

The Sack of the French Embassy in Saigon, July 1964: The 1954 Northern Refugees Facing a Double Threat of Neutralization¹

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Following the signing of the 1954 Geneva Agreement ending the Indochina War, French and non-communist Vietnamese armed forces regrouped below the 17th parallel. France hoped to remain influential in the South but the ascension of Ngô Đình Diệm, famous for his anticolonialism, decided otherwise. Shortly after his creation of the Republic of Vietnam, Paris definitively withdrew French troops out of Vietnam in 1956. Since then, France seemed to be a thing of the past. Yet ten years after leaving Vietnamese political affairs, France was still the target of virulent Vietnamese attacks. Starting in December 1963, demonstrations against French symbols in Saigon recurred and reached their apex with the sack of the Embassy on the 20th of July 1964. How can we explain those attacks? What does these seemingly anti-French attacks reveal?

Communist insurrections in the countryside and political instability had then beset South Vietnam. Since Ngô Đình Diệm's assassination in November 1963, a whole series of unsuccessful governments had plunged the country into chaos. Within South Vietnam, Buddhists communities formerly oppressed sought to take their revenge against Catholics who seemed to be the privileged few favored by the former regime. Demonstrations of both of those religious groups turned into urban riots in the cities of Saigon, Hue and Danang. At the international level, Western indecision to take a strong action against renewed communist insurrections cast a serious doubt on its commitment to contain communist expansion. Not only did presidential elections in the United States defer any possible intervention, but Charles de Gaulle was also proposing an alternative to the fight. Having ended the Algerian War at the 1962 Evian Conference, the General now recommended a neutralisation of the armed conflict in South Vietnam.

So far, the main explanation for the sack of the French Embassy in Saigon was found in the shocking proposal of Charles de Gaulle. But an in-depth look at these demonstrators, their origins and their demands reveals that these Vietnamese mobilized against two threats. They did not only fight French plans for a cease of fire, but they also combatted a neutralist trend coming from within South Vietnam. The sack of embassy despite its anti-French appearance, expressed the demonstrators' commitment to fight any neutralist calls on both international and domestic front.

1. The 1964 Anti-French Demonstrations

1. We sincerely thank the Director of the Historical Office of the French Army, Lieutenant Colonel Frédéric Guélton who granted us access to the restricted fund of the French Army's intelligence (10T).

Starting in december 1963 and lasting through the year 1964, demonstrations against French symbols in Saigon rose to worrisome levels. On the 20th of December 1963, 2000 students marched to the embassy. On January 4th, they sabotaged a party organised by the *Alliance française*. Over the next two weeks, new demonstrations not only happened again at those places, but also in front of the French cultural Mission as well as the J.-J. Rousseau and Marie Curie high schools.

On the 19th of July 1964, the Southern Vietnamese government organized the main ceremony of the «Week of shame» commemorating the tenth years anniversary of the Geneva Agreement. In a crowd of nearly one million people demonstrating, young men marched with cardboard models of General de Gaulle shaking hands with Ho Chi Minh. At night, students desecrated the French War memorial. «Down with the French colonialists!», «Down with de Gaulle!», «Down with the Geneva Agreements!» resonated along Duy Tan street.² They removed the bronze inscriptions and poured paint on the statues of the unknown French soldiers.

The unrest went on the following night. On July the 20th, the General Student Association organised the «sleepless night»,³ during which more than a thousand gathered at the Faculty of Arts.⁴ The first hours of the night were dedicated to a conference on the Geneva Agreements. The students then marched to the Prime Minister Palace and into the streets of Saigon. At precisely two o'clock, the crowd stood still in order to sing the national anthem. Once returned to the faculty, they played tunes of Phạm Duy until dawn. But during that same night, a hundred of students attacked the French embassy. The rioters entered the courtyard where they bashed in a car and set another one on fire. Unsatisfied by this deed, they broke all the windows of the gallery and shredded the French flag.

Two days later, the General Student Association held a press conference on these events. It claimed the responsibility of the War memorial vandalism, but refused to be account-

2. « Tổng hội sinh viên và học sinh đã đập phá công trường chiến sĩ vào lúc nửa đêm 19-7 » [The General Student Association vandalized the War Memorial during the night of the 19-7]. Thời Luận, 21/7/1964, p. 1.

3. According to the special coverage of Tự do, « Thức trắng một đêm với Sinh viên, 2 giờ đêm hát quốc ca và mặc niệm giữa đường phố để kỷ niệm giờ bán nước » [A sleepless night with the students singing the national anthem at 2 A.M. in order to commemorate the time when the nation has been sold]. Tự do, 22/7/1964, p. 1.

4. Two days later the Student Association claimed 3000 demonstrators, « Trong một cuộc họp báo sôi nổi, Tổng hội sinh viên nhìn nhận có đập phá công trường chiến sĩ Pháp và 1 lần nữa phủ nhận việc ở Toà Đại sứ, đòi đoạn giao tịch thu tài sản Pháp » [In a lively press conference, the Student General Association recognized the attack on the French War Memorial but rejects again any responsibility in the sack of the embassy, and demands the breaking of diplomatic relations and the nationalisation of French property]. Dân chủ mới, 24/7/1964, p. 1.

able for the French embassy's looting. « We only take apart symbols », declared its president, « But later, we will use more civilized means to dismantle these shameful remains, because this statute does not represent the soldiers who fought for the independence of this country. »⁵ The President added three demands to this declaration: the severing of diplomatic relations with France, the nationalisation of all French property and the construction of a memorial dedicated to Vietnamese soldiers.⁶ A mysterious looting, a student march and demonstrators targeting French symbols in Saigon. All of these seemed to suggest that France was still important to Vietnamese political affairs despite its departure ten years before. What drove these attacks? Did they target only France? Why did the students' anger reach such a high level of violence?

French intelligence suspected members of the government cabinet to plot against his leader, General Nguyen Khanh.⁷ Bad relationships with Paris and the situation for a potentially disproportionate repression could have hurt on the international level the Prime minister who was already unpopular on the domestic front. But in practice, none of these possible developments happened. The sack of the embassy was most plausibly the result of a political plot. But this could not explain the scale and recurrence of the anti-French demonstrations in 1964. An in-depth look at the demonstrators is therefore needed to understand the nature of these events.

2. 1954-1964, Ten Years Resenting the French

2.1 The 1954 Northern Refugees

The Geneva Agreements did not only regroup Communist and non-Communist armed forces on each sides of the 17th parallel. It also offered the civilian population the right to join the zone of their choice during a transition period of 300 days. By the end of this

5. « Đoạn giao với Pháp » [A breaking of diplomatic relations]. Tự do, 22/7/1964, p. 4. « Tổng hội sinh viên lên tiếng » [The Student General Association takes action]. Thời Luận, 24/7/1964, p. 1.

6. « Đoạn giao với Pháp » [A breaking of diplomatic relations]. Tự do, 22/7/1964, p. 4.

7. SHAT/10T, 967, Rapport de l'Ambassade de France sur la situation politique au Vietnam en août 1964 au Ministre des affaires étrangères, 31 août 1964, , p. Q11. SHAT/10T, 973, Bulletin de renseignement du SDECE sur le Général Do Mau et la francophobie au Sud-Vietnam. Douglas Pike also suspects government officers to be responsible for the sack, Politics in South Vietnam, May 1968, Folder 01, Box 16, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 29 Apr. 2014. In his memoirs, Do Mau uses the passive form to refer to these demonstrations and thus occults any responsibility in the looting. Độ Mậu. 1993. Việt Nam máu lửa quê hương tôi [Vietnam, my homeland in fire], Westminster, NXB Văn Nghệ, p. 684.

regroupment, more than 900 000 Northerners of whom 500 000 were Catholics left the North for political, economic and religious reasons.⁸

The 1964 anti-French demonstrators came from this particular refugee group. While it is impossible to identify with certainty the culprits of the embassy's looting, the origin of the student demonstrators is however well known. The executive committee of the Association was composed of Northern refugees. Its president, Lê Hữu Bội, the secretary for external affairs, Lê Đình Điều and the head of the action committee Nguyễn Trọng Nho, all came from the North. Their anticommunism would only grow stronger over the years. The first of them would die in the battle of Hue in 1968, the second one would direct the domestic news of the Ministry of propaganda and amnesty (Bộ Dân Vận Chiêu Hồi) in 1972 and the last one would serve as a deputy at the National Assembly during 1967 and 1975.⁹

In addition to the students, a large crowd had demonstrated against French symbols and commemorated the tenth anniversary of the Geneva Agreements. According to the governmental information agency, a million had gathered at the official ceremony of the «Day of Shame» on the 19th of July 1964.¹⁰ Although this figure might well be exag-

8. The official figure of 928,152 migrants arrived in South Vietnam is found in Bùi Văn Lương. 1959. « The Role of Friendly Nations », in Richard W. Lindholm (ed.), Vietnam: The First Five Years, An International Symposium, East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, p:48-54 but for a discussion of those figures, see John Prados. « The Numbers Game: How Many Vietnamese Fled South in 1954? ». The VVA Veteran (The Official Voice of the Vietnam Veterans of America), 01-02/2005, and Đặng Phương Nghi. (2002). Về số người công giáo di cư từ Bắc và Nam sau hiệp định Genève [About the proportion of Catholics among the migrants leaving North to the South after the Geneva Agreements]. Visited on 15/09/2009, <http://vantuyen.net/index.php?view=story&subjectid=20311>. For the migrants' motivations for leaving North, see Peter Hansen. 2009. « The Virgin Heads South: Northern Catholic Refugees and their Clergy in South Vietnam, 1954-1964 », in Thomas David DuBois (ed.), Casting Faiths, Imperialism and the Transformation of Religion in East and Southeast Asia, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, p:129-153, Peter Hansen. « Bắc Di Cư: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954-1959 ». 2009. Journal of Vietnamese Studies, 4(3),173-211 and the historical analysis of Vietnamese Catholicism Nguyễn Quang Hưng. 2003. Katholizismus in Vietnam von 1954 bis 1975, Berlin, Logos-Verlag et Trần Tâm Tĩnh. 1978. Dieu et César, Les Catholiques dans l'histoire du Vietnam, Paris, Sud-Est Asie.

9. Lê Đình Điều. http://ducavn.nl/duca_files/TrangTuongNiem/LeDinhDieu.htm. Frank Mickadeit. « O.C.'s first Vietnamese judge retires ». Orange County Register, 25/9/2013.

10. « Cả triệu người tham dự mít tinh gồm đủ các mọi tôn giáo đoàn thể đảng phái » [One million of all religions, groups and political parties participates to the meeting]. Thời Luận, 21/7/1964, p. 1 et « Cuộc mít tinh vĩ đại nhân ngày Quốc hận, Một triệu người gồm đủ giới đã tham gia » [A spectacular meeting organised for the Day of

gerated, Thời Luận's special coverage reported that the organizers were surprised by the large attendance.¹¹ The government had perhaps enrolled civil servants from all its departments to form a cheerful audience the way it did in 1965,¹² but the massive participation suggests that part of the demonstrators came spontaneously. We know that Catholic refugees who had protested during 1964 against their discrimination were part of the crowd.¹³

Northern refugees had always protested against the injustice of the Geneva Agreements. Their lives were abruptly disrupted when their homeland came under Communist rule. Aside from Ngô Đình Diệm's propaganda, their determination to fight Communism and unite Vietnam emerged from their desire to return one day to their homeland. While some expressed at most nostalgia, others were ready to take up arms in order to avenge their exile. The most aggressive refugees were those who had already confronted Communists during the Indochina War.

Members of the nationalist parties craved revenge against those who ousted them from the leadership of the newly independent Vietnam. Numerous artists, journalists and intellectuals had also opted for the non-Communist South. Lastly, Catholics were strongly determined to fight the threat of communist propounded atheism. Their armed fight in the dioceses of Phat Diem and Bui Chu against the Viet Minh starting in 1949 led entire Catholic villages to flee in 1954.¹⁴ Amongst all, the most warlike refugees were «veterans» of the Indochina War.

Under the Ngô Đình Diệm regime, many of those «veterans» were set aside. But a large majority, overwhelmingly Catholic, became the backbone of the Republic and took over important positions in the military, the administration, the police and education. They shared with their President much more than the Catholic religion. They were committed

Shame, One million participants from all political horizons]. Dân chủ mới, 21/7/1964, p. 1.

11. « Biển người tràn ngập công trường Lam Sơn hét vang khẩu hiệu chống Cộng trung lập » [A sea of demonstrators floods the Lam Son Square and shouts slogans against Communism and Neutralism]. Thời Luận, 21/7/1964, p. 1.

12. An internal circular requested each department to mobilize 75% of the civil servants for the commemoration of the Day of Shame in 1975. TTLT2/PThT/Văn Hóa, 29.400, Tổ chức lễ kỷ niệm "Ngày quốc hận", 20/7/65, 32 tr, [The Organisation of the "Day of Shame", 20/7/65 p.32]

13. A Vietnamese doctoral thesis on Vietnamese Catholics' political activism claims that the Catholic refugees participated in the demonstrations of the tenth anniversary of their migration., Bùi Chí Thanh. 1968. Công giáo (hoạt động chính trị sau cách mạng 1.11.1963), Saigon, Ph.D. in Political Science, p. 89.

14. Trần Thị Liên. 1996. Les Catholiques vietnamiens pendant la guerre d'indépendance (1945-1954) entre la reconquête coloniale et la résistance communiste. Ph.D. (Histoire), Institut d'études politiques.

to fight Communism in order to achieve national unification. After their arrival in the South, those refugees were flooded by financial and material assistance from the government, its American ally and worldwide international charities. They also became the focal point of international media coverage on Vietnam. The story of their exodus from the North to the South and then from deprivation to self-help development was the perfect showcase for Saigon and Washington's nation-building initiatives against Communist expansion. This ensuing glorification on top of massive economic support convinced the refugees of their righteousness. They were the model citizen of «Free» Vietnam. They embodied Vietnam's nationalist fight for independence and unity. No other view than a united Vietnam devoid of Communist presence was thus conceivable. Blinded by the spotlight of international media focus, the veteran refugees of the Indochina War believed they had the monopoly on Vietnamese nationalism.

2.2. France, eternally sabotaging national unity

Refugees resented France for botchedly ending its colonial rule. Paris had unfulfilled its responsibility by neutralising a conflict opposing «the Free world» against Communism in 1954. To them, the Geneva Agreements was the «result of a Machiavellian plot of the Viet Cong and their colonialist associates aimed at dividing the country.»¹⁵ While Communists were the number one public enemy, France was also to blame for the partition of the country. Leaving a heavy legacy after its departure, the former Metropole was in part responsible for their exile and all its attendant sufferings and humiliations.

But refugees kept a grudge against France even after its departure. The former colonial power kept acting against the realization of a non-Communist Vietnam. Between 1954 and 1960, Paris implemented an ambiguous diplomacy. It formally recognised the Southern Vietnamese regime but at the same time, it also maintained economic and political ties with Hanoi. The war was over, Vietnam was decolonized but many aspects of the war had to be sorted out. French and North Vietnamese military officers met repeatedly in the Trung Gia Joint Military Commission for the exchange of captured equipment and prisoners. Jean Sainteny was sent to Hanoi as a Government Delegate. Even when France had to repatriate the Tonkinese workers sent in the Pacific possessions between 1923 and 1940, Paris chose to send them North, rather than to the Southern state. Many congressmen in Saigon protested: «The signature of this arrangement is a joint plot of the colonialists and the Viet Minh prepared in Hanoi and Nouméa; the French government who recognized Saigon as the only legal authority in Vietnam, cannot ratify this treaty and should either break off these agreements, or refuse to implement them», reported the French Ambassador in Saigon to the Quai d'Orsay.¹⁶ For many refugees,

15. « Lập trường: Hiệp Định Genève có giá trị gì? » [Editorial: How valid are the Geneva Agreements?]. Luyêñ Thép, 1/8/1957, p. 1.

16. SHAT/10T, 963, Rapport de l'Ambassade de France sur la situation politique au Vietnam en juin 1960 au Ministre des affaires étrangères, 30 juin 1960, , p. Q13.

French ambiguous diplomacy kept threatening the unity of Vietnam even years after the decolonization.

While Paris ambiguous diplomacy systematically bothered the refugees, Charles de Gaulle ascension and new international policy angered them even more. The General, now elected as President had a new take on the colonies of the late French empire, which had substantial implications for Vietnam. He had recognised the right of autodetermination of Algerians in the 1962 Evian Conference and ended the war. In line with an alternative path stepping aside American guidance and of open dialogue with Moscow and Beijing, he considered that Hanoi was the legitimate authority of an independent Vietnam and thus recommended the cease of fire of the armed conflict opposing North and South Vietnam. Those propositions of cease of fire irritated the refugees. According to the newspaper *Thoi Bao*, «the French initiatives for a neutralisation of South Vietnam, (...) are obviously an attempt to sabotage Western solidarity and commitment against Communism in Asia.»¹⁷ Only two days after Agence France Presse published the neutralization plan in three stages 1) cease of fire, 2) withdrawal of all foreign influence and 3) progressive unification, the Vietnam Press Agency responded on the 20th of January: «One might wonder on which grounds the French government tries to impose its political plan for the Vietnamese problem. Authorized circles recall that in 1954 France has failed to defend the freedom of the countries it protected... This time again, it will be at the expense of the Vietnamese people that France tries to make its come back in the Far East by colluding with the Communist regime of Beijing. This come back is nothing less than an outdated colonialism...»¹⁸ Without a doubt, refugees' wrath was targeting French calls for a neutralisation. But this proposal alone was not so threatening on its own. It became alarmingly dangerous because it fleshed out at the international level, an existing domestic trend towards neutralization.

3. Domestic calls for a neutralization

3.1 The persistence of a domestic front

France was not the sole impediment to the refugees's bid to create a united and non-Communist Vietnam. Their national ideal was perhaps approved by Ngô Đình Diệm and his American ally. But it had not won an unanimous support among the South Vietnamese population. While the sack of the embassy had the appearance of a purely anti-French demonstration, it cristallised around two separate threats coming from outside and within South Vietnam.

17. SHAT/10T, 966, Rapport de l'Ambassade de France sur la situation politique au Vietnam en décembre 1963 au Ministre des affaires étrangères, 31 décembre 1963, , p. P4.

18. SHAT/10T, 967, Rapport de l'Ambassade de France sur la situation politique au Vietnam en janvier 1964 au Ministre des affaires étrangères, 31 janvier 1963, , p.QI 2.

In fact, not everybody saw the Geneva Agreements as a catastrophe.¹⁹ Some even celebrated the cease of fire or imagined a definitive boundary at the 17th parallel, like in Korea. But for refugees, this delimitation was impossible. Their newspapers kept publishing news of the North and condemning the unnatural division of the country.²⁰ Their special issues for the lunar year displayed poems, songs and drawings dedicated to the lost homeland. Their entire journalistic community was mobilised for two goals: North would never disappear from memory and its liberation would never fade from the very first priority of the political agenda. The contours of their Vietnamese nation, imagined as sovereign community as Benedict Anderson put it,²¹ could not stop at the 17th parallel. The territory they kept reminding their readers was the one stretching from the tip of Ca Mau to the Northernmost military post of Nam Quan. Nothing else was even thinkable.

Besides, France was not the only one to call for an end of the conflict. Refugees knew it perfectly. Long before the calls of General de Gaulle, Dr. Phan Quang Dan suggested in 1957 to negotiate with the North.²² But he immediately ran into a wall of tenacious opposition. The government imposed administrative sanctions to the newspapers publishing those calls.²³ Refugees were not outdone. Luyen Thép, the journal published by the Diocese of Vinh in exile, took offense of the proposals were made by a man himself coming from the North and declared it was making propaganda for the adverse party.²⁴

19. The Movement for the Defense of Peace created in Saigon on the 1st of August 1954 and made public on the 10th of August gathered for example twenty six intellectuals, technicians and landowners from the South, CAOM/HCI/SPCE, 83, *Mouvement pour la défense de la paix*.

20. Most the periodicals published by the refugees had revealing titles: Hà Nội and Tin Bắc (News of the north), Hồn Quê (Soul of the Homeland).

21. Benedict O' G. Anderson. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, New York, Verso.

22. « Lập trường của Bác sĩ Phan Quang Đán: Hiệp định Geneve và tổng tuyển cử » [The opinion of Dr. Phan Quang Dan: The Geneva Agreements and the Referendum]. *Thời Luận*, 28/7/1957, p. 1. See also Nghiêm Xuân Thiện. « Hiệp thương và thống nhất » [Negotiations and Unification]. *Thời Luận*, 11/8/1957, p. 1 et Nghiêm Xuân Thiện. « Thống nhất là tranh thủ nhân dân » [The Unification is winning over the people]. *Thời Luận*, 18/8/1957, p. 1.

23. « Vụ xử án Thời Luận ngày thứ năm 3-10 vừa qua » [The Thoi Luan trial last Thursday 3/10]. *Thời Luận*, 6/10/1957, p. 1. The government imposed a fine of 100,000 piastre as recalled editor in chief Nghiêm Xuân Thiện. « Lời nói đầu của Nghiêm Xuân Thiện » [The Introduction of Nghiem Xuan Tien]. *Thời Luận*, 16/1/1964, p. 1.

24. Khai Minh. « Thử đặt lại trách nhiệm lịch sử trước vấn đề thống nhất lãnh thổ Việt Nam » [Let's discuss again our responsibility towards the unification of Vietnam's territory]. *Luyện Thép*, 15/7/1957, p. 3, Khai Minh. « Lập trường: Ý kiến chúng tôi về

It was not a coincidence if the journal which published the doctor's proposals got its 50 000 issues destroyed and its office ransacked from top to bottom.²⁵ Every time Hanoi proposed to establish cultural and economic relations as a first step towards the normalization between the North and the South, the refugees' press responded immediately.²⁶ The most extremists elements among them were even ready to come to blows.²⁷ By all means, refugees made sure nobody South of the 17th parallel could even think of such negotiations.

In 1960, when the Communist insurrection resumed in the countryside, this question resurfaced. Should South Vietnam fight it or strive for peace? Again the refugees' printed press attacked any sign of defeatism or neutralism: « Those tendencies form what can be called « a domestic front ». It is made of spies working for foreigners and those who voluntarily spread the seeds of division. »²⁸ In short, refugees never lowered their guard, not even under a political regime both sharing the same nationalist vision and repressing any dissidence. With or without the help of Ngô Đình Diệm, they fought anybody who stood in their way of the unification of Vietnam and the elimination of Communism.

2.2 1964, an opportunity for neutralisation

In 1964, the threat was even greater. The National Liberation Front controlled a large part of the countryside and Ngô Đình Diệm's assassination had plunged South Vietnam into total chaos as eight government cabinets failed to govern the country over nineteen months. The fall of the regime now allowed the emergence of many political voices

lập trường thống nhất của Báo Thời Luận và của KHối dân chủ đối lập » [Our opinion on the position of Thoi Luan and the Democratic Opposition Bloc on the question of unification]. Luyện Thép, 1/9/1957, p. 3.

25. Nghiêm Xuân Thiện. « Lời nói đầu của Nghiêm Xuân Thiện » [The introduction of Nghiêm Xuan Tien]. Thời Luận, 16/1/1964, p. 1.

26. See « Chung quanh đề nghị của Phạm Văn Đồng » [About Pham Van Dong's proposals]. Lửa sống, 2/8/1955, p. 1, « Không hiệp thương với Việt Cộng » [No Negotiation with the Viet Cong]. Dân Việt, 7/7/1956, pp. 38-39, « Nghiên cứu bản tuyên cáo của chính phủ Cộng Hòa Việt Nam » [An Analysis of the Republic of Vietnam's Declaration]. Tin Bắc: Tuần san trào phúng - văn hóa - xã hội, 10/5/1958, p. 1.

27. In 1956, the newspaper Tiên Thủ was ransacked by a horde of migrants when it proposed to negotiate with the North as reminded an article praising the refugees' combativity « Tóm tắt về đời sống và những hoạt động của đồng bào định cư » [A Summary of the Activism and Livelihoods of the Resettled Patriots]. Dân Việt, 25/4/1957, pp. 6-7.

28. SHAT/10T, 963, Rapport de l'Ambassade de France sur la situation politique au Vietnam en juin 1960 au Ministre des affaires étrangères, 30 juin 1960, pp. 49-50.

which were formerly repressed. They claimed the merits of the « 1963 Revolution » and attacked anything or anybody closely or loosely related to the former regime. Those advocates attacked the former regime's authoritarianism, its lack of transparency, its favoritism for Catholics and its indiscriminate repression of Buddhist monks and demonstrators. To the refugees, the greatest threat was not the emergence of this general unrest. It was the contestation of two pillar objectives of Ngô Đình Diệm's regime they also shared: the fight against Communism and the unification of Vietnam. The Northern refugees had to make sure that the 1963 Revolution would not flush away their national ideal together with the dogmas and abuses of the former regime.

While only isolated proposals had been made under Ngô Đình Diệm's regime, there was in 1964 a large trend opting for the neutralisation of the armed conflict. Many movements, such as those of Buddhist monk Thích Quang Liên desired to end the internecine war raging over Vietnam since 1945.²⁹ But in addition to those calls for a cease of fire, separatist movements also threatened the territorial integrity of South Vietnam. A Committee for the People Salvation in Hue was created in August 1963 demanding the political autonomy and the neutralisation of the conflict on its territory.³⁰ Accordingly, the Centre could serve as a buffer zone between the North and the South. But to the refugees this proposition was as dangerous as calls for the neutralization, if not more. If one day they had to reunite the country, the refugee's task would be in this case twice as much more work.

The 1964 demonstrations the refugees' carried out were made in reaction to these political developments. Their mobilisation did not only target France, but also the government and the South Vietnamese population so that the Geneva Agreements would not be forgotten. « The spirit of the Sleepless Night is one of cultural circles expressing their

29. Contrary to the idea that Vietnamese Buddhism was instrumentalised by Communism as claimed in Marguerite Higgins dans 1965. *Our Vietnam Nightmare*, New York, Harper & Row, ou Mark Moyar. « Political Monks: The Militant Buddhist Movements during the Vietnam War ». 2004. *Modern Asian Studies*, 38(4),749-794, Buddhist claims were nationalists, Edward Miller. « Religious Revival and the Politics of Nation Building: Re-interpreting the 1963 'Buddhist Crisis' in South Vietnam ». *Modern Asian Studies*, Available on CJO 2014 doi:10.1017/S0026749X12000935 or pacifist ambitions according to Robert J. Topmiller. 2006. *The Lotus Unleashed: The Buddhist Peace Movement in South Vietnam, 1964-1966*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky.

30. SHAT/10T, 967, Rapport de l'Ambassade de France sur la situation politique au Vietnam en août 1964 au Ministre des affaires étrangères, 31 août 1964, p. 16. Intelligence from the French Service for External Documentation and Counterespionage reported that those separatist movements were repeated during the 1966 elections. Buddhist monk Thích Tri Quang demanded the autonomy of Central Vietnam where the armed conflict against Communists would be neutralised and American economic aid replaced by France and Japan. SHAT/10T, 973, Bulletin de renseignement du SDECE sur les menaces de sécession du Centre-Vietnam.

confidence in the victory of the reason and the righteousness of weak people. The purpose of the Sleepless Night is to awaken oneself, one's comrades and other compatriots in the face of the insidious past and the threatening present experience of Communists and Colonialists plotting together»,³¹ declared the General Student Association. Its press conference two days after the sack of the Embassy recalled that students were ready to fight for the unification of their country. When a journalist asked why students avoided the conscription if they were determined to fight Communism, its President answered that their reluctance was explained by the unequal recruitment, «but that in the case of a March to the North, a general conscription would be declared and in such case, students would volunteer to form the front line.»³² A few days later, the War memorial was knocked down by students armed with ropes and stakes.³³ The General Association took this opportunity to reiterate its demands. It asked again for the breaking of diplomatic relations with France and the nationalisation of all its property. But in addition to this, it now demanded that the government start planning for a March to the North.³⁴ Even if the Committee could not represent all the members of the General Student Association, its message was very clear: it was determined to fight Communism and unite Vietnam. In the months following the anti-French demonstrations, the students continued to fight both separatist and neutralist threats. In addition to the General Association, an Inter-Faculty Student Force was also created. Its leader Nguyễn Phúc Liên, who was particularly close to the Bui Chu diocese drove the movement to fight the infiltration of the Committee for People Salvation within student circles in Hue.³⁵

Finally, students were not the only ones calling for the unification of the country. Dân Chủ Mới, a newspaper led by editor-in-chief Hà Thành Thọ, a Northern refugee journalist, published an article on the genesis of this national ideal: « From the very first days fighting the French, one remembers that the problem of unification was in no way less important than the question of independence. Because getting independence without territorial unity would be an incomplete one just as much as the independence of Tonkin

31. « Thông cáo của Tổng hội Sinh viên Saigon về cuộc tuần hành trong đêm không ngủ » [Proclamation of the Student General Association During the March of the Sleepless Night]. Tự do, 22/7/1964, p. 1.

32. « Đoạn giao với Pháp » [A breaking of Diplomatic Relations]. Tự do, 22/7/1964, p. 4.

33. « Đêm hôm qua 28-7, 1 nhóm sinh viên đập phá và kéo đổ 3 pho tượng đồng tại Công trường Chiến-sĩ Pháp » [Yesterday Night on teh 28/7, A Group of Student ransacked and Knocked Down the Three Bronze Statutes of the French War Memorial]. Dân chủ mới, 30/7/1964, p. 1

34. « Tuyên ngôn của Ủy ban Sinh viên Cách Mạng yêu cầu 7 điểm » [The Seven Points Declaration of the Revolutionary Student Committee]. Dân chủ mới, 30/7/1964, p. 1

35. Nguyễn Phúc Liên. Tóm tắt lý lịch [A summarised personal curriculum]. Visited on the 7/7/2014, <http://www.viettudan.net/36984/index.html>.

and Annam when France governed Cochinchina was superficial. (...) France changed its strategy and ceased to oppose to the territorial unity «if this was the wish of the Vietnamese people», but it transformed independence into a kind of autonomy (...). Our people protested continuously and was determined to shed its own blood in order to achieve a genuine independence and unity. (...) We face today difficult times but we have a young generation whose determination and ardor will bring a promising future to our nation.»³⁶ To refugees, the only possible nation was one united North to South.

Students or journalists, the refugees seized the tenth anniversary to remind the rest of the population that it was urgent to achieve their national ideal and to continue to the fight. Facing Communist insurgency and political instability, they reaffirmed forcefully their desire to unify the country. But without a repressive regime sharing exactly the same political ambitions, refugees had to rise up and possibly take up arms in order to defend their project of fighting Communism and uniting Vietnam. Between 1964 and 1966 and even after American intervention, the refugees never lowered their guard. While they faced the sometimes violent contestation of their opponents,³⁷ refugees gathered in many different organisations between 1964 and 1966. While some were based on Catholics communities, such as the Đại Đoàn Kết, others were more inclusive such as the Inter-Religious Front against Communism and Neutralism of Father Hoang Quynh.³⁸ Some were military, such as those of the Nung called the Association of the veterans in love with their nation,³⁹ while others were paramilitary such as the Hung Vuong Forces.⁴⁰ But whatever their common ground or operational feature, one single objective united them all: They all strived to unite Vietnam and free it from Communism.

36. Lê Hữa. « Đêm không ngủ » [The Sleepless Night]. Dân chủ mới, 24/7/1964, p. 3.

37. On the 21st of September 1964, the Committee for National Salvation sacked governmental offices and occupied the Hue radio station. On the 23rd of January 1965, it set the American Chamber of Information in Hue into fire.

38. TTLT2/PThT/An Ninh [Sécurité], 15.166, Tài liệu của Võ phòng về tình hình an ninh tại khu vực đồng bào công giáo tại Biên Hoà và Gia Định năm 1965, 5.1.65-4.6.65 94 tr. Tài liệu hạn chế, [Police Intelligence Documents on the Security in the Catholic areas of Bien Hoa and Gia Dinh in 1965, 5.1.65-4.6.65 94 p. Restricted Distribution].

39. TTLT2/PThT/An Ninh [Sécurité], 14.990, Hồ sơ v/v các cá nhân và đoàn thể xin thành lập các lực lượng chiến đấu chống cộng và việc tuyển dùng quân nhân giáo phái vào địa phương quân năm 1964 8.1.64-22.1.65 58 tr., Tài liệu hạn chế, [Folder on the persons and groups demanding the creation of anti-Communists forces and the enrolment of religious forces in the National Guard, 1964 58 p. Restricted Distribution].

40. TTLT2/UBLĐQG/, 569, Hồ sơ v/v hoạt động của các lực lượng năm 1965-1967 79 tr, [Folder on Paramilitary Activities].

Conclusion

The sack of the French embassy on the 20th of July 1964 needs to be analyzed with regards to the two neutralist trends affecting South Vietnam. At the international level, General de Gaulle's proposals staggered Western solidarity against Communism. Within South Vietnam, a neutralist trend had emerged since the assassination of Ngô Đình Diệm. The sack was symptom of a more profound crisis and the anti-French demonstrations during 1964 were the emerged tip of the iceberg. Refugees whose lives were abruptly disrupted by the Geneva Agreements were the most determined proponents of a territorial unification. The political vacuum left after the fall of the republic and the lack of a strong international response to Communist insurrections did not leave them indifferent. Refugees attacked not only French proposals but also threats of neutralisation and dismemberment of Vietnam coming from within the country. Those «veterans» of the Indochina War mobilised their forces to continue the fight against Communism and continue the nationalist struggle during the Vietnam War.