



**INDOCHINA
IN THE YEAR OF
THE GOAT - 1967**



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Dedicated to Professor Nguyễn Ngọc Bích (1937-2016)

Nguyen Ngoc Bich represented, by his commitment to speaking the truth, persistently but not by negative polemic, the best of his generation intellectuals. He spoke insistently for human rights in Viet Nam but also advocated exchanges between Viet Nam and the United States as a means for goal oriented dialogue on that and other subjects. During his tenure as Director of the Vietnamese Language Service at Radio Free Asia, Nguyen Ngoc Bich was appreciated for always



examining the facts of an event and assuring that critical reporting was not specious exaggeration. His occasional correctives with staff and an ever widening circle of friends was always delivered in a positively gentle manner.

Bich always advocated education for the greatest possible number of young people in any country. Based on his own experience he understood that education, and especially international study, opened minds to different ways of thinking about social, political, environments. Bich studied in American universities, but also broadened his perspective at Kyoto University.

More than just politically aware and sensitive to the circumstances of contemporary Viet Nam, Nguyen Ngoc Bich was a literary phenomenon. The translations developed with his wife are unmatched. Moreover, one particular feat will probably never be matched. Bich compiled a directory of "Nom", that centuries past form of writing Vietnamese by use of Chinese characters. . . a script that is no longer used but still present in some cultural and historical material.

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Introduction: Indochina in the Year of the Goat

As the Communists in the North were gearing up for the Tet Offensive in the year to follow, the American military command was beginning to implement its evolving “pacification” program, while trying to make its search and destroy tactics more effective. U.S. and Free World Forces grew significantly and Hanoi replaced its Viet Cong losses with NVA regulars.

Three interrelated tasks dominated American war policy: destroying the war-making capability of the North, including disrupting infiltration by ground and water; seeking and destroying Communist regular and VC forces inside South Vietnam; and neutralizing VC infrastructure inside the South, including hamlet security, pacification, and nation building.

Significant controversies over strategies continued. Strategies of limited war meant avoiding targets that might disturb China, its border, and Russia, its ships, and limiting harm to civilian populations in North and South, and prohibiting the use of ground forces in nominally neutral Laos and Cambodia.

There were conflicts over General Westmoreland’s appreciation of pacification v. those of General Abrams later. There were disputes over the accuracy of intelligence, e.g. about conservative body counts. There were disagreements about the enemy’s true strength on the battlefield (order of battle) made up of not only regular forces, but of the number and the actual battlefield effectiveness of irregular insurgent forces.

Issues of material such as the relative value of weapons, e.g. AK-47 v. M-16, sensors, quality of weapons provided to ARVN forces arose.

Search and destroy tactics aided by firepower and high mobility were effective in imposing heavy casualties of southern insurgents. Yet the enemy responded by Viet Cong losses by replacing them with regular forces from the north. Moreover, the enemy skillfully took the initiative at times and places of its own choosing. Losing on the battlefield communists turned to horrific terror in SV and propaganda worldwide including the use of friendlies inside the USA. To counter terror and propaganda, the allies increasingly turned to programs of pacification, counter insurgency identified as CORDS and Revolutionary Development.

President Johnson expended an extensive amount of diplomatic effort in pursuing nebulous “peace” feelers. Even his limited war of