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Vietnam: On the defense and development of the country in the current situation

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Petition to the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the political bureau of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

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July 10, 2011 — We, the undersigned, respectfully send to your Excellencies this petition regarding the defense and development of the country in the current situation.

I. The independence, self-determination, and territorial integrity of the country are under serious threat

1. China claims 80% of the East Sea (Southeast Asia Sea) to be its property China, in the role of being “the manufacturing factory of the world” and the biggest money lender, aspires to become a world superpower. Under the cloak of “peaceful rise,” China is projecting its power in multiple forms to infiltrate and dominate other countries on all continents. A number of world analysts are of the opinion that China has surpassed all accomplishments of neo-colonialists after World War II.

More recently, China has seriously intensified its ambition to control and own the East Sea (the Southeast Asian Sea) through actions that violate international laws and the sovereign rights of the countries bordering it. China has unilaterally drawn a nine-line and dot, U-shaped border on the East Sea, also known as the “cow-tongue line,” that encompasses 80% of the East Sea surface area. China has repeatedly declared that it has indisputable sovereignty over everything within that cow-tongue line and has carried out illegal activities there within to affirm this claim in violation of international laws.

China is actively strengthening its naval forces, preparing to move in large oil extraction platforms, and carrying out military and non-military incursions into areas that are within the maritime territory of Southeast Asian countries. At the same time, China pursues actions aiming to create disunity among countries within ASEAN.

2. China has used military forces to occupy Vietnam’s territories in the East Sea and is prepared to do that again regarding the remaining Vietnam’s territories in the Spratly Islands

In the maritime area on which Vietnam has sovereignty and sovereign rights, China occupied by military actions in 1974 the Paracels that were at that time under the control of South Vietnam. In 1988, China took by force seven islets and rocks in the Spratlys that were also under the control of our country. Since then, China has regularly carried out actions to threaten and violate our maritime sovereign rights. For example, China has unilaterally imposed an annual fishing ban on the East Sea during which it chased away our fishing boats, arrested them, detained them, and/or confiscated their catches and properties for ransom. China has pressured foreign oil companies to not sign or to nullify contracts for oil exploration on the maritime economic zone of Vietnam. China has repeatedly sent Chinese Naval Surveillance Force vessels to carry out surveillances in the East Sea as if the sea belongs to its own. Only last month, Chinese ships deliberately cut the oil exploration cables of two Vietnamese ships—the BinhMinh02 and Viking II—while these ships were in operation within the Vietnamese exclusive economic zone. These are among a series of escalating actions by China that are designed to threaten and seriously encroach on Vietnamese maritime territory.

Vietnam's geography, geo-political, and economic position vis-a-vis the world today appears to be an obstacle to the Chinese ambition to expand southward on the way to become a world superpower. China has applied all covert and overt means, including military actions, to seduce, infiltrate, manipulate, threaten, and interfere with Vietnam's internal affairs in its design to weaken Vietnam and ultimately make us China's subordinate.

Vietnam has appeased and tried in multiple attempts to accommodate China in order to establish cooperative bilateral relations. However, to date, ***the more Vietnam tries to cooperate, the more aggressively China behaves.***

3. China has accomplished important steps in its plan to dominate Vietnam

Reviewing the China-Vietnam bilateral situation, we clearly observe that China has accomplished important steps in its strategic plan to dominate Vietnam. Below are some main observations:

Economically, Vietnam's import from China has increased dramatically, by 280% from 2006 to 2010. Since 2009, Vietnam's trade deficit with China has equaled the deficit with the rest of the world. Currently, we have to import from China 80% to 90% of the needed materials for our processing and service industries. This includes a significant volume of petroleum, electricity, and industrial inputs. One fifth of imports from China are consumer goods, and this does not include an equivalent amount that enters the country clandestinely from China.

Of particular concern is the fact that recently China has won as much as 90% of all engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) contracts in Vietnam in areas such as electric power plants, metal and nonmetallic refining facilities, chemical plants, and bauxite and titanium mining facilities. In contrast, China has imported from Vietnam agricultural products and raw minerals the extraction of which leaves behind environmental problems with long-term consequences. In addition, we have allowed China to rent industrial and forest land near the common border, and have been unable to control counterfeit money entering the country from China.

Our weak economy has been a fertile ground for China to infiltrate, control, and disrupt. And China has constructed huge dams upstream of our two largest rivers, causing consequences that we are not yet able to assess. Finally, we cannot ignore the fact that China has similarly infiltrated and controlled the economy and policies of our neighboring countries.

If China succeeds in its strategy to own the East Sea, Vietnam's routes to the world will be blocked.

Politically, given the fact that Chinese infiltration and control of our economy has taken place over a number of years and is being continued, we should wonder what has China done to Vietnam, and

to what extent has Chinese soft power influenced Vietnamese leaders? And to what extent has China been involved in the rampant corruption and social degradation in our society?

Our leaders have been too timid to make transparent the factual relationship between Vietnam and China for the Vietnamese people to be informed and to participate in seeking solutions. We, the people, are discontented and unable to comprehend our leaders' behavior. The Party and the Government seem to be confused and alienated from the populace. International friends are worried and hesitant to support Vietnam's just cause.

The Vietnamese leadership's conduct regarding Vietnam-China bilateral relations is reflected in the joint press release following the meeting between the Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the two countries. This press release, made public by the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry on 26 June 2011, contains vagueness that is unfathomable and gives rise to worries for many Vietnamese inside and outside of Vietnam. For example:

- The press release completely ignored the aggressive actions on the East Sea taken by China in violation of Vietnam's sovereignty and sovereign rights. Instead, it stated: "The two sides held that the relationship between Vietnam and China has developed in a healthy and stable manner, meeting the common aspirations and fundamental interests of the Vietnamese and Chinese people, and benefiting peace, stability and development in the region." If this sentence is aimed at describing the current bilateral relationship between the two countries, then it is not correct, contrary to reality, and therefore dangerous to Vietnam. What has happened is the opposite of the statement. The Vietnamese leaders should demand that the Chinese leaders honor the guidelines coined by themselves; namely the "16 Golden Words" (i.e., friendly neighborliness, comprehensive cooperation, long-lasting stability, and future-looking) and "Four Goods" (i.e., good neighbors, good friends, good comrades, and good partners). We should not irresponsibly join in the refrain of "the two sides underlined the need to persist on directing the Vietnam-China comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership to develop exactly in line with the motto of "16 Golden Words" and the spirit of "Four Goods."

- The press release further stated: "The two sides emphasized the necessity to actively implement the common perception of the two countries' leaders, peacefully solving the disputes at sea through negotiation and friendly economic activities". What is "common perception," which in Vietnamese should be correctly understood as "common agreement"? To date, the Vietnamese leaders have not made it clear. However, the Chinese side has interpreted the "common perception" to its favor. The Spokesman of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated on 29 June 2011, that "The Vietnam side should implement the common perception of the leaders of the two countries to solve the dispute at sea," and that "Both countries oppose the intervention regarding the South China Sea by countries outside the region." Chinese politicians and press have repeatedly stated the reason for the dangerous flare-ups in the East Sea is the provocative actions of Vietnam and other countries in the region. These statements sometimes added that Chinese public has been prepared and ready for a war to occupy the "series of pearls," the term China uses to refer to the islets and rocks in the Spratlys that are more than 1000 kilometers from the southernmost land point of China. The vagueness in the joint press release is favorable to China and detrimental to our country, including our relations with the third parties.

- The press release also stated: "[The two sides] stress the need to steer public opinions along the correct direction, avoiding comments and deeds that harm the friendship and trust among the people of the two countries." China has used this statement to pressure Vietnam to restrain public opinion in our country, while allowing the Chinese press to publish slanderous and anti-Vietnam articles. We need to affirm that public opinion is needed to interpret Chinese actions and public statements that slander Vietnam and its people. Public opinion should play a support role to

government political and diplomatic activities and should not be seen as “undermining the friendship and trust between the peoples of the two countries.” The Vietnamese people have the tradition and historic will, at all times, to sacrifice to maintain independence and to actively seek ways to build friendly relations with China. Vietnam has never attacked China, but has risen in arms to repulse China from its incursions and occupation in the past.

II. In the meantime, the nation is faced with multiple difficulties and risks

1. Our economy is in a state of under-development, with low quality, little effectiveness, and prolonged crises

Most of economic efforts during the past few years were focused on “putting out fires,” e.g., trying to getting the economy out of immediate difficulties such as inflation. Since 2007, inflation has been ongoing at two digits (except in 2009), and estimates for 2011 are also at the high two digits. While internal and external resources have been mobilized at a high level that is heretofore unseen, their economic effectiveness is low. Our ICOR index, which has an inverse relationship with investment effectiveness, has been highest ever, and is also the highest in the region. The import-export imbalance is high. Our budget deficit has crossed the alarm threshold (5% of GDP in accordance with international standards). Our economy continues to rely on poor infrastructures, resulting in low effectiveness and competitiveness. Our growth has been based mostly on investment and low-skill, inexpensive labor, as well as exploitation of natural resources to the point of exhaustion. Our natural environment has been gravely damaged. The disparity between rich and poor is widening, and the distribution of income has become more and more unjust. Injustices in the distribution and accumulation of assets, land lease and use, implementation of laws, and formation of new power groups and monopolies are major issues that run contrary to the nation’s goal of building “a well-to-do citizenry, a strong country, and a society that is democratic, just, and civilized.” The ultimate result is a situation where the nominal income per capita has increased but the quality of life has decreased in multiple facets, including increased human insecurity and worsened quality of life for peasants and the majority of workers and salary earners.

2. Vietnam is experiencing worsened cultural and social conditions

New values and progressive values cannot keep up with national development needs nor can they overcome unbecoming conditions and antiquated social behavior. Social justice is seriously compromised. People, the most valuable national asset, are not truly liberated.

Of the many areas of concern that need to be addressed is the state of national education. Our educational system is backwards in many aspects compared to other nations in the region, in spite of the fact that we have one of the region’s highest share of income expensed on education (from both the viewpoint of the nation and of the individual).

Our educational curricula, management, teaching and learning processes are quite backwards, sometimes even erroneous. We have a relatively high percentage of population with a general education, and the percentage of academic diplomas at every level attained by the citizenry is relatively high compared to countries at an equivalent level of income. However, in reality, the quality of human resources and the effectiveness of our labor are lower than those of many other countries—far lower than what is needed to lift the nation to modern time. The fundamental reason is that the national educational system in the existing socio-political system does not aim at developing free and creative citizens who are empowered to be leaders. It is an education system that aims at developing people who race for trophies and quantities irrespective of value.

Our people recognize and condemn the tolerance of falsehood and degradation in the national cultural and spiritual life. These poor social conditions, coupled with rampant corruption, create new types of injustices that eat into our traditional values. The absence of transparency in all aspects of life is fertile ground for corruption and negative values. This reality has become a serious barrier to the development of a healthy and civilized society, and has created an environment of lawlessness that is conducive to mediocrity in the political system.

3. The political system is rampant with contradictions and is a barrier to the national development

The current national economic, cultural, and social conditions clearly reflect increased contradictions within and degradation of our socio-political system and government. Faced with urgent needs, it is necessary to transform the structure of our national economy and to implement an economic model that focuses on quality rather quantity.

Modern times require changes in the political system that erases barriers to renovation and economic development and promote the full and effective use of all resources. While the need for political changes has been raised by the leadership, goals, plans, and methods have not been devised for implementation. We are particularly concerned with increasing corruption in the administrative and political system; and with the dubious behavior and unethical conduct of government personnel and party cadres.

This system has been increasing in size, thus aggravating further the scale of contradiction and corruption, causing ever increasing losses for the nation. This situation, coupled with errors in organization and personnel deployment, renders ineffective efforts to renovate the political system in spite of much cost and effort. Many projects are for show, with falsities in both format and content. Democracy continues to be seriously violated. Running for and election to offices of power have not been accorded true democracy. Many citizens' rights that are spelled out in the Constitution are not allowed nor protected in daily life; of these, are the rights to free speech, free access to information, freedom to establish groups, and freedom to demonstrate.

We can state that our nation is faced with the contradiction between the people's desire to live in a country that is "peaceful, unified, independent, democratic, and prosperous" on the one hand, and a political system that is more and more degraded and ineffective, on the other hand. This contradiction becomes more and more dangerous to the future of the nation as we face the threat from China in its design to infiltrate Vietnam.

Geographically we cannot move our country to another location far from China. Realities force us to take a turn that is decisive to our nation's future. Being a neighbor to ambitious China that is on the way to become a world superpower, Vietnam needs to sustainably protect our independence and sovereignty; to command respect from China; and to develop a bilateral relationship that is truly for peace, friendship, cooperation and development. This objective is very critical on numerous fronts, including the protection of our islands, special economic zones, and sea and sky in the East Sea in the face of Chinese claims that have become more and more ominous.

China has conducted direct military attacks and is preparing more attacks. The most dangerous front in which China has concentrated power and influence is the infiltration and/or disruption of our economic, political, and cultural life. On this front, China carries out threats and inducements at the same time, in the name of the mutual safeguard of socialism, in order to sow division between our people and our political system. It infiltrates our leadership, weakens our national unity, and lessens our capability to maintain our national security and defense. If it defeats us on this front, China will defeat us on all fronts.

We are now in a new situation in international relations as China rises to become a superpower with plans and actions that sometimes ignore international laws, conventions, and stability. Most countries in the world, with perhaps the exception of China, want Vietnam to be independent, self-governing, prosperous, and developed, with the ability to contribute to peace and stability in the region. They want Vietnam to have friendly and cooperative relations with its neighbors and the world, and to pursue mutual peace and prosperity. This new world attitude towards Vietnam is a tremendous opportunity for our country to deploy resources that have heretofore been neglected, in order to lift the nation to a position it deserves in the community of nations. To seize this opportunity and avoid the risk of isolation, the Vietnamese people and its leaders need to become involved in the struggle to preserve values that constitute the foundation of a progressive world; that is peace, democracy, freedom, protection of human rights, and protection of the environment.

III. Our petition

With the above, we earnestly present the following petition to the Congress and the Politbureau of the Vietnamese Communist Party:

1. Make transparent before the Vietnamese people and the world community the real relationship between China and Vietnam

Provide facts and reasons to support Vietnam's sovereignty over the islands and exclusive economic zones in the East Sea in a manner that is convincing and compliant with international laws. Affirm consistently our goodwill regarding building and preserving friendly and cooperative relations with China. State unequivocally our resolve to protect our independence, sovereignty, and integrity of our land and water. Explain the background, content, and legal validity of the message that North Vietnam's Premier Pham Van Dong sent to China's Premier Chu An Lai in 1958 regarding the East Sea, in order to conclusively do away with intentional misinterpretation by China.

We must make a distinction between a power group within the Chinese government that harbors unethical and illegal plans and actions against Vietnam, and the friendly attitude of the majority of Chinese people toward the Vietnamese people. We should be ever ready to be friends and trusted partners of all nations. We should have particular respect for friendly and cooperative relations with nations in Southeast Asia, major nations, and all nations who are concerned with the peaceful resolution of the competing claims in the East Sea.

2. Inform the Vietnamese people of today's national reality

Inform the people of risks to the future of the nation. Seek unity. Assemble spiritual, mental, and physical resources to develop and protect the country. Renovate comprehensively the education and economic systems. Raise the people's levels of consciousness, unity, and well being that are required for the protection and development of the country.

In order to do so, we need to overcome the misdirection of the national educational and economic systems caused by ideological fundamentalism. Political reforms, therefore, are a precondition for all other reforms.

3. Implement by all means citizen's rights regarding freedom and democracy that have been defined by the Constitution

Liberate and promote people's desire and efforts to build and protect the nation. Take advantage of new opportunities. Respond to the challenges and needs of today's world.

In the process of implementing the rights to freedom and democracy that are spelled out in the Constitution, it is necessary to seriously implement the rights to free speech, free publication, free expression of political views by peaceful demonstrations, free association, and transparency in all national activities.

4. Call upon all citizens, Vietnamese inside and outside of Vietnam, to support the task of collaboration, cooperation, conflict resolution, and unity

This is to be done in the spirit of reconciliation and compassion, without any distinction as to political belief, religion, ethnicity, and social positions. All citizens shall close the page on our past differences in the interest of the national good. All citizens shall have the common goal of building and protecting the nation with all of our hearts, minds, and creativity.

5. Leaders of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the only power that exists in Vietnam, shall be totally responsible for today's national condition

They shall commit to the national interest above all others. They shall carry the flag of democracy to push for political reforms and the liberation of the people's potential for the task of nation building and protection. They shall push back on corruption and social degradation. They shall bring the country out of today's weaknesses and dependencies. They shall lead the nation to sustainable development. They shall lead the nation to walk side by side with the progressive world in the interest of peace, freedom, democracy, human rights, and environmental protection.

Finally, we earnestly invite our compatriots, inside and outside of Vietnam, to support and sign this petition. By doing so with factual deeds, we Vietnamese will have demonstrated our iron will to arrest and push back plans and actions that infringe on Vietnam's independence, self-determination, and sovereignty. By doing so, we are resolved to eradicate injustice, poverty, and backwardness in our country. By doing so, we are building and preserving the nation, and we are upholding the Vietnamese tradition of standing up for our independence. By doing so, we will be proud to stand before the people of the world and our children and grandchildren.

Seizing the opportunity to lead our nation out of danger and to build a sustainable society in peace is the sacred responsibility of all of us, the Vietnamese.

Made in Hanoi, July 10, 2011

[Signatures at <http://boxitvn.blogspot.com/2011/07/toan-van-ban-kien-nghi-ve-bao-ve-va.html>.] [More than 2.000 to date]

P.S.

* <http://boxitvn.blogspot.com/2011/07/toan-van-ban-kien-nghi-ve-bao-ve-va.html>