Vietnam is Well, but that Angers Western Imperialism

Some fifteen years ago, when I lived in Hanoi, I used to come very often to the rooftop bar at the Meritus Hotel for an evening drink, just to feel gentle breeze and to spot ancient cargo boats majestically sailing on the surface of Red River. Sometimes the river could be clearly visible, but often it was covered by fog, like in an old Vietnamese painting.

There were villages on the horizon, consisting mainly of simple ‘tunnel’ houses, and I could also see few skyscrapers in the center of the city. Far below, the buildings on the shores of the ‘Little Lake’ were colorful, nostalgic and picturesque.

Hanoi was melancholic and poor, but it was what it was, and one would love it or hate it, but could never be indifferent to it.

It was also the capital of a socialist country, a proud country, which defeated both French and US imperialists. It was a symbol of resistance, a beacon of hope for many poor and struggling countries, and like in case of Cuba, a living proof that a determined and proud nation can dare, could stand up and win even against the mightiest and the most venomous enemies.

At some point, Meritus changed its name and its owner. It became Sofitel and just recently was converted again, this time to Pan Pacific. The rooftop bar survived. The skyscrapers grew all around the city. They now cover almost entire horizon; suddenly Hanoi has real skyline. You look at the distance, and what you see could have been anywhere else: in Shanghai or Dallas, Bangkok or Johannesburg... but only with half-closed eyes.

Enthusiastic Communist posters survived, or at least some of them. Others mutated and migrated to new huge modern digital billboards. They are shining into the night, and the images are constantly changing: Uncle ‘Ho’, pioneer children, workers and soldiers ready to defend their country.

“Is Vietnam still a Communist country?” I keep asking wherever I go, for years. I ask the same question in deep villages and major cities. It is because the answer seems to be essential to me. It is because so many millions of Vietnamese people died, fighting for their country and then trying to fulfill their dream of a social homeland.

Answers I receive I often evasive. For some reason, eyes of many are downcast.

“What happened, Vietnam?” I want to ask, but Vietnam is one great and long stretch of land following the seashore; it does not speak, it does not reply to rhetorical questions. Most of its people are free to speak, they are able to reply, but for some reason they don’t. Are they confused as much as I am?

More I feel that the answer should be positive and optimistic, more evasive replies I get. I keep thinking, why?

I never give up; never stop asking, because I feel that it is essential to know.

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A renowned artist George Burchett, son of a great Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett, was born in Vietnam and now, for several years he is living with his family in Hanoi. His love for this country is passionate and unconditional. He observes many changes occurring around him, and finds most of them positive: “Life in Vietnam is gradually improving. You can walk around Hanoi or drive throughout the countryside: there is no brutal misery here. People are optimistic. Life is improving.”

He also explains that after this year’s Vietnam Communist Party’s 12th National Congress, there is a path taken by the Politburo - in non-Western political direction.

Some people I speak to, as well as several analysts, have no doubt that after sacking of anti-Beijing and pro-market Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, the Communist Party of Vietnam has been adopting much friendlier policy towards China, while not abandoning its own form of socialism (should it be called ‘Socialism with Vietnam characteristics?’). However, after travelling for almost two weeks all over Central Vietnam, it is undeniable that the market forces are still playing very important role, often trying to dictate in which the country is developing.

“I like those huge cranes, construction sites and turbines”, I joke while walking through the Fine Arts Museum in Hanoi, where, on the second floor, some great works of Vietnamese socialist realism are exhibited.

“Yes, me too”, replies one of my pals sardonically. “But many of these cranes are now building shopping malls and luxury condominiums for the rich.”

I spent almost three years living in Vietnam, when it was still poor, between 2001 and 2003. Determination of the people to build much better country was truly admirable.

Every year I kept returning, travelling to virtually all corners of the nation. Vietnam was doubtlessly changing, but in many ways it was retaining its socialist spirit. Strong central planning under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam ensured that the evolution towards the mixed economy never turned to chaos and pro-market anarchy. Country’s spirit and patriotic symbolism was Marxist, but also with deep national roots.

Even as the new foreign companies were building their assembly lines here, the government was insuring that there would be no desperate and deplorable working conditions like those that have been prevailing in the Philippines, Indonesia or Cambodia. I visited several garment and apparel factories in the South: they were all clean, well ventilated, with medical posts, canteens and decent transportation for workers.

In the countryside, working and living conditions have been improving as well, often dramatically.

However, not unlike in many countries of Latin America, the Western propaganda operating through its own media outlets and through the local ‘blogs’ and social media began relentlessly attacking the Communist Party leadership and the entire political and social system of Vietnam.

Common strategy of destabilization (similar to that which used to target Eastern Europe during the Cold War and Latin America and China now) was determinately applied. Countless NGO’s and ‘human rights’ organizations got promptly involved. Many local intellectuals joined the ranks of the foreign critics; some of them began getting ‘funding’ and ‘sponsorship’ from foreign agencies, ‘cultural institutions’ and even governments.

Great achievements of the state were purposefully dwarfed, while such topics like corruption and social woes, got excessively highlighted. Entire ‘anti-establishment culture’ got designed, manufactured and unleashed. For educated urbanites, to support the Communist Party and the ‘system’ became thoroughly ‘uncool’, almost shameful.

Interaction with foreign tourists often didn’t lead to anything positive either.

In an ancient town of Hoi An, I encountered a hotel waitress, originally a village girl, who almost immediately after I sat down at a table, began, in her passable English, to recite long litany so beloved by many European travellers: how terribly tough are things in Vietnam, how high are school fees in her country (thorough nonsense, there are no school fees here, although there are, unfortunately, some ‘hidden costs’), and how desperate is the situation in local hospitals (in fact, the situation significantly improved in recent years, as I was told by several Vietnamese citizens). She then, in a well-trained manner, asked a question, which was supposed to please me: “How are things, the education and medical care, in your country?”

“We are always looking up at other countries, particularly at those in the West”, my long-time friend, a Vietnamese
administrator who is for many years working for the United Nations, told me. “We are rarely happy with what we have... or given. There is always something to complain about.”

She is correct. The question remains: who is actually manufacturing and promoting such mindsets? Working all over the world, I actually find this to be increasingly ‘stereotypical’ and ‘mass produced’, manufactured ‘in certain countries’; concretely ‘designed and manufactured’ in the West, and then implanted into the socialist countries, in Central and South America, in South Africa, China, Russia and increasingly in Vietnam.

To simplify things, I call such approach: ‘spreading of nihilism, pessimism, depression and cynicism’. Its main goal is to seed discontent, to vilify functioning socialist systems, to divide entire nations, undermine patriotism and finally, to grab demoralized nations for close to nothing.

I already described such ‘efforts’ in colorful details, in my 840-page book “Fighting Against Western Imperialism”.

On so many occasions, during my visits to the country, I met those Vietnamese citizens who are now increasingly rubbing shoulders with the ‘outside world’, as well as with those who out rightly sold out themselves for some mercantile crumbs like recognition, funding and jobs in the international companies and organizations

Such people should not be allowed to derail the country; they should be determinately stopped! Vietnamese people stood tall for decades. They fought and defied some of the mightiest enemies on earth – French colonialists and the US imperialists. They rebuilt their country literally from ashes. In the process, millions of lives were lost, but the nation finally managed to unite; it became as strong as steel, and prevailed against all odds.

If Vietnam now succumbs to foreign propaganda, sabotage and its own ‘5th column’, all that great sacrifice would have been made in vain.

In recent years and decades, some serious mistakes were made, but the country in marching forward, life is improving and prospects are bright. To deny it would be either a clear demonstration of ignorance, or of extremely hostile intentions. This ‘bottom-line’ should never be lost, never overlooked and never taken for granted!*

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