

Address of Vice Admiral Ann Rondeau
President of the United States National Defense University
to
National Defense Academy of Vietnam,
Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam
April 6, 2011

To begin, I want to thank my host, Commandant Lieutenant General Vo Tien Trung, for this opportunity to address faculty/students/staff of the Vietnamese National Defense Academy.

My visit is another component of President Obama's policy toward Vietnam and more broadly, the Asia-Pacific region. The President's visits and the active participation of the Secretaries of State and Defense in the region's evolving multilateral organizations speak to the importance of the United States attaches to this part of the world.

As Secretary of Defense Gates has made clear, the United States is a "resident [Asia-Pacific] power" with enduring economic, political and security interests going back over two centuries. As an officer in the United States Navy, I take great pride in the fact that our first contact with Asia began when the Empress of China left New York Harbor on February 22, 1784 bound for the Orient, arriving in Macao on August 23, 1784.

Our interest in Vietnam dates back almost as far. In 1776, Thomas Jefferson was the first American to show interest in

Vietnam – he was specifically looking for Vietnamese water-paddy seeds to plant at his farm in Virginia 200 years ago.

My presence today is a continuation, in spirit, of that very practical sense that this is a relationship capable of teaching both sides a good deal, a relationship that has a very positive potential.

The development of a relationship between our National Defense University and Vietnam's National Defense Academy is the result of a process going back several years. The subject was first raised during the visit of a National Defense Academy delegation to Washington in 2003 and again during the visit to Vietnam of then Assistant Secretary of Defense Rodman in 2005.

Vietnam has been building its national resilience, as well as regional capabilities, through the contributions of Dr. Nguyen Huu Ninh, a Nobel Laureate and member of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change. The faculty at the National Defense University has had the privilege to work with Dr. Ninh on these efforts.

As President of the National Defense University, I became personally involved in November 2009, when I met with Lieutenant General Hoat, then Commandant of the National Defense Academy, at the ASEAN Regional Forum Heads of Defense Universities meeting in Bangkok. We discussed then how to build contacts between our universities.

Much of the momentum for these meetings and the agreements that sprung from them derived from Minister of Defense Thanh's December 2009 visit to Fort McNair. During that meeting, we discussed how to organize the relationship so that it can endure and grow in the coming years.

I am here today because of the gracious invitation by Minister Thanh to visit Vietnam, and the continued interest of senior Vietnamese military officials in developing relations between our two centers for national defense studies that prompted your National Defense Academy Commandant and Vice Minister Vinh to reiterate the need for me to make this trip.

And I am here because of the very positive, warm and fruitful discussions I experienced in my meeting with Commandant Trung last November in Washington.

My visit here and my meetings with a wide range of Vietnamese strategic analysts, defense and foreign ministry officials underscore my personal as well as professional interest in working with you to nurture a mutually beneficial and productive relationship and to shape a strategic dialogue between our two institutions.

In fact, this dialogue is already taking shape.

During my meeting with Commandant Trung last November, he talked about a Vietnamese proposal to create an ASEAN Institute for International Security Study, which would allow members of the ASEAN Regional Forum to cooperate more

closely on non-traditional security challenges and encourage information-sharing among regional academic institutions.

Commandant Trung thought these steps would make a lasting contribution to regional academic cooperation but acknowledged the task would be challenging, given the many cultural differences across the region. I agree with his assessment. And I would like my University to find ways to cooperate with this Academy to realize your Commandant's proposal.

But I also see the opportunity he envisioned and believe his ideas could provide the basis for a first National Defense University-National Defense Academy project. We at the National Defense University want to support the National Defense Academy as it works to develop a concept for this new ASEAN institution.

I want to engage our experts and resources to work bilaterally with you on this proposal to see if the National Defense University could help accelerate the formative process. India and Korea have also expressed interest in developing similar regional institutes, and there may be a way to gain some momentum by working with other interested parties within the ASEAN Regional Forum Heads of Defense Universities organization.

And, in the context of Commandant Trung's proposal to create an ASEAN Institute for International Security Study to promote cooperation on non-traditional security threats, I want to advance the proposition that we can do this by recognizing that we, as militaries, do not have all the answers. We can bring

discipline and planning skills to the table, but others, such as other government ministries, international organizations, volunteer NGO groups and even private sector corporations have extensive knowledge in specific areas of humanitarian assistance and capacity building. Admiral Mullen referred to his in his forward to the U.S. National Military Strategy, when he emphasized the importance of “Whole of Nation” approaches.

But before addressing a proposed strategic alliance between our two institutions, I want to give you some understanding of United States National Defense University, our history and mission. 35 years ago, we came into being in order to forge an alliance between two pre-existing institutions: the National War College and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. These institutions had different missions but shared an interest in developing leaders with critical thinking skills. The new National Defense University, enabled opportunities for the two Colleges to exchange curriculum ideas, share faculty development programs, exchange publications, and collaborate in research.

Initially, we were focused on operating in a “joint” national security environment. Most of our students, (80%) were military. Today, we operate in a world that requires a whole-of-nation approach. By that, I mean our military power is most effective when employed in concert with other elements of national power as part of whole-of-nation approach. Today, more than half of our students are US military, the rest are from other government agencies, foreign militaries and agencies, and a few from private industry.

Our mission is to develop leaders with the critical thinking skills that will allow them to deal with the complex, dynamic, and uncertain national security environment we are now facing.. The National Defense University has two foundational principles to promote critical thinking and the necessary free exchange of ideas: Academic freedom and non-attribution, which allow for academic freedom. To spur critical thinking and rigorous analysis, we assure guest speakers, faculty and students that nothing they say will be attributed to them without their express consent. Thus a student, in the classroom, may freely criticize government policy without being concerned that the remarks would be reported to anyone.

Non-attribution and Academic Freedom also enable National Defense University' educational philosophy: to promote our students intellectual development through exposure to different perspectives in the classroom.

One of the most important perspectives to us is the international perspective. We are thrilled that next year we will have the opportunity to hear the perspective of a Vietnamese officer in our classroom. We also hope that Senior Colonel Ha Thanh Chung is the first of many to attend National Defense University.

Senior Colonel Ha Thanh Chung will be studying at the National War College, which focuses on developing national security policy. We also have four other Colleges where students from Vietnam would be welcome: The College of International Security Affairs, which emphasizes counter-terrorism; the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, which stresses

resourcing national security; the Information Resources Management College, which highlights the role of technology, and our Joint Forces Staff College, which is well known for its ability to educate planners at all levels.

Now to turn to the purpose of my visit here: our University was created out of the need for alliances. Our alliances have expanded, and today our two countries would benefit from our two academic institutions collaborating. Here are additional steps we can take now on the road to a formal and proper relationship between our institutions.

- To begin, we want to work with you through the process of nominating candidates to all of our five Colleges.
- Our two institutions should begin to plan a first meeting between our staffs responsible for teaching, research, curricula development, international outreach, publication and production for the purposes of “information exchange.”
- We should have a discussion about conducting joint strategic studies. Thus, our academies could draw on their special skills, capabilities and academic expertise to develop the basis for continuous communication on research, writing, and production of studies and the sharing of information.
- Our institutions should look at a range of interactions including faculty exchanges and student fellowships.

- At this stage, the National Defense University is looking for ways to establish formal contacts to serve as active and responsive conduits for communication between our two institutions. We should establish a Point of Contact relationship between our institutions and designate officials to manage it. The two representatives would exchange information about programs, developments, university policies, and university relations with foreign counterpart institutions.
- We also looking to develop informal communications between Vietnamese and American national defense scholars, who are interested in comparing notes, sharing publications, cultivating personal relationships, and developing the momentum for a continuous dialogue between teachers and between researchers. In this context, we would like to get your agreement to a regular exchange of publications. There must be clarity about this being a two-way street. We would expect to receive the occasional papers and other scholarly works published by your institution's experts.
- As we have said to Deputy Minister Vinh, we'd expect reciprocity – and we look forward to working with you to place a U.S. military officer or a civilian academic from the National Defense University in your Academy.
- We would also like to get agreement to support the visits of working-level study group delegations to Vietnam in exchange for our continued willingness to host delegations representing your institution. Such visits would involve a tour and briefing on our respective institutions, a meeting with representatives of the appropriate research organizations and directorates,

representational events, and the opportunities to discuss issues of substance and global/regional developments of mutual interest.

I want to conclude by emphasizing that the United States and Vietnam have a shared commitment to regional stability and prosperity, and common approaches to the region's transnational issues. We are working to develop a greater appreciation and understanding of each other, and our growing cooperation is based on mutual trust, transparency, and respect for each other's sovereignty.

Last year marked the 15th Anniversary of the normalization of U.S.-Vietnam relations. This provided us with a great opportunity to recognize the great strides we have made in our relations over this relatively short period. Our engagement first began with positive, focused POW/MIA accounting cooperation. Today, we have an expanded relationship in a broad range of areas, to include defense, some of which include the agreement to work together on peacekeeping training, cooperation in search and rescue, our growing engagement on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, positive cooperation in accounting for our missing from the war, and an expanding professional military education program.

To some, this progress in the bilateral defense relationship seems hard to believe given the complicated history we share. And, yet, we continue to see a positive trajectory in our defense engagement, especially as we push forward to define a partnership that furthers our shared goals in the region.

In this spirit, our National Defense University is committed to taking the steps necessary to sustain Vietnamese interest in an enduring relationship – in our view this is aligned with the U.S. commitment to enhancing defense relations with Vietnam. As my colleagues and I move forward with formalizing the relationship between defense research institutions, I see our primary objective to be adding strategic depth to this positive and growing bilateral defense relationship and I am committed to achieving this goal.

Finally, I am pleased to be able to congratulate your Commandant, General Trung, my host, on his election to the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party. This is a singularly important moment for him and for this school, one which underscores the strategic importance of this academy, and emphasizes its role in defense engagement. We look forward to an enduring relationship based on trust, transparency, and mutually advantageous, practical bilateral cooperation.

END OF SPEECH