall exist between us.

The people of Vietnam bleed. Vietnam's fields, forests and villages are mangled and destroyed. But they have defended their country and their independence. For them, the war has not been meaningless.

They have shown us that human resistance is not broken by the massive attacks of technology, that also the terror of our time finally stands powerless, panting with exhaustion, shaking with its own impotence. Therefore, the Vietnam's sacrifice has also a meaning for us. We have experienced similar events in our own civilization, such as the Winter War in Finland in 1939 and the London blitz in 1940. Then we felt the same kind of admiration for a people's unbreakable will to resist.

The guilt of Western civilization is great and the West will rightly fear the judgment of history. The way to national reconciliation may be difficult and delicate in Vietnam. But the West, in its way, is facing a more difficult task. We have to make peace with our own conscience, to try once again to give meaning and content to values, ideals and a civilization seriously damaged in Vietnam.

Therefore, and for the sake of the Vietnamese people, we must look to the future. The Agreement - if it is observed - provides a good foundation for peace and reconciliation. Admittedly, the events of the last few days give us good reason to be apprehensive of the possibilities of applying the provisions. For the time being, we must confine ourselves to pinning our hopes on the sincerity of the parties and on their own interest in ensuring that the agreement is observed. One thing is plain: the long struggle of the Vietnamese people to free themselves from colonial dependence has gained significant success. It will, in the end, be crowned with victory.

In other parts of the world the struggle for national independence still continues. Tomorrow Amilcar Cabral will be buried - the leader of the liberation movement in Guinea/Bissau, the victim of brutal murder.

In years past I have had many conversations with Cabral. He was an extremely impressive personality. What was most remarkable about him was that in the midst of the struggle for national liberation he was constantly thinking about the task of peaceful reconstruction, which must follow after liberation and which had already begun in the liberated areas. His words gave expression to a strong sense of dignity and to a conviction of final victory. The liberation movement wanted to win so that it could build up the country - in peace. He was interested in Sweden, not because of our technical efficiency - for his country is still very poor - but because he wanted to study the ideas which had been guiding lines for building a peaceful society.

At the Opera House last autumn, when speaking at our Party Congress, he said the following - words which perhaps are too laudatory - about solidarity, security and equality:

"Solidarity without equality is only charity, and charity has never contributed to the progress of nations and human beings. And security without equality is only authoritarian paternal control, protectionism or pure colonialism, and is thus in conflict with the genuine liberation of nations and human beings. The merit of your Party is that it has realized these truths, realized that solidarity is the dynamic element essential to the achievement of equality, individual and collective security.

Furthermore: besides every humanitarian, moral or material effort, solidarity requires an awareness of what is reality for other people and a total identification with that reality. For only such identification makes it possible to understand the deep and often complex reasons for people's hopes and thus also for their despair, individual or collective."

This quotation may serve as a tribute and a farewell to Amilcar Cabral.