

Hanoi Hillary's Mekong Initiative

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton just set a new record with her recent jet-setting jaunt to France, Afghanistan, Japan, Mongolia, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Egypt, and Israel. The 13-day globe-trotting excursion (July 5-17) put the number of countries she has traveled to at 102, well beyond the previous record of 98, held by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

There are matters for genuine concern regarding just about every stop on Secretary Clinton's just-finished itinerary, not the least of which is the Obama administration's

penchant for dispersing our debt-laden nation's nonexistent wealth to virtually every other country, in the form of foreign aid, loans, and corporate welfare subsidies. We will focus here on a particularly troubling leg of her journey, her three stops in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, to promote the administration's Lower Mekong Initiative, a vast enterprise to develop all of these nations into prosperous modern states.

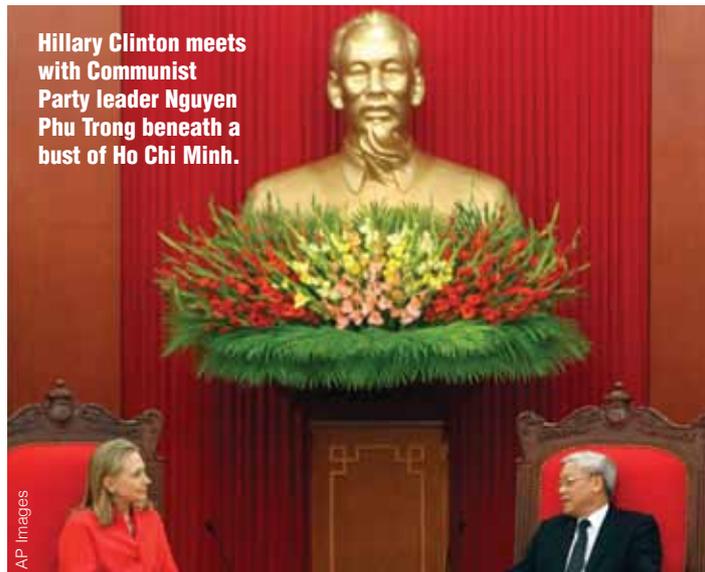
Since Southeast Asia does not dominate the headlines it did during the 1960s and '70s, many Americans seem to be unaware that these countries are still communist dictatorships, with some of the worst human rights violations in the world. Our State Department's policy of showering these regimes with money, technology, and diplomatic honors does little to help the people of the region, but does further cement the power of the ruling Communist Party authorities.

If it had been "Hanoi Jane" Fonda who had landed in Hanoi on July 10 for meetings and photo ops with the top Vietnamese leadership, we can be sure that there would have been a significant outcry. By way of contrast, Hillary Clinton's pilgrimage evoked very little protest or comment, though by virtue of her office she can do far more lasting damage.

Vietnam's abysmal human rights record is documented in Secretary Clinton's own State Department publication, "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2011 — Vietnam."

Although the report did its best to soft-pedal Vietnam's abuses, it nevertheless reported, "The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is an authoritarian state ruled by a single party, the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV).... The most recent National Assembly elections, held in May, were neither free nor fair, since the CPV's Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF), an umbrella group that monitors the country's mass organizations, vetted all candidates."

It also noted that the communist authorities own and con-



Hillary Clinton meets with Communist Party leader Nguyen Phu Trong beneath a bust of Ho Chi Minh.

AP Images

trol "all print, broadcast, and electronic media," as well as all Internet service providers. Censorship is rigid and harshly enforced. Religious persecution is widespread and brutal.

On July 10, following a meeting with Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh in Hanoi, Secretary Clinton told a press gathering: "I also raised concerns about human rights, including the continued detention of activists, lawyers, and bloggers, for the peaceful expression of opinions and ideas.... The Foreign Minister and I agreed to keep

talking candidly and to keep expanding our partnership."

Two years earlier, on July 22, 2010, after meeting with Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem, Clinton made the same claim about "candid" talks concerning human rights. However, the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights reported in September 2010 that conditions had worsened. The re-arrest last year of Father Nguyen Van Ly, an elderly Roman Catholic priest who has suffered several strokes and other ailments due to more than 15 years of harsh prison treatment, is but one example of the "reform" that Hillary's "candid" talks have yielded. Another is the arrest of Dr. Nguyen Quoc Quan, a U.S. citizen, who has been imprisoned since his arrival at Tan Son Nhat International Airport in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) on April 17, 2012. Did she even bring up Dr. Quan's plight with her hosts? She certainly did not make it a public issue, nor did she publicly meet with persecuted dissidents or notable victims of state oppression.

It was more of the same in Laos and Cambodia. Hun Sen, the former Khmer Rouge communist commander who participated in the genocide of his own people (more than two million murdered) continues his 27-year iron-fisted rule as leader of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP). Clinton met with Hun Sen and discussed canceling the \$400 million debt Cambodia owes to the United States — even while she spoke approvingly of the \$75 million annually in foreign aid the United States gives the CPP regime.

According to Voice of America, Clinton led "the largest-ever delegation of U.S. business to Cambodia as part of an investment forum.... Participating firms include Boeing, Chevron, Coca-Cola, FedEx, Ford, General Electric, and Proctor and Gamble." The Obama administration is in the process of building the Mekong region into a smaller version of China that would strip more jobs, manufacturing, and technology from the United States, while rewarding the region's Big Brother totalitarianism. ■