Friends of Vietnam

by

*Eyes Right*

**Washington, D.C. –** On January 21, the day following President Trump’s second Presidential inauguration, I saw a full-page ad in *The Washington Times* paid for by “The Friends of Vietnam.” The headline read, “Trump Ushers in a New Era Positioning Vietnam as a Global Ally.” Beneath the headline was a large color photo of President Trump speaking at a press conference in Vietnam in November 2017 during his first term. The remainder of the ad consisted of three columns of text with four paragraph headlines in bold print with such promising words as “Vietnam’s Determination for Progress” and “Vietnam’s Goodwill Towards the United States.”

Upon reading the entire article, my question was “Who is the group who paid for this” followed by “Why??”

The website at the bottom of the page (in small print) was thefriendsofvietnam.org. I put it into my browser but nothing came up. When I googled “the friends of Vietnam” there were no direct hits, but I did find friendsofvietnam.org (note that “the” is missing) which is the website for Friends of Vietnam Ministries, an American 501c3 non-profit which “provides financial and ministerial support for faith-based organizations within Vietnam.” Operating out of Highlands Ranch, Colorado, its website appears to be focused primarily on supporting several faith-based orphanages and child-support centers within Vietnam. All the photos are of Vietnamese children.

This website stands in stark contrast to the content of the Washington Times ad which seems focused on strengthening economic and strategic relationships between Vietnam and the U.S. Specifically, it states, “By fostering deeper political and strategic collaboration, the U.S. and Vietnam can jointly address transnational challenges, ensuring peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.” These words do not appear to me to be related to orphanages.

It seems that the real purpose of the ad can be identified in one of the middle paragraphs which begins, “Vietnam has solidified its position as a natural and strategic alternative to China as a manufacturing hub.” It goes on to state that Vietnam is a promising destination for American investment in high-tech, energy, and tourism because “Vietnam boasts political stability, domestic security, and a predictable foreign policy.” The article touts the recent restart of Vietnam’s first nuclear power project and the completion of a 500 kV power line project.

Nowhere is there a mention that Vietnam’s government remains communist but defines “the new leadership” of General Secretary To Lam and Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh as reflecting a vision of progress and modernization that “aligns with global trends.”

I last visited Vietnam in 2016. I found the country to be very hospitable and forgiving for what they term “The American War.” Along with a buddy who had served with American forces during this war, we drank with former enemy soldiers, both Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army veterans. Although capitalism was firmly established and visibly thriving with new skyscrapers in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) matching any in the U.S., there was no doubt that the country was being run by communists headquartered in Hanoi. Our tour guide, for example, felt that he was often under surveillance by authorities. What also was certain was a deep distrust of China due to a long history of invasions and subjugation by their larger neighbor to the north. This article emphatically states “Vietnam’s broader foreign policy goals include ensuring freedom of navigation in contested waters, particularly in the South China Sea.”

Although it seems impossible to know who actually developed and paid for this full-page ad, it is obvious to me that the Vietnamese government is anxious to cozy up to the U.S. in general, and President Trump, in particular, to serve as a hedge against Chinese military intervention in Vietnam.

The old adage, *The Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend*, comes to mind.

I thought you might like to know.

E-R