THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ROLE IN THE ORIGIN,

DIRECTION, AND SUPPORT OF THE WAR

IN SOUTH VIETNAM

(ORIGINAL DRAFT OF STATE DEPARTMENT STUDY)
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PREFACE

This study sets forth the evidence as reflected primarily in captured Vietnamese Communist documents and in the interrogations of Communist defectors and prisoners of war showing the extent and depth of Hanoi's role in originating, directing, and supporting the present conflict in South Vietnam.

During the past two years, the number of enemy documents captured by allied forces in the course of operations against Communist headquarters and bases in South Vietnam has greatly increased. The number of prisoners and defectors from Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units has also grown substantially and the resulting interrogations have provided considerable information substantiating and supplementing that in the documents.

With the use of these sources, it is now possible to reconstruct the North Vietnamese role in the war with greater detail. Hanoi's strategy between the 1954 Geneva Agreements and the 1959 decision to launch a full-scale military effort against the Saigon government, for example, can be depicted reasonably well, even though the evidence -- based primarily on captured documents, the public statements of Vietnamese Communist leaders, and reports from the U.S. mission in Saigon -- is still indirect and fragmentary.

The evidence of Hanoi's control and direction of the war after 1960 is more direct since it is now based not only on a substantial number of captured enemy documents, but also on the statements of numerous prisoners and defectors. In so far as Hanoi's physical support of the war in the form of men and material infiltrated to South Vietnam, the evidence for the period from 1960 to 1963 is now very substantial and makes an incontrovertible intelligence case. The evidence has mounted to massive proportions for the years after 1963, as Hanoi poured men and arms into the South. We believe the case for these years is so strong as to be unassailable even among the general public.
SUMMARY

Hanoi's Role in the Origin of the Present War

It is clear, as described in the first sections of this study, that Hanoi's role in the current war has its roots in the Viet Minh fight against the French.

The end of the war against France brought a shift in the tactics ordered by Hanoi in South Vietnam, but occasioned no change in the degree of North Vietnamese control of the insurgent apparatus or in the aim of the Communist Party to complete the "unfinished revolution" in the South. Certain key Communist leaders and several thousand cadre were left behind to form the nucleus for the renewal of the "struggle." Directives from the North initially ordered the stay-behinds to use "political" action, i.e., everything short of armed action, to guarantee the carrying out of the countrywide elections envisaged under the Geneva Agreements.

Hanoi's policy in 1955, was probably dictated by belief that it was following the one easiest and least costly road to gain control of the South. The viability of the southern government of Ngo Dinh Diem appeared exceedingly precarious. Even if it should survive, Hanoi had everything to gain in going ahead with the proposed national elections. After extensive purges, Hanoi's own organs of control were strong enough to ensure that the overwhelming majority of the people in the North, who numbered some three million more than the populace in the South, would vote as dictated by the Communists. In Ho Chi Minh, moreover, Hanoi had a national hero who would probably have gained more votes in South Vietnam than any rival candidate.

The government of Ngo Dinh Diem, however, demonstrated considerable resurgence and refused to comply with Hanoi's demands for elections, basing its refusal in part on the evidence that the North Vietnamese would not allow proper international supervision of the voting in the North. While opposing the elections, Diem was able to bring some order out of the postwar chaos in the South and assert the authority of his own government. His efforts to extend his writ were frequently heavy-handed and in time contributed to growing discontent in both rural and urban areas.
During this early period, however, some of the Communist Party leaders in the South began to fear that Hanoi's policy of political opposition to Diem was doomed to failure. By the end of 1955, these southern leaders, including Le Duan, estimated that their position was declining vis-a-vis the government. Diem's efforts to break up the Party apparatus in the South, Communist sources reveal, were having considerable success.

Le Duan and his followers subsequently set forth the thesis that "heavy military pressure" should be brought to bear against Diem. Hanoi apparently agreed, however, only to a small-scale increase in armed harassment and Le Duan continued to push for the inauguration of a full military campaign against Diem. Although the strategy debate continued for the next two years, half measures of both a military and political nature were being applied by the Communists against Diem.

In early 1959, at a Central Committee meeting in Hanoi, the initiation of an all-out military and political campaign to bring Diem down was finally authorized by the Party leaders. It is worth noting that, at the time this decision was made, there were relatively few American military personnel in South Vietnam. It was not until 1961 that the U.S. changed its basic policy and sent a significant number of advisors to assist the South Vietnamese Army. By that time, Hanoi's decision to open a full-scale military effort in the South was nearly two years old, and the Diem government was in dire need of outside assistance as a result of Viet Cong military pressure aided and directed from North Vietnam.

**Hanoi's Role in the Control and Direction of the War**

The first major political move by Hanoi in support of the developing insurgency was the establishment of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam -- a decision probably taken at the Central Committee meeting in early 1959. Although the public birth of this organization was apparently two years in the making, as Hanoi probably waited for the insurgency to buildup background momentum in the South, it was a very logical step for the North Vietnamese who have persistently operated behind the facade of front movements in Indochina starting with the old Viet Minh league during and after World War II.
Hanoi apparently hoped to use the NFISV as a cover for all facets of Viet Cong activity in South Vietnam, military as well as political, and to support its claim that the insurgency was an indigenous phenomenon. Shortly after the Front was formed, it announced that all insurgent forces had been organized into a "Liberation Army" under the NFISV. Behind the scene, nevertheless, Front activities were tightly controlled by the Communists. Several documents have been captured which describe in considerable detail the role of the party in organizing, training, and indoctrinating the IAF. Other documents describe the party control of the political appendages of the Front. The overt leadership of this organization, moreover, is demonstrably a collection of men with long histories of association with Communist causes and organs in North and South Vietnam.

In the effort, probably, to give the Communists an open and explicable voice in the NFISV, Hanoi created an ostensibly independent Communist party in the South in 1962 -- the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP). However, captured documents and the testimony of prisoners have confirmed that the PRP is nothing more than a cover name for the Lao Dong or Communist Party apparatus in the South. There is evidence in captured documents, too, that Hanoi took considerable pains to conceal the role of the Northern party authorities in the South, warning against the revelation of any material connecting Hanoi with the insurgent operations.

The influx of rank and file North Vietnamese soldiers during the last three years has been accompanied by a heavy input of North Vietnamese officers at all command echelons in Viet Cong regular units. Prisoners and documents strongly suggest that at least one-third of all officers at the battalion level or above in Viet Cong regular units north of Saigon are infiltrators from North Vietnam. Similar sources have revealed that the overall insurgent apparatus is now controlled at the top level by high North Vietnamese military officers, including politburo member Nguyen Chi Thanh, and senior generals Tran Van Tra, and Tran Do. It is probable also North Vietnamese generals Hoang Van Thai and Chu Huy man are also directing military operations in the South.
A series of documents captured during the past year has provided evidence confirming that the central committee and the politburo in Hanoi still set down the strategic and the overall tactical guidelines for the war upon which the detailed directives and instructions to the rank and file are based. These documents show that the strategy used by the insurgents in the South during much of 1966, at least, was based on the resolution adopted at the secret 12th conclave of the Hanoi central committee held in late 1965.

Hanoi's Role in the Support of the War

Even before the Party Central Committee meeting in 1959, Hanoi had begun to lay the groundwork for logistical support of the military insurgency in the South. A supply route through the Laotian panhandle to feed manpower South was organized beginning in 1958. This operation was expanded in 1959, and an extensive seaborne infiltration apparatus was also set up. Active preparations for the training of large numbers of infiltrators to take cadre and command positions in Viet Cong units also began in the North during this period. These men were drawn primarily from the physically fit southerners who had been regrouped to the North after service with the Viet Minh. Many of them had remained in active military service in the North, receiving extensive and disciplined training.

By 1961, the infiltration operation from the North had moved into high gear. The entry of over 8,600 men into the South by the end of the year has subsequently been confirmed by the statements of several prisoners or defectors from each infiltrating group and by the notations of captured Communist documents. There is persuasive, but less substantial information, indicating the entry of over 2,200 more men during this period. This input formed an important component of the Communist regular military force structure in South Vietnam which was estimated at that time at around 25,000 men.
Study of interrogation reports show that the vast majority of the infiltrators were well-trained officers or senior non-commissioned officers and that they took leading positions within the insurgent military structure. At least 50 percent of them probably were members of the Communist Party.

In the early years through 1963, the Viet Cong forces equipped themselves largely through the capture of weapons from ARVN units and outposts and from caches of old French and U.S. weapons left behind when the Viet Minh regrouped North. By 1961, however, evidence of Hanoi's support showed up on the battlefields in the South in the form of factory re-worked French rifles. They had been refitted to handle the Communist 7.62 round of ammunition. This was followed in 1962-1963 by the appearance of Chinese Communist submachineguns and carbines, which had been channeled to the insurgents largely through North Vietnam.

The infiltration of at least 10,000 men from the North between 1962 and January 1964 has been confirmed by rigorous military standards. Evidence is available indicating that at least 10,000 others probably came south during this period. The total enemy regular force strength in the South by early 1964 ranged between 30 and 40,000. Thus, the infiltrators continued to constitute a major share of the Communist military strength. This was only the beginning, however, because Hanoi, sensing victory, had authorized a major stepup in assistance to the South.

Ethnic North Vietnamese soldiers, followed by organic North Vietnamese army units began to move South during 1964 in substantial numbers. The North Vietnamese decision to inaugurate a quantum jump in support of the southern war effort, it should be noted, was taken and partially implemented well prior to the appearance of US combat troops in South Vietnam in February 1965.

The overall effect of the introduction of North Vietnamese
regulars during 1964 and 1965 was an increase of 12 regiments or 32 maneuver battalions in the combined Viet Cong - North Vietnamese force structure in the south. This force structure expanded from 29 battalions in 1964 to 98 battalions in 1965 - northern battalions numbered 32. In the first six months of 1965, this influx of northern units enabled the Communist forces to force the South Vietnamese Army to commit the last of its general reserve of fighting forces to static defense positions, and to establish more extensive Communist control throughout many areas of northern South Vietnam.

By late 1965, Hanoi's input of manpower and material was so extensive and important to the war effort in the south that Hanoi, in a secret Central Committee resolution could state, "... that the North Vietnamese main forces are the organic mobile forces of South Vietnam," i.e., the backbone of the insurgent war effort in the south. Infiltration continued during 1966, and the direct violation of the Demilitarized Zone by entire North Vietnamese combat units was initiated. The ratio of infiltrators to indigenous personnel continued to increase, despite heavy casualties and the expansion of the southern units. Modern infantry assault weapons and mortars now make up the major portion of the Communist arsenal. By mid-1966, Communist roadbuilding efforts in the Laos Panhandle had extended the original roadnet to about 700 miles, crossing the border into South Vietnam. Hundreds of trucks are now estimated to be using these roads to ferry supplies south.

The situation in South Vietnam presently is developing in a direction which tends to make the insurgent war effort more and more dependent on North Vietnamese aid. A survey of the population available to the enemy in Communist-controlled areas and in areas under no particular control in South Vietnam indicates that sufficient draft age males are available to supply an average of some 7,000 men.
a month to the Communist military. Captured prisoners and documents, however, indicate that recruitment goals are not being met from within the south and that northerners are being relied on more and more to provide replacements for Viet Cong units as well as complete combat elements.

The Viet Cong, moreover, are dependent on Hanoi for all of the modern arms and munitions that are becoming standard equipment in Communist regular units operating in the south. It appears, in fact, that continuation of the present levels of combat or an increase in the intensity of combat would be predicated almost entirely upon Hanoi's willingness to supply manpower and materiel.
I. HANOI'S ROLE IN THE ORIGIN OF THE PRESENT WAR IN SOUTH VIETNAM
I. THE ORIGIN OF THE PRESENT WAR

To understand the depth and extent of Hanoi's control and direction of the present conflict in South Vietnam, it is necessary to review the North Vietnamese role in the Indochinese War (1946-1954) against France as it developed in the South. It was Ho Chi Minh and his comrades in the Communist (or Lao Dong) Party in the North who formulated the strategy for the military struggle against France, initiated the armed action, and controlled the Viet Minh organization in the South.

Hanoi and the Viet Minh

The most comprehensive statement on the strategy for the fight against France was set forth in tracts written by the secretary general of the Communist Party, Truong Chinh, and published in 1946 and 1947 in the North. His blueprint for victory involved a three-stage military campaign largely defensive at first, then waged on a nearly equal basis with the French, and moving finally to a general counteroffensive. Throughout the tracts, Chinh referred to the rebel forces in the South as "our" units, noting that, although the Viet Minh units in the South were in the defensive stage at the time, "we" will "soon" switch over to the second phase. The key tactic in phase two would be to combine guerrilla and mobile warfare. Guerrilla
actions would take the lead at first to force the French to disperse their forces, overextend their area of operations, and use up manpower and resources.

The course of the subsequent fighting indicates that Chinh's prescription was carefully followed by the Viet Minh in the South. Although the principal theatre of the war remained in the North, intensive small-scale operations conducted by the rebels in the South served to keep the French off balance and prevented them from moving badly needed forces to the northern battle zone in a number of instances.

In his tracts, Truong Chinh openly gave the Communist Party, which was headquartered in North Vietnam, full credit for the decision to launch the Indochinese War. He claimed that the "Party" had correctly foreseen that the colonial powers would come into conflict after World War II and that the Party "had decided" when this happened to "immediately launch the general insurrection."4 An official Lao Dong Party history states that the "Central Party gave the order for the resistance war on 25 November 1945."5 This is all the more revealing in view of the claim of the Vietnamese Communists that their Party, then known as the Indochina Communist Party (CPI), was dissolved on November 11, 1945.

Despite its ostensible dissolution, Truong Chinh made no effort to hide the controlling role of the Communist Party in directing the
Việt Minh and the various elements in it opposed to the French. The "Communist Party," he said, "organized the different strata of people into the National Liberation Front: the Việt Minh." The Communist Party, according to Chinh, also developed the "peasant organizations" to give a "solid base" to the Việt Minh.

Speaking pointedly on the situation in the South in relation to Communist Party control, Chinh noted that the geographical distance from the North had initially proved "deterimental to the judiciousness of instructions given by the Việt Minh in the South, preventing them from entirely keeping pace with the general line of the Party." The Party history quoted above suggests that firm measures subsequently were taken to facilitate the implementation of northern directives. It states that on 20 November 1945, "by order of the Party," a conference of the "south section" was convened for the purpose of "unifying the resistance leadership" in the South. At this conference the "Resistance Committee of the South" was formed. This committee was the southern headquarters for the direction of the War. The present-day Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) -- the top Communist headquarters in the South -- is its lineal descendant.

The action of the Party command in the North to facilitate control of Việt Minh operations in the South is borne out by captured enemy
documents. A report prepared by the "Executive Committee" of the party "central headquarters" in the North in 1948 stated that:

"Formerly, the direction of distant sections of the Party, such as South Vietnam...was very loose. The Central Committee decided to confer responsibility for the section on a delegate, as much because of delays in liaisons and communications as because these sections of the Party did not consider it their duty to report to the Central Committee."

The terms "central headquarters," and "Central Party" are repeatedly used in Communist documents in a context indicating the top party command in the North.

The above document went on to note that "in 1948, the Central Committee sent new delegates to the South" and that these delegates "reported directly on the situation and received our instructions." The Central Committee of the Party also ordered a reorganization of communications and liaison facilities between South and North. According to the same document, the "network of telecommunications" was to be extended beginning in 1948 and a system created to accelerate "transmission of letters and documents" in order to harmonize them with the "control exercised by the Central Committee."
The document declared that the "rapidity of communications from North to South is the condition for unified administration of the entire Party."

Despite these efforts, it is evident that some problems of communication remained in the early years and that differences of opinion between authorities in the North and commanders in the South persisted, as might be expected in a wartime undertaking in any country. Down through the years, however, after allowances for debate and discussion were made, the views of the central authorities, sometimes modified by the dissent, eventually became the basis for operational orders in the South.

The 1948 document quoted above, for example, indicates that the party command in Hanoi was distressed by the slow progress in the numerical buildup of the party apparatus in the South. Although the document stated that there were 23,000 members of the Communist Party in the South by August 1948, it nevertheless contained a directive to the southern Party leaders to "undertake a plan of expansion" and to develop it "simultaneously" with the plans for expansion of the "people's associations." It appeared that the Party in the North was anxious to insure its control over organizations affiliated with the Viet Minh and designed to attract non-Communist nationalist elements to the
Viet Minh/Communist cause. The document stated that the "Party apparatus should develop alongside the expansion of all popular organizations."

Other captured documents indicate that the Communist Party, both in the North and in the South, did continue to expand its influence during the next few years. A November 1951 Communist directive captured by the French stated, for example, that:

"During five years of Resistance, the people have become familiar with the name of the Party and have come to recognize its role of leadership, thanks to propaganda and the sacrifices of our comrades. The doctrine and policies of the Party have permeated the people and served as the directing force behind the people's revolution. After five years of fire and blood, the Party itself has come of age, with bases established everywhere, in the temporarily occupied zone as well as in the Liberated Zone."

By 1951, the Party felt it necessary to drop its covert status and reemerge into public. According to the above document, the Communists believed that:
"The actual [public] existence of the Party is now extremely necessary. This will steady the direction of the Resistance, unify the National Welfare forces, strengthen the unity between the various groups, communities, and people, and exhaust the Resistance until the final victory."

Basing its action on certain subjective and objective factors, the National Congress which met on 11 February 1951 decided that the Party would change its name to "Vietnamese Workers' [Lao Dong] Party." 9

In an "explanatory note," the above directive ordered Party members to answer in response to queries regarding the difference between the old Communist Party of Indochina and the Lao Dong that "the Workers' Party is continuing the work of the Communist Party. To those whose sympathy is particularly sure, you may say that the Workers' Party is the Communist Party."

Directives on general strategy and tactics in the South continued to come from the North during this period. Hanoi's Minister of Defense, Vo Nguyen Giap, in his treatise called "The War of Liberation and the People's Army," written in 1950, admitted to the North Vietnamese role. He stated that the third stage of the war started
in 1950 when, in addition to certain favorable international developments, "President Ho and the Party decided to complete rapidly the preparations for passing to a vigorous general counteroffensive".\textsuperscript{10} (This reference to the Party's role, it should be noted, was made several months prior to public reemergence of the CPI on March 3, 1951, as the Lao Dong, or Worker's Party).

An example of an order from the North and its impact on the Viet Minh in the South is recounted in the Party history. It states that in 1953, "following an order of the Central Party, the 5th district" (roughly comparable with the current Communist Military Region V which covers the northern half of South Vietnam) attacked in the central highlands using their main forces. "Our troops liberated the entire Kontum Province."
It is clear from the totality of the intelligence available during the period of hostilities against the French that a party structure was eventually setup which pervaded the Viet Minh facade at all levels in South and linked directly with the Communist hierarchy in the North. The statutes of the Lao Dong Party, first announced in 1951, spell out a pyramidal party organization from the Central Committee and Party Congress at the top to the regional or interzone, province, district, town, and finally to the village cell at the bottom. The Party structure, however, corresponded in effect to the administrative structure of the North Vietnamese regime which operated openly in "liberated areas" but covertly in contested or French-held areas through a system of "Administrative and Resistance Committees." In the latter cases, the structures of the Party and administrative apparatus appear to have been modified to adapt to local circumstances. In the South, the Party-administrative structure was broadly organized into two interzones -- "Interzones V", encompassing all of what is now central Vietnam, and "Interzone Nambo," extending from the southern foothills of the highlands area to the tip of the Camau peninsula. A special zone was established for the Saigon-ChoLon area.
The supporting evidence on the character of the Communist Party structure includes captured documents. A summary of a document captured by the French in the Danang area in December 1949, while noting weaknesses in Party organization, describes Party activities within the Viet Minh armed forces and political organizations in the area. A second document captured by the French in Tonkin and dated March 1949, gives instructions on Party and administrative organization in contested areas and areas under French control. A third document seized by the French in the Mekong River Delta in 1950 focuses on the Party structure within the Viet Minh forces and notes the existences of interzone, provincial, and villages Party committees. A fourth document in the hands of the French and dated 1949 is a directive of the "Committee of the Party of Nambo" and specifically refers to the Indochinese Communist Party in the Nambo area and the existence of Regional and Town Commissars.

The senior Party representative in the South at the end of World War II was Tran Van Giau, a Communist trained in Moscow and sent to Vietnam in the early 1930's to assist in the development of the Party in Indochina. In August 1945, Giau brought about the merger of the Communist-controlled Viet Minh and various nationalist groups in the South in a front organization dominated by the Party. A heavy-handed
extremist, who proved hard for the northern authorities to handle, Giau was recalled to the North by the Central Party in 1946 and subsequently held several significant posts in the North Vietnamese government.

Giau's replacement was Nguyen Phuong Thao, who operated under the pseudonym of Nguyen Binh. A northerner, Binh had been active in political strife in the South since 1929. Before taking over at the top of the Viet Minh apparatus in the South, he had commanded an insurgent military sector northeast of Saigon. Binh was an exponent of extreme terrorist methods and commando-style guerrilla warfare. He held the top post in the South until about 1951, and later died in the North.

His replacement was Le Duan, the current Party first secretary in Hanoi, and a man destined to have a greater influence on the insurgent operations in South Vietnam, perhaps, than any other Vietnamese Communist leader down to the present day. There are a wealth of reports from agents and from the interrogation of Communist sources which discuss Le Duan's commanding role in the South. He has been a member of the Communist Party in Indochina since its formation in 1930, and held top posts in regional and Central Party organizations, including the Central Committee, before World War II. He was
imprisoned by the French in Vietnam in 1940 and released about 1945. Before his appointment to direct the Party apparatus in the South, Le Duan held important regional party posts there. A Communist source claims that he was elected to membership in the politburo in 1951. Like his predecessors, Le Duan had considerable independence of action in directing day to day military and political operations in the South, but remained answerable on broader policy questions to the party chiefs in the North.

The number two man in the insurgent apparatus in the South during this period, according to a variety of intelligence sources, was Le Duc Tho, another top North Vietnamese leader of the present day. He currently ranks seventh on the politburo and is the head of the powerful organization Department of the Party Central Committee. Tho's authority in the South, some intelligence reports suggest, rivaled that of Le Duan. It is significant, however, that reports also imply that differences of opinion between the two were, if serious enough, solved by appeal to the Party authorities in the North.

The intelligence information is not sufficient to identify the southern party leaders below Le Duan and Le Duc Tho with precision between the years 1951 and 1954. Because of the frequency with which they are mentioned in intelligence reports of the period, however,
there is good reason to believe that several other top North Vietnamese leaders of the present day were active in the southern command structure at one point or another during this era. Among those most frequently mentioned was Pham Hung, currently number five man in the Politburo. Hung reportedly held party organizational posts in the insurgent zone which lay to the east of Saigon. Another was Ung Van Khiem, now a member of the Central Committee in Hanoi and a former NVN foreign minister. Tran Van Tra, a general officer in the North Vietnamese Army, was often mentioned in intelligence reports as Le Duan's deputy for military affairs. Hanoi radio identified him several times as a member of the Viet Minh high command in the South.

The Geneva Agreements and After

The end of the war against France and the creation of separate northern and southern zones in Vietnam under the Geneva Accords brought a shift in the tactics ordered by Hanoi in the South. It occasioned no change, however, in the degree of North Vietnamese control of the insurgent apparatus or in the aim of the Lao Dong Party to complete the "unfinished revolution" in the South. During the closing session of the Geneva Conference, in fact, the leader of the North Vietnamese delegation, Pham Van Dong, declared that the problem of Vietnamese unity
still remained and that "we shall achieve it just as we have won the war." In the next day, Ho Chi Minh called publicly for a "long and arduous struggle" to reunify North and South Vietnam which, he asserted, is "all our land." In signing the Geneva Agreement the North Vietnamese legally admitted responsibility for the insurgent forces in the South, since the cease fire agreement was signed for the insurgents in both the North and South by the "Vice Minister of National Defense of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam."

Although the bulk of the Viet Minh armed forces were regrouped north of the Demilitarized Zone by 1955, as stipulated in the Geneva Agreements, certain key Communist leaders and several thousand cadre were left behind to maintain the Lao Dong Party structure at least in skeletal form and to constitute the nucleus for the continuation of the "struggle." Several Communist sources active in the southern party apparatus during this period have stated that Le Duan remained in charge of Party operations in the South for several years following the Geneva Agreements. Some of the sources were present at clandestine conferences in the South attended by Le Duan.

Intelligence reports also identify General Van Tien Dung, a prominent North Vietnamese military leader of the present day who has been chief of staff of the North Vietnamese army since 1954, as a member of the Party's southern command organization for a period in
1955-56. Dung apparently arrived in South Vietnam in mid-1955 when his frequent public appearances in the North suddenly ceased. His mission in the South was partially to encourage support of the Communists by the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai religious sects which at that time constituted two of the best organized non-Communist elements in South Vietnam.

The French had sought, by grants of special privilege and funds, to use such groups to support their objectives in South Vietnam. In the process, however, the French permitted the sects to buildup private armies and to rule large areas in the South as virtually private domains. Factions of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, intent on retaining their privileged position, attempted first to dominate the postwar South Vietnamese government of Ngo Dinh Diem, and then to overthrow him.

Party Actions

The vast quantities of enemy documents captured since early 1966, as allied forces have penetrated enemy base areas in South Vietnam, have greatly added to our knowledge of top level Communist activities in the South from the period immediately following the Geneva Agreements down to the present day. One of the most revealing of all the documents was a notebook captured in Operation CRIMP, a January 1966 action in which allied forces overran an important Communist headquarters northwest of Saigon. This notebook, written about 1963 by a cadre
who clearly was well acquainted with the Communist background in the South, contained detailed statements on some of the major trails and successes of the Party since 1954.

This document -- termed the CRIMP document by intelligence authorities -- states that during the first year after the Geneva Accords, the southern Party command "became covert." The organization and methods of operation of the party were changed in order to guarantee the leadership and forces of the Party under the new struggle conditions. During this period, however, the southern command, according to the document, still "based" itself on the "resolutions and directives of the Central Committee," i.e., the authorities in North Vietnam.

A party member active in the South during this period has related how the secretariat of his provincial committee received radio messages, which had come from Hanoi and had been relayed by the Party command authorities in the South. Reports back to Hanoi were also sent by radio, according to this source. After 1954, he said, the "basic system of organization remained the same, from the Central Committee level, through zone, province, and district to village level."

While the number of hard-core Communists remaining in South Vietnam after 1954 cannot be confirmed, French and South Vietnamese estimates based on the observations of friendly military commanders in the field,
placed the figure at around 5,000 "armed Viet Minh." However, this is clearly a conservative estimate since it does not include political agents or "soft-core" members or supporters who severed ties temporarily in some cases with the Viet Minh and took up civilian life in the South.

Careful arrangements were made for these stay-behinds. Weapons and munitions were cached throughout remote areas in the countryside. Explicit orders were issued to key cadre, most of them southern-born and many active in propaganda organs, to remain in the field. Two Viet Minh functionaires, for example, Truong Van Hao and Lam Dua, said that they had received instructions to remain in their propaganda posts in their native Quang Nam Province after the Geneva Agreements. In 1956, after the government became suspicious of them, they fled to North Vietnam. Both returned to the South as infiltrators in 1961, when they were captured. Another example was Tran Van Khe, a Party member active near Saigon in propaganda work during the French war. He was ordered to stay in his area and spread Communist propaganda in preparation for the elections scheduled under the Geneva Agreements. These elections, in theory, would have led to a country-wide vote on the unification of Vietnam.

Hanoi sent small numbers of cadre south in the first year after the war to locate in government-controlled areas and strengthen the Party's
position. One of them was Tran Tan Chi who was born in the North, joined the Party, and served in the army in the North as an intelligence officer before going to the South in 1954 to carry on clandestine intelligence work. Chi maintained covert contact both with the authorities in Hanoi and with those in the South until captured in 1958. Other members of his intelligence unit were also North Vietnamese sent to the South in 1954.

Hanoi's Initial Post-War Policy in the South

Through the study of captured Communist documents and the interrogation of prisoners knowledgeable of the period, the nature of Hanoi's policy directives to the southern authorities after the French war can be reconstructed. One document captured in November 1954 provided detailed instructions for party echelons in South Vietnam. The document was from the "Lao Dong Party Eastern Interzone Delegation" to "All Provincial Committees" and had the words "Democratic Republic of Vietnam" in the upper right-hand corner. The document requested local party committees to conduct training courses in which the "center of gravity" of the training should be "confidence in the Party, in President Ho Chi Minh, and in victory." The Hanoi authorities were apparently hoping to prevent a sag in morale among followers in the South as a
result of the decision to stop the war in 1954 short of full victory there.

According to the document, all party activity was to be directed at ensuring that the French and other Western elements left South Vietnam "within the next two years." The provincial committees were warned against putsch-type actions and told that "later on, when the Geneva Accord is on the point of fulfillment, we will fight more openly for more speedy fulfillment. We will gain nothing by being impatient or overbold." Each member of the Party, the document stated, "must be given a new responsibility applicable to the present situation." He should become "secretly the basic element" in some popular or governmental organization so as to be "ready for the fight on the great day of the masses," i.e., when the time is ripe for a Communist takeover.

The document went on to note that, while the previous aim had been to "destroy" the governmental apparatus in South Vietnam, "until the general elections" it would be necessary to cooperate with the government, being careful to use it "for our own advantage." This same theme was sounded in the CRIMP document which noted that, "right after peace was established, the mission of the South was to use political actions to guarantee the execution of the Geneva Agreements." This was done
upon the "instructions of the Central Party."

That this was Hanoi's policy is also revealed by the Party history. Speaking of the immediate post Geneva period, the history states that "in the South, they (i.e., the Communists) are not attacking, but must remain temporarily on the defense. Because of this, the most suitable method of struggle is by political means" in order to "prepare every aspect for a long and difficult struggle." According to the CRMP document, "In South Vietnam," between 1955 and 1957, "...we were able to avoid the construction of "armed forces" since we only had a few former bases which were needed in the political struggle and for the creation of a reserve force."

Hanoi's policy in 1955 was apparently dictated by a belief that it was following the easiest and least costly road to gain control of the South. From the standpoint of the North Vietnamese, there was everything to be gained in going ahead with the proposed national elections. Their own organs of control were apparently strong enough to ensure that the overwhelming majority of the people in the North would vote as dictated by the Communists. The fact that the population in the North at the time totaled some three million more than that in the South probably also contributed to Hanoi's confidence in pressing for elections, since it was generally assumed that any decision on unification would be based on a majority of the total vote.
The North Vietnamese position was also bolstered by the fact that, in Ho Chi Minh, Hanoi had a national hero who would probably have gained more votes in South Vietnam than any rival candidate. Many Vietnamese in both North and South considered Ho as the leader of the anti-French resistance movement. The Communists, moreover, represented one of the few tightly organized political forces at that time in South Vietnam. Some of the non-Communist political elements in the South were squabbling bitterly among themselves and it seemed unlikely that they would be able to unite in opposition to the Communist slate.

From the outset, the government under Premier Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon refused to comply with the North Vietnamese demands that the "preparatory consultations" on the country-wide elections be held. According to the Geneva Agreements, these consultations were to begin in July 1955. Diem based his refusal in part on the implicit evidence that Hanoi would not allow the International Control Commission (ICC) set up for Vietnam under the Geneva Accords to have a completely unrestricted hand in supervising and guaranteeing the freedom of voting in the North. If this were not done, Diem realized that the election would result in a Communist takeover of the South. Although North Vietnamese propaganda maintained that Hanoi was willing
to go ahead with the elections under ICC supervision, it was evident that the North Vietnamese impeded and restricted the ICC when the latter's activity threatened Communist interests.36

Evidence was also available to the Diem government indicating that the Communists in the North were intimidating and using force on the populace in a manner which would prevent them from voting as free men in any national election. The Hanoi regime, for example, had repeatedly violated Article 14 of the Geneva ceasefire agreement which guaranteed civilians the right to move freely from one zone to another until military repatriation was completed.37 There were also numerous eye-witness accounts of roadblocks in the North set up against the movement south of refugees from the Communist regime.

Many of these refugees were fleeing from the brutal agrarian reform program in North Vietnam which had been underway in some areas since 1953. This program had resulted in the death or mistreatment of thousands of landlords whose property was arbitrarily seized by party-led peasant gangs. The campaign became much more intense between 1954 and 1956, sparking armed revolutions against the regime in some areas. These outbreaks were harshly smashed with considerable loss of life. The results were indicative of the tight control by the regime over the populace and of its willingness to use any methods to
enforce its will.

While opposing the elections, Diem attempted to bring some order out of the postwar chaos in the South and to assert the authority of his own government. However, the administrators and military officials which Diem sent to the rural areas were frequently inept and corrupt and often used strongarm methods. Land reform in the South was not equitably carried out, despite Diem's generally good intentions. Moreover, the traditional autonomy of the village was terminated and replaced by direct control from Saigon. The eventual result, when coupled with the heritage of wartime conditions existing since 1945, was the generation of considerable antagonism toward the Diem government among the rural populace.

Concern Among Communists in the South

Although the Communists attempted to exploit the dissatisfaction among the peasantry, secretly, some of the southern party leaders began to fear that Hanoi's policy of primarily political opposition to the Diem government was doomed to failure. The efforts of the southern party command to form anti-Diem political alliances with some of the religious sects in the South and with some other political elements were not particularly successful. Communist sources indicate
that, by the end of 1955, these southern party leaders including Le Duan, estimated that their position was declining vis a vis the government. According to one source, Le Duan believed Hanoi was "wasting time" and that the Diem government should be "forcibly overthrown" as "soon as possible" if NVN was to "succeed in gaining control of South Vietnam." A number of covert intelligence sources indicate that the Communists held a conference or conferences in South Vietnam in early 1956 to discuss a modification of tactics.

According to Communist sources, Le Duan and his supporters set forth the thesis that the postwar political struggle had reached the stage where resort should be made to heavy Communist "military pressure." Duan called for a fast buildup of military forces based on the highlands region, and an all-out effort to consolidate and buildup the party apparatus. At the time, however, the northern authorities were apparently unwilling to go that far, in the belief, it appears, that the Diem government would eventually collapse. It is significant, in terms of northern control of the insurgency, that the Hanoi view on strategy prevailed.

Le Duan continued to push for the inauguration of a full military campaign against Diem during the balance of 1956. According to the CRIMP document, "at the end of 1956, the volume by Comrade Le Duan
entitled The South Vietnam Revolutionary Path, was of great significance" and "solved the ideological crisis." Le Duan's book, according to the document, stated that "force must be used to overthrow" the Diem government and to establish a "revolutionary democratic" government, thus providing "conditions" for "unification" of the country.

Despite the assertion that the strategy problem was solved by the publication of Le Duan's book, other evidence, including some in the same document, indicates that the debate over tactics persisted for several more years. Half measures of both a political and military nature continued to be employed against Diem for sometime by the Communists before the northern leaders finally authorized a full-scale military effort.

The failure of the Hanoi leaders to give a complete go-ahead in 1956 created considerable difficulty among the cadre in the South whose ranks were being thinned by Diem's increasingly successful anti-Communist campaign. Stepped-up government security measures resulted in the capture after mid-1956 of scores of Communists and hidden stores of arms and the elimination of Communist influence in many rural areas. According to the CRIMP document, "a mood of skepticism and nonconfidence in the orientation of the struggle began to slip into" the southern party command.
The depression of the southern party leaders was well-founded, for not only was their own apparatus under considerable pressure from the government, but the position of their occasional allies, the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, was badly shattered. Diem, through a combination of bribery and armed force, had by mid-1956 managed to break up the last of the large rebel armies mounted by these two groups. Fighting continued for another year against strong elements of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, but they were no longer an important threat to the government. Some bands, however, later cooperated with the Communists.

The reasons for Hanoi's procrastination in authorizing an all-out military effort in the face of the weakened party position in the South are not fully known. There may have been dispute in Hanoi as to the proper strategy to follow, with some in the Party encouraging continued political initiatives by NVN toward the government in Saigon. They might have viewed these as a first step in obtaining needed influence within the South Vietnamese regime. Hanoi did propose that economic or postal agreements be set up between the North and the South several times during 1957 and 1958.

There were, moreover, opportunities closer to home for North Vietnamese exploitation during this period. Hanoi was firmly backing
the Pathet Lao operations in Laos with men and material. The growing political instability there may have foreshadowed in the eyes of some Hanoi leaders the necessity for even greater NVN involvement. There may thus have been some hesitation at the time in committing resources to a major new effort in South Vietnam.

On the other hand it is clear from the pattern of Communist activities in the South, as reported by the U.S. Mission in Saigon, that the Communist apparatus was beginning to turn increasingly to armed terrorist operations in the country-side, in part due to GVN security measures but also to the realization that mere propaganda and subversion were largely ineffective against resurgent Saigon authority. Armed Communist activities in the country-side increased sharply during the last half of 1957. While statistics are not complete, Communist guerrillas initiated at least 30 armed and terrorist incidents during the last quarter of 1957, in addition to a large number of incidents carried out by Communist-lead Hoa Hao and Cao Dai dissident elements. During this same period, Communist forces assassinated or kidnapped at least 75 civilian and civil officials in the country-side.

In 1957, Le Duan went to North Vietnam, apparently hoping in part to present his views on the necessity of an all-out military campaign
in South Vietnam more effectively to other members of the politburo and Central Committee. His treatment following his arrival in the North is symbolic of the close connections between southern and northern elements in the Lao Dong Party. He began to appear in public in the North in the Fall of 1957. In September, Hanoi announced that he was a member of the politburo. He accompanied Ho Chi Minh to Moscow for celebrations of the October Revolution, and soon after his return emerged as a major Party spokesman in the North. By 1960, he had been appointed First Secretary of the Party, and was reputed to be very close to Ho Chi Minh.

It is possible that Le Duan's great influence in the North stemmed partly from his foresight in appraising the initial Communist postwar strategy in the South as insufficient to bring about a Communist takeover. He is now ranked second in the politburo behind Ho Chi Minh, and is considered by many as his heir apparent.

The identity of Le Duan's replacement in South for several years after 1957 is not entirely clear from the available intelligence. According to several Communist sources, one of the top party leaders in the South during at least part of this period was Tran Van Tra, who had moved up through steadily more important positions in the southern command during the French war. Tran Van Tra was present in Hanoi in
1955 and 1956 as deputy chief of staff in the North Vietnamese Army -- a post he still holds.\(^{46}\) He was also in the North for at least short periods until late 1963. Other sources, including PW's state that Nguyen Van Cuc, who often went under the pseudonym of Muoi Cuc, was also one of the top party men in the South.\(^{47}\) Muoi Cuc, according to some sources, was close to Le Duan in viewpoint and allegiance. Cuc served during the French war in the Saigon-Cholon area.

Hanoi Changes Policy in the South

Through the analysis of captured Communist documents and the overt pronouncements of the North Vietnamese regime, the timing of Hanoi's decision to begin an all-out military effort to bring down Diem can be pinpointed relatively close. According to the CRIMP document:

"From 1957-1958, the situation (in the south) gradually changed. The enemy persistently sabotaged the implementation of the Geneva Agreement, actively consolidated and strengthened the armed forces, police forces, and the government apparatus from the central echelon down to the villages and hamlets."

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"The political struggle movement of the masses, although not completely wiped out, was encountering increasing difficulty and increasing weakness. The party bases, although not completely destroyed, were significantly weakened, some quite seriously."

The situation had reached a point by the end of 1958, according to the Party history, that a major shift in strategy had to be authorized. According to the history, "at the beginning of 1959, the 15th assembly of the Party's second Central Committee convened to analyze the situation." The assembly agreed, couching its words as ever in propaganda terms, that "our people must determinedly pursue the revolution to throw off the oppressive yoke of imperialism and feudalism in the South." The party history went on to note that "in 1959...the struggle in the South entered into a new phase."

The basic orders for this new phase, after being worked out in detail, were then sent south. According to the CRIMP document, "the directive of the politburo in May 1959 stated that the time had come to push the armed struggle against the enemy." Detailed instructions were then transmitted to party elements in the South and "in October 1959, the armed struggle was launched." The document
notes at another point that, "at the end of 1959, when we started an additional armed struggle in coordination with the political struggle against the enemy, it immediately took the form in South Vietnam of revolutionary warfare, a long range revolutionary warfare."

Interestingly, statistics on Communist military activity show an upsurge beginning in late 1959. By the end of the year, the Viet Cong had assassinated more than 580 civilians and civil officials. Viet Cong armed attacks had increased in size, and frequently employed company-strength units against regular Vietnamese army forces or installations. In January 1960, the Viet Cong entered a town in Kien Hoa Province with a force of several hundred men.

That these orders to the insurgent elements in the South were in fact based on the directives flowing from the 15th Assembly of the Party Central Committee in early 1959 is indicated by the CRIMP document which stated that "the resolution of the 15th Conference of the Central Committee officially and precisely specified the responsibilities and strategic aim of the revolution in South Vietnam." According to the document, without the resolution of the 15th Conference, "There certainly would never be a victorious revolutionary movement in South Vietnam as it exists today." It further noted that the details of actually waging the war were "based on the decisions and instructions
The extent of northern party direction of the insurgent apparatus in the South is further demonstrated by a statement in the CRIMP document that, by 1958, "the majority of party members and cadres" in the South "felt that it was necessary to immediately launch an armed struggle in order to preserve the movement and protect the forces." However, the leadership of the southern party command "still hesitated for many reasons, but the principal reason was the fear of violating the Central Committee's policy." The document implies that the southern party command realized it could not see the whole picture as adequately as the leaders in the North, and thus must leave basic strategic decisions to Hanoi. "The Central Committee of the Party," the document notes, "is very enlightened." The "Central Committee," the document indicates, "kept leading the South" to develop the military campaign in "conjunction with political action, and not to depend on military activity alone."

The timing of the decision to start a broad military effort against the Diem regime and the role of the Hanoi authorities in the decision is also borne out in a captured directive issued to subordinate units by the Communist committee in the "Nambo" (southern South Vietnam) interzone.49 This document discusses the situation in detail at the
end of 1960. According to the document, the correct implementation of the "Central Party's instructions and resolutions" together with the resolution of the "Fourth Regional Congress in October 1959" -- a meeting of the southern Communist leaders -- has led to considerable initial success. In a number of "campaigns," according to the document, the Communists were able to assemble as many as 2,000 people. The Communist movement, the document claimed, was promoted especially well in the rubber plantations among the laboring force, and in the cities where the insurgent apparatus had been weak.

The document pointed out, nevertheless, that a long road lay ahead, declaring that although "Party and group bases have been re-established in a number of places," the work was proceeding slowly. It noted that the Party was "aiming in the direction of a general armed uprising to seize the administration" but must not jump impatiently into it without proper preparation. "We must strengthen armed activity to the right level" and combine it with political action. All this must be done, the document concluded, "under the glorious leadership of the Central Executive Committee of the Party and Chairman Ho."

According to a party district committee chairman who was captured and interrogated in early 1960, the southern command authorities had received instructions from NVN in late 1959 to broaden both their
political and military leadership apparatus and became "more aggressive" in military activities.50

The CRIMP document described some of the directives from the North in general terms. It noted, for example, the "Central Committee's assertion that the South Vietnam revolution must take over the mountain areas." In "carrying out that policy... the Party apparatus in the South" had started "building up powerful armed forces, building and expanding base zones communicating with each other," and consolidating the strategic corridor along the highlands to the South i.e., the infiltration network.

Captured Communist documents of this era lay heavy stress on the "oppression" of the Diem regime as the rationale behind the Party's decision to move into a broad military effort against the South Vietnamese government. The CRIMP document, for example, notes that these were "the years in which the enemy (the GVN) suffered major political losses and... social contradictions." The "resentment of the masses became more deepseated and many individuals who formerly supported the enemy now opposed them." As noted above, genuine discontent among some of the peasantry to certain of Diem's policies and practices including his population resettlement, or "agroville" program had developed to a significant extent. This discontent was
exploited actively by the Communists. It is interesting, however, that the documents show the Communists did not decide in favor of all out military action, despite the "oppression" of the populace, until by early 1959, it was clear even to those in the North that the Party organization was threatened with destruction in the south if firm action was not taken.

Captured Communist documents and Hanoi propaganda of this period argued that American "imperialism" had replaced the French in bolstering Diem from 1954 to 1960. It is noteworthy, nonetheless, that in 1959 when the Hanoi regime authorized a broad military effort to bring Diem down, the number of American military personnel in South Vietnam was very small. It was not until 1961 that the U.S. changed its basic policy and sent a large number of instructors and advisers to Vietnam to help in the training of the South Vietnamese army. However, by that time, Hanoi's decision to open a full-scale military effort in South Vietnam was two years old and already extensively implemented.

The 1960 Party Congress in Hanoi

Although the decision to mount a full-scale military effort in South Vietnam had been made secretly in Hanoi in early 1959, and
support preparations had been underway at many points in the North since that time (see Chapter III), the general populace in NVN and some rank and file party cadre probably remained unaware of the development and its future impact on their lives. Thus, it was necessary for Hanoi to publicize the new policy properly throughout the whole Party and in South Vietnam in a setting which would make clear its high and official stature.

Hanoi propaganda had begun to set the stage in late 1959 by identifying the North Vietnamese more openly with the growing insurgent activity in the South. Hanoi radio began occasionally to refer to Viet Cong assaults as "our attacks" and on one occasion praised the "skill of our commander and the good will of our soldiers." The assignment of laying the theoretical groundwork for the expanded insurgency in the South out in public was given partially to Nguyen Chi Thanh, at that time the NVN's top political officer in the armed forces and now leader of the southern insurgent command. In August 1960, he set forth his views in an article entitled "Our Party Has Skillfully Led the Revolutionary War," which appeared in Hoc Tap, the official party journal in the North. Thanh described the "Party's decision to start a general uprising against the French and its finding that "resort to violence," was necessary as "the most effective measure to defeat the enemy." The Party, according to
Thanh, had thus conducted "legal, semi-legal, and illegal" forms of struggle. He implied that a similar strategy was now necessary against the South Vietnamese government, claiming that a "bourgeois state will not give up its seat to a proletarian dictatorial state through "self-destruction," but only as a result of a "violent revolution." Thanh called for the buildup of "guerrilla troops" in Vietnam along with the construction of a "regular and modern army in the North." It was clear that the objective was increased support of the insurgency in the South.

In September 1960, the Third Congress of the Lao Dong Party convened in Hanoi. According to the regime, "the conference represented party members "throughout the nation," and one of its primary concerns was "the struggle for national reunification."

Little attempt was made at the Congress to disguise the commanding role of the North in sponsoring the insurgency in the South or in announcing the broad overall plans to the northern populace. According to the Party history, "the conference analyzed completely and profoundly all aspects of the situation in the South...setting forth the basic responsibilities of the immediate duties of the Vietnam revolution."

Le Duan, the chief promoter of the military strategy in the South, sounded the same theme in a major address to the Congress. "The
present National Congress of our Party," Le Duan stated, "will define for the whole Party and the whole people the line for the carrying out... of the national people's democratic revolution throughout the country," and for the struggle to achieve national reunification. The Congress would also decide, according to Le Duan, upon the "basic orientation" for the strengthening of Party leadership to meet the new requirements of the revolution." According to Le Duan "the North has become a common base of the revolution throughout the country," which he stated, was aimed at "overthrowing" the government there and "liberating" the country.

The political report of the Party Central Committee at the same Congress described the role of the northern populace in the growing insurgency in the South. It declared that "our people, together with their efforts to build and consolidate the North...must strive to preserve and develop the revolutionary forces in the South." It was the Party's task, according to the report, not only to "lead the socialist revolution in the North," but also "at the same time, to fulfill the task of the national people's democratic revolution throughout the country."
II. CONTROL AND DIRECTION OF THE WAR AFTER 1960