E. DRV Strategy: Objectives and Timing

From the close of the Geneva Conference on 22 July 1954, through Hanoi's announcement of the founding of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam on 29 January 1961, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam appears to have passed through four distinct phases in striving toward its national objectives of independence, reunification, assured foreign support, and Vietnamese hegemony in Southeast Asia.

1. Political Struggle: Summer, 1954 -- Summer, 1956. In the year following Geneva, the DRV executed its regroupments and pressed hard towards land reform and economic recovery. In February, 1955, the Malenkov clique fell from power in the USSR, and the Soviet Union came under a collective leadership within which Khrushchev was pre-eminent. Intimations that the new leaders were interested in pursuing a conciliatory policy in the Cold War distinctly at variance with the national interests of the DRV were manifest in Soviet inaction when the deadlines for consultations concerning the Geneva Plebiscite passed in July, 1955. Doubly disappointed that Diem was not overturned by the sects, and that its principal ally seemed ill-disposed to back its cause, the DRV maneuvered frenetically to precipitate a reconvening of the Geneva Conference and to stymie Diem. U.S. intelligence was aware of a directive passed down through Lao Dong Party channels in August, 1955, for subordinates to struggle against the Americans and Diem "... so that there may be a less dangerous administration that will go to a conference with us." In September, 1955, the newly created Fatherland Front brought out its proposal for a confederation of North and South Vietnam, coupled with assurances that in both entities landlords would get free treatment. In South Vietnam in the same month, on three occasions soldiers fired on crowds agitating for the Geneva Plebiscite. Captured reports from Party field operators in South Vietnam were pessimistic, containing predictions of "long, painful and complex struggle," and reporting weaknesses such that "it is not time ... to meet the enemy." But within South Vietnam, Diem moved smoothly through his own plebiscite ejecting Bao Dai, announced plans for a new constitution, and proclaimed Ordinance No. 6 (11 January 1956), giving the GVN powerful legal recourse against "struggle movements." And just as the flurry of DRV diplomatic notes finally elicited help in the form of Chou En Lai's letter of 26 January 1956, calling for a new Geneva Conference, Khrushchev dropped the "de-Stalinization" bombshell: at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Khrushchev, in denigrating Stalin, undermined the Soviet position as the fount of Communist international policy, and fractured the Communist Bloc. In April, 1956, just after the United Kingdom issued a note castigating the DRV for violation of the letter and spirit of the Geneva Accords, Khrushchev committed the Soviet Union to "peaceful competition" with the West.
"We say to the representatives of the capitalist world: 'You are for the development of capitalism. We are for socialism. We do not want to impose our institutions on you, but we will not allow you to interfere in our affairs: Therefore, there is only one way open to us -- peaceful competition.'" 153/1

The Soviet softening, taken with the U.K. position, plus Diem's successful elections in March, 1956, seemed to write off action by the Geneva powers, and evidently caused serious reconsideration by the Lao Dong leaders. On 24 April 1956, Ho Chi Minh issued a statement reporting on the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party, in which, in Hanoi's ca. 1960 version, he held that:

"... We have grasped the great significance of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This Congress has:

"Analyzed the new situation prevailing in the world, and pointed out the new conditions favorable to the preservation of peace and the advance toward socialism by the Revolutionary Parties of the working class and the laboring people;

"Clearly shown the Soviet Union's victorious road, giving us still greater enthusiasm and making us believe still more strongly in the invincible forces of the Soviet Union, the bastion of revolution and of world peace;

"Pointed out the tasks of the Communist Party in the ideological and organizational fields. The Congress particularly emphasized the application of Marxist-Leninist principles to collective leadership and opposed the cult of the individual.

"While recognizing that war may be averted, we must be vigilant to detect the warmongers' schemes; for as long as imperialism exists, the danger of war still exists.

"While recognizing that in certain countries the road to socialism may be a peaceful one, we should be aware of this fact: In countries where the machinery of state, the armed forces, and the police of the bourgeois class are still strong, the proletarian class still has to prepare for armed struggle.

"While recognizing the possibility of reunifying Viet-Nam by peaceful means, we should always remember that our people's principal enemies are the American imperialists and their agents who still occupy half our country and are..."
preparing for war; therefore, we should firmly hold aloft the banner of peace and enhance our vigilance." 154/

The text of this statement reported by U.S. intelligence at the time, however, had Ho coupling his statement that "the enemies of our people still occupy one half of our national territory and are preparing for war . . ." with the ominous assertion that the DRV must "be in a position to change the form of the struggle . . ." Moreover, Truong Chinh, the Party First Secretary, was reported to have addressed the notion that "peaceful unification" of Vietnam might be "illusory and reformist." 155/

In May the Soviet Co-chairman of the Geneva Conference signed the letter calling upon the two Vietnams to observe the Accords, but in effect committing the Geneva powers and ICC to status quo in Vietnam. At this juncture, the DRV appeared resigned to partition for the foreseeable future, as evidenced in the public letter of 19 June 1956 from Ho Chi Minh to the restive regroupes, in which he undertook to explain and defend a "socialism in one country" strategy (see supra, p. 24), but stressed that "the present political struggle is a stage in our national democratic revolution . . . in the present political struggle, as in the Revolution and the Resistance, our compatriots in the South are in the vanguard, closely united and struggling heroically and perseveringly." 156/ As the deadlines for the Geneva Elections (July, 1956) approached, NVA troops were drawn back from the Demilitarized Zone in Vietnman to defensive positions; DRV diplomats wooed the neutral nations in search of support, openly advocating neutralization of Southeast Asia. Captured orders to Party cadre in South Vietnam stressed "an ideology of lying low for a long time . . ." 157/

The Geneva deadline passed uneventfully, the DRV by July being well impressed with the futility of looking to the Conference for aid. Ho's Pravda article of 2 August 1956 underscored the DRV's rejection of a go-it-alone strategy, and its continued fealty to the Bloc led by the Soviets. 158/

2. Internal Dissent and Reassessment: Summer, 1956 -- Fall, 1957.

By mid-1956, the Lao Dong Party leaders faced at home not only a crisis of confidence over their foreign policy failure, but the serious threat to internal security arising from reaction to the Land Reform Campaign. To stem deterioration of public morale, Ho announced on 18 August 1956 the "successful completion" of Land Reform, admitting to "errors" by the Party, and closing his statement with an appeal for unity under the Fatherland Front:
"Unity is our invincible force. In order to consolidate the North into a solid base for the struggle to reunify our country, our entire people should be closely and widely united on the basis of the worker-peasant alliance in the Viet-Nam Fatherland Front. It is all the more necessary for veteran and new cadres of the Party and Government to assume identity of ideas, to be united and single-minded, and to compete to serve the people." 159/

All through the fall of 1956, with the Party and the government under patent stress, the public statements of the Lao Dong leaders reiterated the theme. At the Tenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Party, in late October, 1956, Truong Chinh, as the proponent of Land Reform, was publicly sacrificed to "rectification of errors" and to national unity. Vo Nguyen Giap's confessional at the Tenth Plenum took place on 27 October 1956, the day after Diem promulgated the new Constitution of the Republic of South Vietnam and took office as its first president. North Vietnam's peasant uprisings in November further deepened the contrast between North and South, much to the DRV's disadvantage internationally. After a fence-mending December, the DRV summoned its National Assembly for one of its rare sessions. The Assembly took cognizance that "the struggle for unity would be long and difficult," and that "consolidation" of the North would have to take priority; on 22 January 1957 it passed a resolution stating that:

"The National Assembly confirms that in 1956, the work of strengthening the North and struggling for national reunification was crowned with great successes, though errors and shortcomings still existed in some work. Our successes are fundamental, and will certainly be developed. Our errors and shortcomings are few and temporary, and will certainly be removed, and are now in the process of being overcome." 160/

The National Assembly adjourned on 25 January 1957, the day after the Soviets proposed admitting North and South Vietnam to the United Nations as separate, sovereign states -- a move concerning which the DRV evidently had no warning, and which probably dates the nadir of DRV fortunes post-Geneva. 161/ Ho Chi Minh promptly denounced the Soviet action in a message to the UN, but at no time was the DRV more isolated.

It was about this period that mounting dissatisfaction with the Party leaders in South Vietnam began to be felt in Hanoi. Prisoners and documents attest that Le Duan, the Lao Dong chieftain in South Vietnam, had lost faith in "political struggle" as early as 1955; one source reported that it was Le Duan's view that Hanoi was "wasting time," and that the Diem government should be "forcibly
overthrown" as soon as possible if the DRV were to expect to "succeed in gaining control of South Vietnam." In February, 1956, Le Duan is reported to have conferred with southern leaders on tactics, and concluded that "military pressure" was essential for reunification. He is alleged to have called for a military campaign in the Highlands, and a revitalizing of the Communist Party apparatus in the South. There is some evidence of his having published these views in a book in late 1956. Hanoi, preoccupied with internal problems, was in no position to act on such proposals, but it could not ignore the "mood of skepticism and nonconfidence" -- as a southern communist later described it -- pervading the South.

Sometime in early 1957 Le Duan returned to Hanoi from South Vietnam to assume a key role in Lao Dong policy formulation. In any event, Ho Chi Minh evidently deferred to southern sentiment when on 15 February 1957 he applauded the "appeal of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on the banning of atomic weapons and on reduction of armament," reaffirmed the DRV's similar devotion to peace, but went on to note that:

"The National Assembly has discussed the question of national reunification. The struggle waged by our people for this purpose is long and difficult but will certainly be victorious. To achieve national reunification, all our people must unite closely, make further efforts to consolidate the North and make it a basis for national liberation. Our deputies have voiced the iron will of our people in the work of national reunification. The National Assembly has many a time warmly welcomed the firm and consistent combativeness of our compatriots in the South..."

"... the National Assembly has called on our compatriots throughout the country and residing abroad and on our People's Army to unite closely in their struggle, consolidate the North, maintain and extend the struggle waged in the South, and strengthen our international solidarity.

"The National Assembly has appealed to our compatriots in the South to struggle perseveringly and to strengthen their will for national reunification and independence. 'No force can hamper the determination of our people for unity and fraternal love.'..."

"We are duty-bound to unite and struggle in order to carry into practice the decisions of the National Assembly, implement the policies and political lines of the Party and Government, speed up the tasks set for this year, increase production, practice savings, consolidate the North, and unite the people throughout the country on the basis of the program of the Fatherland Front for the struggle for national reunification."
The U.S. is not well informed on how the Lao Dong leaders decided which to pursue of the several policy courses open to them, but there is evidence that the developing of consensus took several turnings. There appeared to be at first a move led by Ho and Giap toward strengthening DRV ties with the Soviets, crowned with some immediate success. On 28 February 1957 the UN General Assembly recommended to the Security Council that South Vietnam (and South Korea) be admitted to the UN. In early May, Diem paid a state visit to the U.S., where he received assurances of continued strong U.S. support. Whatever its reasons, the Soviet thereupon took a position against the admission to the UN of South Vietnam, and on 20 May 1957, Marshal Kliment E. Voroshilov, President of the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet, arrived in Hanoi for a state visit billed in DRV newspapers as a "most important event." It then appears that Truong Chinh and other Sinophile leaders pressed hard for orientation toward Peking. Amid evidence of haste and confusion, Ho left the country to visit East Europe in July, 1957, returning after stops in Moscow and Peking on 30 August 1957. Ho was in Moscow in July when Khrushchev expelled Malenkov, Molotov, and Kaganovich -- the anti-party group -- from the Praesidium of the CPSU, and probably gained some first hand insight into the ideas of the new leaders. In his absence, the DRV signed a new economic agreement with the CPR, and on his return, he appears to have been plunged into a power struggle of some proportions. Ho Chi Minh issued a statement on 2 September 1957 that the government of South Vietnam had to respect the desire of its people for reunification, and averred that his European trip demonstrated a "complete unity of views" with fraternal countries and that the trip had "splendid" results. Also in September, Le Duan was formally admitted to the Politburo. In late October or early November, Ho left, somewhat mysteriously, for Moscow. Although Hanoi newspapers had announced a six week long fete in honor of the 40th anniversary of Russia's October Revolution, the actual celebrations were limited to a few, simple events, and handled low-key by the DRV and its press. Such speeches as were recorded had distinct Maoist overtones. Truong Chinh re-emerged from eclipse as the principal party spokesman, while Giap dropped from sight. Le Duan also went to Moscow, but returned without Ho Chi Minh. Then, in late December, amid rumors that Ho and Giap were dead, both reappeared in Hanoi, and resumed their former position. In 1958, the Soviets replaced the CPR as the DRV's prime aid donor.

In subsequent years, Lao Dong Party historians identified the meetings in Moscow in the fall of 1957 as one of the pivotal events in the modern history of Vietnam. Western commentators have focused on Khrushchev's speech in which he pointed out that capitalism was doomed but that, "the only correct path in the development of international relations is a policy of peaceful coexistence ... We work from the premise that wars are not necessary to advance socialism ..."
But DRV attention has been directed to the Moscow Declaration of 1957, embodied in the "Communique on the Conference of Representatives of Communist and Workers Parties of Socialist Countries," which took quite a different line:

"The communist and workers parties are faced with great historic tasks . . . In present day conditions in a number of capitalist countries, the working class has the possibility . . . to unite the majority of the people, when state power without civil war can ensure the transfer of basic means of production to the hands of the people . . . However, in conditions in which the exploiting classes resort to violence against the people, it is necessary to bear in mind another possibility -- nonpeaceful transition to socialism. Leninism teaches and history confirms that the ruling classes never relinquish power voluntarily. In these conditions the severity and forms of class struggle will depend not so much on the proletariat as on the resistance of the reactionary circles to the will of the overwhelming majority of the people, on the use of force by these circles at one or another stage of the struggle for socialism." 171/

The congruence of this Declaration with Ho's April, 1956, statement to the Ninth Plenum of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee (supra, 46-47) and with the rhetoric Hanoi had been using to condemn Diem, seems more than coincidental. Le Duan returned from Moscow ahead of Ho to present the results to the Lao Dong leaders, and issued on 7 December 1957 a public statement that the Declaration:

". . . not only confirmed the line and created favorable conditions for North Vietnam to advance toward socialism, but has also shown the path of struggle for national liberation and has created favorable conditions for the revolutionary movement in South Vietnam." 172/

Some authorities have viewed the "crisis of 1957" within the Lao Dong leadership as a clash of factions over whether to align with the bellicose Mao (pro Truong Chinh, Nguyen Duy Trinh) or remain loyal to the temperizing Soviets (pro Ho and Giap). 173/ P. J. Honey, for example, found it significant that even Mao acknowledged Soviet leadership at the 1957 Moscow Conference, and notes that in February, 1948, the spokesman for the DRV National Assembly's Political Subcommittee announced that:

"Our firm international position is to stand in the socialist camp headed by the Soviet Union . . . This position proceeds from our people's fundamental interests and from

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the requirements of North Vietnam's advance towards socialism." 174/

Honey deprecated contrary statements issued by Hanoi about the same time -- e.g., that the NVA would "always stand ready by the side of the CPR in its struggle to recover Quemoy and Matsu, and to liberate Taiwan. . ." -- and thought that:

"It is very probable, although not a scrap of evidence has so far come to light which would corroborate it, that Ho Chi Minh was secretly reassuring the Soviet leaders, explaining that North Vietnam was supporting China only with empty words, while her actions proved that she had not been taken in by Maoist innovations." 175/

D. S. Zagoria interpreted the DRV strategy debate as less a dispute over external relations than over internal priorities: "The crucial local issue has resolved around the relative priority to be assigned to economic development of the North and struggle in the South." He concluded that "pro-Soviet" view prevailed simply because "between 1957 and 1960, northern leaders agreed on the need to concentrate on economic development." 176/

Proponents of both interpretations conclude that Hanoi's predilection for the USSR was ipso facto a deferral of support for the insurgency in the South. But the evidence supports a third interpretation. It is quite possible that the DRV leaders sought and won Soviet support because they found it impossible amicably to set priorities between internal and external national objectives. It seems evident that only the Soviets could offer the wherewithal to pursue both sets of goals simultaneously, and it is possible that the Lao Dong leaders opted for "guns and butter" rather than "socialism in one country." The apparent harmony among the pro-China and pro-Russia "factions" by early 1958 bespeaks such a compromise solution. Of course, serious doubt remains whether the Soviets would have valued DRV fealty high enough to pay the price, yet it seems that such could have been the case. The new DRV-USSR understanding reached during 1957 definitely included the extension of material aid which North Vietnam needed for its economic advancement. It evidently also included Soviet concurrence in a more adventuresome policy toward reunification. Whether or not specific DRV advances upon South Vietnam were countenanced, it is evident that the DRV leaders had obtained Soviet recognition that North Vietnam's circumstances placed it outside the range of strategic and doctrinal considerations which had lead Khrushchev, et al., into "peaceful competition" and "peaceful coexistence."
3. Preparations: Winter, 1958 -- Spring, 1959. In the autumn of 1957, and throughout 1958, violence in rural South Vietnam mounted, and increasingly manifested strategic direction. There is, however, only sparse evidence that North Vietnam was directing, or was capable of directing that violence. Yet even had the DRV determined in late 1957 to support insurgency in South Vietnam, there probably would have been little sign of that decision in 1958, so soon after it had been reached. The Nao Dong leaders were possibly the most experienced and dedicated group of professional revolutionaries in the world -- and probably the most cautious. Perhaps more than any other such group, the North Vietnamese communists had subjected their past to intense and objective scrutiny, striving to detect errors in strategy and tactics, and to derive lessons applicable to the future. The writings of Ho, Giap, Truong Chinh, and others have revealed that they were by no means satisfied that they had always made correct choices in the past on questions of war or peace. The salient lesson they have drawn is that premature revolution is significantly worse than no revolution at all, and they have repeatedly cited the abortive uprisings of 1930 and 1940 as cases in point. In both instances, amorphous, mainly spontaneous insurrection lead to failure, and then to reprisals and heavy losses among exposed middle and lower echelon Party leaders, which set back Party progress several years.

The 1940 rebellion has seemed particularly poignant to DRV commentators. When the Japanese invaded Tonkin in September, 1940, the Indochinese Communist party, together with other Vietnamese nationalists, elected violent resistance. Demonstrations took place throughout the country. Ho Chi Minh was at the time in K’unming, with the ICP "External Bureau." He and his colleagues there counseled their in-country counterparts against proceeding beyond demonstrations, but the ardor of local leaders could not be dampened. In November, 1940, peasants in the Plain of Reeds took up arms, and there was shortly a series of peasant jacquerie, which spread throughout the Mekong Delta. As Ho, et al., had predicted, the uprising failed and the French administration in Saigon launched a savage repression which virtually destroyed the ICP organization in rural Cochinchina. 177/

In May, 1941, at the Eighth Plenum of the ICP Central Committee, there was an exhaustive review of the 1940 debacle, and a re-direction of party effort toward forming an alliance of all social classes and political parties, nationalist movements, religious sects, and anti-Japanese resistance groups. Social reform and communist slogans were de-emphasized. All the resources of the Party were to be thrown behind a new front group which would carry out the Party strategy; that group was the League for Independence of Vietnam, or the Viet Minh. 178/ Again and again thereafter, communist leaders in their speeches and published works have returned to the lessons of the abortive revolt and the Eighth Plenum: never squander Party grassroots
organizations in futile causes; submerge the Party in a broader cause, behind a national front.

The example of successful revolution most often held out by DRV leaders has been the "August Revolution" of 1945. The official DRV history points out that this uprising was successful because, under Party leadership, there had been: (1) a careful preparing of the people in both ideology and organization, including the training of cadres, the build-up of bases of resistance, and the organization of armed forces -- peoples' war, peoples' army; (2) a seizing of the right opportunity; (3) "launching the revolutionary high tide of the whole people" -- meaning the forming of a "national front" organization which could command the support of the majority of the people, including "all classes, nationalities, and religions"; (4) a skillful combining of military and political "struggle" -- that is, the employment of both forms of revolutionary endeavor, and the gradual shift in emphasis from political to military methods; (5) dividing the enemy by proselyting his armed forces, civil service, and citizenry. The first two lessons, on preparation for and careful timing of revolution, have received particular stress. Party history is accurate: Ho Chi Minh carefully husbanded his forces and waited for the moment to strike. Virtually all the energies of the Viet Minh from 1943 through the spring of 1945 were devoted to the patient development of a political infrastructure in rural areas, and the building of guerrilla strongholds in the mountains adjacent to China. Ho permitted his armed forces to begin systematic guerrilla warfare only after the Japanese set up an independent Vietnam under Bao Dai in March, 1945. Even then, however, he used them sparingly. There was supposed to have been a Viet Minh conference in June, 1945, to signal the "general uprising," but Ho Chi Minh delayed convening of this conference because he was convinced that uprising would be premature. Although DRV histories do not say so, there is, in fact, every indication that when the "August Revolution" was launched, it came not as a conscientious, coordinated effort controlled by Ho and his lieutenants, but as another more or less spontaneous rebellion. Confronted with the prospect of being a bystander while others won victory, Ho hastily convened the deferred conference on 16 August 1945, and formally committed the Viet Minh to the overthrow of Bao Dai and the expulsion of the French and Japanese. Within three weeks, the independence of the DRV was proclaimed, and Ho was installed in Hanoi as its president.

One example DRV historians do not often cite is the inception of the long and ruinous Resistance War which began in December, 1946. From all appearances, the DRV leaders still entertain serious doubts over the wisdom of going to war against France at that juncture. There is evidence that the incidents which opened the war in December, 1946, had not been condoned by Ho, and that he re-committed the Viet Minh to military action only reluctantly, and after events had issued their own dictum. Moreover, communist literature on the Resistance War of 1945-1954 abounds with reproach for local leaders...
launching too-venturesome, costly enterprises without proper preparation. Even top leaders were not immune to criticism on that score; e.g., Le Duan was apparently relieved of command over COSVN in late 1952 or 1953 for pressing too fast and hard. 181/ From the highest strategic level to the lowest tactical level, Vietnamese communist doctrine underscores the essentiality of careful preparatory work, and the criticality of timing initial overt operations. 182/ It is not likely, then, that a decision to proceed toward the reunification of Vietnam by force was lightly taken by the Lao Dong leaders; it would in any event have countenanced extensive, painstaking, covert groundwork.

Such preliminary efforts might have been the refurbishing of the Communist Party in South Vietnam, which had been seriously weakened by Diem's persistent Communist Denunciation Campaign. It seems probable that, whenever they were started, the initial steps of the DRV were directed to reinvigorating the Lao Dong apparatus in the South. For this purpose it would have needed relatively few cadre -- for instance, with 400 men, the Lao Dong could have dispatched 10 organizers to each of South Vietnam’s provinces. From all indications, organizers were sent South in 1958; the numbers are not known. Similarly, in all likelihood the DRV would have looked to base preparations. Again evidence is scanty, but there were definite indications that guerrilla secure-areas were being prepared in the Highlands, in the Plain of Reeds, and in the War Zone C - War Zone D region north of Saigon. 183/

There are also indications, however, that debate over strategy continued through 1958. Reports captured while being forwarded via Lao Dong channels from South Vietnam to Hanoi indicate that some subordinates there clung to the belief that the Diem regime could be toppled without recourse to guerrilla warfare, and that others despaired of success without substantial military aid from the North. There is also evidence throughout 1958 that Viet Cong tactics were being subjected to careful study in Hanoi. 184/ Whatever preparations were in progress during 1958, in December, 1958, or January, 1959, Hanoi apparently decided that the time had come to intensify its efforts. On December 1, there was an incident at a "political re-education camp" north of Saigon -- the "Phu Loi Massacre" -- which the DRV promptly seized upon to launch a worldwide propaganda offensive against Diem. U.S. intelligence came into possession of a directive from Hanoi to its subordinate headquarters in Inter-Sector V during December, 1958, which stated that the Lao Dong Party Central Committee had decided to "open a new stage of the struggle" 185/; the following month, January, 1959, U.S. sources also acquired an order directing a Viet Cong build-up in Tay Ninh province to provide a base for guerrilla operations; the same order mentioned similar bases in the mountains of western Inter-Sector V. 186/
In February, Viet Cong guerrillas successfully attacked a GVN outpost near Trang Sup, in Tay Ninh, and Diem told a French correspondent that "at the present time Vietnam is a nation at war." George Carver has recorded that in late 1958 or early 1959, Le Duan journeyed to South Vietnam for an on-the-spot appraisal of affairs there, and that his report lead to a DRV decision to step up support of the insurgency.

"Consolidation of the North" proceeded apace during 1958. Societal discipline advanced to the point that by early 1959 the land reform campaign -- under a different name -- was re-initiated without difficulty.187/ Crops were good, and economic prospects in both the agricultural and industrial sectors were excellent.188/ In January, 1959, the DRV contracted with the Soviet Union for a 50% increase in trade, and in February another large loan was negotiated with the CPR.189/ Against this background of domestic success -- progress and plenty within North Vietnam -- and of international finesse -- cooperation with both the great communist powers without domination by either -- the DRV implemented the next step in its strategy.


a. Surfacing the Strategy, 1959

However the DRV privately viewed the war in South Vietnam during 1959 and 1960, the public statements of its leaders were aggressive. If the numbers of infiltrators and the amount of supplies dispatched to the South were insignificant or unimpressive to the beleaguered insurgents, the pose adopted by the Le Duan principals must have greatly enheartened insurgents in South Vietnam.

On 4 April 1959, President Eisenhower, in an address at Gettysburg, declared that South Vietnam could not, without U.S. aid, "meet the dual threat of aggression from without and subversion within its borders." He stated that U.S. national interests compelled the U.S. to help South Vietnam sustain its morale, economic progress, and military strength.190/ On 30 April 1959, Pham Van Dong applauded Khrushchev's rejoinder to President Eisenhower as follows:

"Comrade Khrushchev's strong statement was a powerful blow to the US imperialists aggressive bloc. The Vietnamese people are very grateful to the Soviet Union, head of the socialist camp, for its constant sympathy for and support to their righteous struggle for national reunification. Comrade Khrushchev's statement powerfully encourages our people to enthusiastically build North Viet-Nam and advance gradually toward socialism and to struggle for national reunification . . .

"Just as observed by Comrade Khrushchev, the intervention by US imperialism in South Viet-Nam is the cause of the continued partition of Viet-Nam . . . The struggle for the reunification
of our country is still meeting with difficulties and hardships, but we are confident that the Vietnamese people will certainly triumph in the complete liberation of our country from the US-Diem clique's dictatorial yoke just as they had gloriously succeeded in their valiant struggle in the past. The American imperialists and their lackeys, who are being opposed and isolated, surely will not be able to avoid the ignominious defeat of those who go counter to the march of history." 

Ho Chi Minh's May Day speech of 1959 opened with an encomium from the Soviet Union, China, and other socialist powers who were promoting the movement for national liberation in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. According to the Hanoi Radio report, he pointed out "that the earnest desire of the Vietnamese people from North to South is peace and national reunification. On orders from the U.S. Imperialists the South Vietnamese authorities are sabotaging the implementation of the Geneva Accords and strangling all democratic freedom of the southern people." He concluded on the note that:

"Under the leadership of the Viet-Nam Lao Dong Party and the government, all our people will further strengthen solidarity and unity of mind with other countries in the socialist camp, headed by the great Soviet Union... and strengthen solidarity within the national united front... By so doing the north of our country will steadily advance toward socialism as a strong basis toward victory in the struggle for national reunification."

On 4 May 1959, the official DRV newspaper declared that:

"The glorious South Vietnamese people surely will not remain with folded arms before the continuous and cruel repressive acts of the U.S.-Diem clique. The Vietnamese people have many times compelled their enemies to pay for their bloody crimes. The U.S.-Diem clique has by its own will contracted a big debt of blood toward the Vietnamese people, and have dug their own graves."

The foregoing were issued while the Lao Dong Party conducted the Fifteenth Plenum (Enlarged Session) of its Central Committee in Hanoi. The session featured speeches on foreign and domestic programs, but it is fairly certain that a Plenum of the Lao Dong Central Committee is not a debating society nor a parliament -- decisions were not reached there, they were presented.

On 13 May 1959, Hanoi broadcast in English the communique of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee; on the Plenum, a bellicose tone was unmistakable:
"The Central Committee of the Vietnam Lao Dong Party has held its 15th enlarged session to review the developments in the struggle for national reunification and lay down the tasks for the whole party and people in connection with that struggle..."

"North Vietnam, now completely liberated, has carried through its task of national people's democratic revolution and is carrying out the socialist revolution and building socialism. This is an extremely important change which determines the direction of development of the Vietnamese revolution in the new stage. Meanwhile, the southern part of our country is still under the domination of the American imperialists and their lackey -- Ngo Dinh Diem. They have turned South Vietnam into a new-type colony and a military base for preparing war..."

"The interventionist policy of the U.S. imperialists and the South Vietnam authorities' policy of dependence on the United States have undermined and deliberately continue to undermine the implementation of the Geneva agreements and the cause of peaceful national reunification, thus cutting across the desire and interests of the Vietnamese people. The U.S. imperialists and their followers are scheming to perpetuate the division of our country and prepare a new war..."

"To carry out this perfidious scheme, over the past few years the U.S.-Diem clique has been actively increasing its military forces, carrying out a policy of ruthless exploitation of the people, abolishing all democratic functions, repressing and terrorizing the people in a most barbarous manner, causing ever more serious dislocation of the South Vietnamese economy, and making the life of local people more and more precarious and wretched..."

"To achieve national reunification on the basis of independence and democracy, the session mapped out the following tasks: the entire people will unite and strive to struggle for national reunification on the basis of independence and democracy to endeavor to consolidate the North and actively take it step by step toward socialism, to build a peaceful, unified, independent, democratic, prosperous and strong Vietnam; and to contribute to the safeguarding of peace in Southeast Asia and the world..."

"The session expressed its unshakable belief that our whole people, uniting and struggling heroically and
perseveringly, will certainly smash the U.S. imperialists' scheme to seize our land and their lackeys' plot to sell out our country. On the basis of the consolidation of North Vietnam and its steady development in all fields, of the broad and powerful development of the patriotic movement in the South, and will the approval and support of the peace loving people all over the world, our struggle for national reunification will certainly be successful."

The following day the official press carried an editorial (also broadcast by Radio Hanoi in English) commenting on the communique:

"At present, the world and home situation has become basically different from that of the past. It has been developing in a way which is fully advantageous to our people and very disadvantageous to the imperialists and their lackeys. Our strength in all fields in the North, which is the firm base for the revolutionary struggle in the South, has constantly been consolidated and increased. The magnificently heroic struggle of the southern people has constantly developed and their united strength has broadened without a halt. Strength in all fields of the socialist camp has grown majestically.

"On the basis of an unprecedently firm North Vietnam and socialist camp, our compatriots in the south will struggle resolutely and persistently against the cruel U.S.-Diem regime . . .

"Our people, always cherishing peace, are determined to struggle to compel the other side to carry out correctly the Geneva agreements, to re-establish normal North-South relations and to hold consultations on general elections to reunify the country. However, our people are determined not to give the imperialists and feudalists a free hand to oppose our people's aspirations and to keep the southerners in slavery. Our people are determined to struggle with their traditional heroism by all necessary forms and measures so as to achieve the goal of the revolution."

On 10 July 1959, the Belgian Communist publication Red Flag published an article under Ho Chi Minh's by-line which reported that:

"We are building socialism in Viet-Nam, but we are building it in only one part of the country, while in the other part we still have to direct and bring to a close middle-class democratic and anti-imperialist revolution."
On 8 July 1959, the United States armed forces sustained the first combat deaths in the war: two U.S. servicemen were killed by a terrorist bomb inside a U.S. compound at Bien Hoa. Other Viet Cong terrorist activities mounted to new levels of intensity. In the fall of 1959, as recounted above, communist guerrillas began to attack openly units of the Army of Vietnam, and to occupy province and district capitals for short periods. On 12 September 1959, Premier Pham Van Dong told the French Consul in Hanoi, that:

"You must remember, we will be in Saigon tomorrow, we will be in Saigon tomorrow." 193

In November, 1959, Pham Van Dong twice told Canadian ICC Commissioner Ericksen-Brown that "we will drive the Americans in the sea"—statements deemed significant enough by the Lao Dong hierarchy to elicit a visit from General Giap to "reassure" Ericksen-Brown of the DRV's peaceful intent. 194

But the U.S. and Diem were both inured to threatening communist invective; what should have been more ominous was the DRV's willingness to act, first evident in Laos.

b. DRV Intervention in Laos

During the First Indochina War, a nominally independent national movement developed in Laos, the paramilitary Pathet Lao, and its political arm, the Lao Fatherland Front (Neo Lao Hak Xat). It was quite clear, however, that the Viet Minh -- and the Lao Dong Party -- dominated the Resistance in Laos; in fact, the Viet Minh negotiated the Geneva settlement on behalf of its Laotian allies. After the Accords were signed, some Laotians were regrouped to North Vietnam itself, and like the South Vietnamese, were formed into NVA units. In 1954-1955, the DRV openly assisted the Pathet Lao in consolidating political and military strength in Phong Saly and Sam Neua, two provinces on Laos' northeast border with North Vietnam, designated as regroupment zones by the Geneva Agreements. U.S. intelligence obtained evidence that DRV cadres remained in these provinces following regroupment, some as advisors, but some occupying key political and administrative positions in the Pathet Lao and Neo Lao Hak Xat. Captured documents indicate that a North Vietnamese headquarters for this effort was set up in Laos, with the following missions assigned from Hanoi:

1) implementation of the truce and the political struggle;

2) establishment and training of the Laotian (Communist) Party;
(3) assistance in fiscal matters; and

(4) improvement of Pathet Lao military forces.

A captured report to Hanoi, probably from this headquarters, indicated that by 1956 the Laotian Communist Party had expanded from less than 100 to more than 2,000 members, and that a light infantry, guerrilla force of more than fifteen battalions had been created. Apparently, Hanoi had planned to withdraw the Vietnamese cadre in late 1956, and there is evidence that some withdrawals took place by early 1957; there is also evidence that most DRV cadre remained. However, in 1957, with the aid of the ICC, a political settlement was reached. Two battalions of Pathet Lao surrendered to the Royal Lao Government (RLG), to be incorporated into its army, and the Pathet Lao agreed to demobilize 5,000 other troops. Two officials of the Lao Fatherland Front were admitted to the Royal Lao Government, and the movement ostensibly integrated into the national community.

During 1958 and early 1959, the Royal Lao Government became increasingly pro-Western, and DRV activities in Laos were evidently attenuated. However, in May, 1959, when the Royal Lao Army (RLA) attempted to disestablish its two Pathet Lao battalions, one escaped and marched for the DRV. DRV reaction was quick. Immediately thereafter U.S. intelligence was reliably informed that a military headquarters similar to the Viet Minh's Dien Bien Phu command post had been set up near the Laos border to control operations in Laos by the NVA 335th Division, which had been formed from the "Lao Volunteers" regrouped to the DRV in 1955. From mid-1959 onwards, the U.S. acquired convincing evidence of an increasing DRV military involvement in Laos, and beginning in late 1960, of USSR entry into the conflict with substantial military aid for the Pathet Lao. The Pathet Lao aided by a severe weakening of the RLG from a neutralist coup by Kong Le in 1961, and a counter coup by right-wing forces in 1962, mounted an offensive against the RLG to expand Pathet Lao controlled territory, which continued through a "cease-fire" of May, 1961.

It was not, however, until December, 1960, that the DRV announced to foreign diplomats resident in Hanoi its decision to intervene in Laos; during 1961 the DRV presence in Laos was transformed from a semi-covert MAAG-like undertaking to an operational theater. Beginning in December, 1960, and throughout 1961 and early 1962, Soviet aircraft flew 2,000 to 3,000 sorties from the DRV to Laos, delivering more than 3,000 tons of supplies to communist forces, which expanded their territory to hold the northern half of the country. Ethnic North Vietnamese appeared in Pathet Lao formations, and Kong Le himself admitted that NVA officers and soldiers were serving as "technicians" with his paratroops. North Vietnamese from NVA formations were captured by RLG forces and captured documents substantiated the presence of entire NVA units. In December, 1961, a convoy of Soviet-made tanks was sighted entering Laos.
from the DRV, and shortly thereafter DRV officials formally presented 45 tanks to Kong Le. U.S. aerial photography identified also Soviet-made artillery and radar in use by the Pathet Lao. Truck convoys of 20 to 300 vehicles were observed entering Laos carrying munitions, rice, motor fuel, and NVA troops. Altogether, the combined communist forces demonstrated significant military superiority over the RIG forces. Rightist forces (under Phoumi Nosavan), U.S. military aid notwithstanding, were markedly unsuccessful in stemming the communist drive. In May, 1961, a truce was struck, and the conflict was carried into international conference; at Geneva on 23 July 1962, a new political settlement was reached. As of that period, U.S. intelligence reported 12 NVA battalions in Laos, some 6,000 strong. In addition, 3,000 NVA personnel were serving with PL units. 199/

The Geneva Agreement on Laos of 1962 consisted of joint declaration by the several nations concerned with Indochina -- including the U.S., the DRV, and the GVN -- agreeing that Laos would be neutralized:

"All foreign regular and irregular troops, foreign para-military formations and foreign military personnel shall be withdrawn from Laos ... the introduction of foreign regular and irregular troops, foreign para-military formations and foreign military personnel into Laos of armaments, munitions, and war materiel generally, except such quantities as the Royal Government of Laos may consider necessary for the national defense of Laos, is prohibited ..."

In concert with the Pathet Lao, the DRV circumvented these agreements. Although measures were taken to conceal DRV presence and ostensibly to withdraw DRV forces -- 40 North Vietnamese were removed under ICC observation -- U.S. intelligence obtained good evidence, including a number of eye witness statements, that the bulk of the NVA forces remained in Laos; U.S. estimates placed NVA strength in Laos in early 1963 at 4,000 troops in 8 battalions, plus 2,000 Pathet Lao advisors. 200/

In any event, by late 1960 the DRV could look upon its Laotian enterprise as successful in substantially expanding its sphere of influence in Laos, to include control over the territory adjacent to South Vietnam over which passed its "Ho Chi Minh Trail" of infiltration (see map). Eventually the enterprise brought about withdrawal of the U.S. military presence from Laos, per the Geneva Agreement of 1962. If the Vientiane government, braced with broad U.S. aid, surprised the DRV with its resiliency, it at least proved unable to challenge the Pathet Lao -- and DRV -- gains. Whatever the DRV longer term goal in Laos, reunification of Vietnam seemed thereafter to take priority over further extension in Laos. In any event, the DRV succeeded in securing its Laotian frontier from U.S. or Laotian
efforts to mobilize the tribal peoples against it, and in opening access to South Vietnam via the Laotian panhandle.

It is not clear whether the DRV found it necessary to pressure or subvert the Cambodian government in order to bring it into line with its general strategy, but align the Cambodians did. As in Laos, the Viet Minh had fronted for Khmer Resistance at the Geneva Conference of 1954, and there is evidence that in the years following it supported subversive organizations in Cambodia. In 1958, a crisis between South Vietnam and Cambodia erupted over boundary disputes and border violations. Cambodia formally laid claim to all of Cochinchina in a declaration to the United Nations, while South Vietnam laid claim to off-shore islands and other nominally Cambodian territory.

Beginning in 1958, Cambodia declared for "neutralism," and thereafter its relations with the DRV were marked with increasing cordiality and cooperativeness. Evidence collected since 1963 indicates that the Viet Cong built bases adjacent to the Cambodian border, used sanctuary areas across it, operated trans-frontier supply routes, and had sources of supply within Cambodia. Insofar as the minimal evident objectives of DRV policy were concerned -- use of Cambodian territory to further the campaign to reunify Vietnam -- Cambodia proved to be incapable of interfering even when, apparently, it wished to police its territory. 201/

c. Explication of the Strategy, 1960

During 1958 and 1959 work had progressed on a revision of the DRV Constitution. On 1 January 1960, with much fanfare, the new basic law was promulgated. The Preamble recounted the modern history of Vietnam, in part as follows:

"Vietnam is a single entity from Lang-Son to Camau.

"The Vietnamese people, throughout the thousands of years of history, have been an industrious working people who have struggled unswittingly and heroically to build their country and defend the independence of their Fatherland . . . With the Dien Bien Phu victory, the Vietnamese people defeated the French imperialists and the U.S. interventionists . . .

"This major success of the Vietnamese people was also a common success of the liberation movement of the oppressed peoples, of the world front of peace, and of the socialist camp.

"Since the restoration of peace in completely liberated North Viet-Nam, our people have carried through the National People's Democratic Revolution. But the South is still under
the rule of the imperialists and feudalists; our country is still temporarily divided into two zones.

"The Vietnamese revolution has moved into a new position. Our people must endeavor to consolidate the North, taking it toward socialism, and carry on the struggle for peaceful reunification of the country and completion of the tasks of the National People's Democratic revolution throughout the country.

"In the last few years, our peoples in the North have achieved many big successes in economic rehabilitation and cultural development. At present, socialist transformation and construction are being successfully carried out.

"Meanwhile, in the South, the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen have been savagely repressing the patriotic movement of our people. They have been strengthening military forces and carrying out their scheme of turning the southern part of our country into a colony and military base for their war preparations. But our southern compatriots have constantly struggled heroically and refused to submit to them. The people throughout the country, united as one, are holding aloft the banners of peace, national unity, independence, and democracy, resolved to march forward and win final victory. The cause of the peaceful reunification of the Fatherland will certainly be victorious."
their henchmen in order to achieve national unity and complete independence and freedom throughout the country. These two strategic tasks are closely related to each other and spur each other forward...

"The two revolutionary tasks of the North and South belong to two different strategies, each task being aimed at satisfying the definite requirement of each zone under the specific conditions of our divided country. But these two tasks have one common aim -- to achieve peaceful national reunification and resolve one common contradiction of our whole country -- the contradiction between our people and the imperialists and their henchmen.

"The common task of the Vietnamese revolution at present is: to strengthen the unity of all the people; to struggle resolutely to maintain peace, to accelerate the socialist revolution in North Viet-Nam while at the same time stepping up the National People's Democratic Revolution in South Viet-Nam;...

"The revolution in the South is a protracted, hard, and complex process of struggle, combining many forms of struggle of great activity and flexibility, ranging from lower to higher, and taking as its basis the building, consolidation and development of the revolutionary power of the masses. During this process we must pay special attention to the work of organizing and educating the people, first and foremost the workers, peasants and intellectuals, promoting to the highest degree the revolutionary fighting spirit of the various strata of our patriotic countrymen. We must unceasingly expose the criminal schemes and acts of the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen, doing our utmost to divide and isolate them.

"To insure the complete success of the revolutionary struggle in South Viet-Nam our people there must strive to establish a united bloc of workers, peasants, and soldiers and to bring into being a broad national united front directed against the U.S.-Diem clique and based on the worker-peasant alliance. This front must rally all the patriotic parties and religious groupings, together with all individuals inclined to oppose the U.S.-Diem clique. The aims of its struggle are peace, national independence, democratic freedoms, improvement of the people's living conditions, and peaceful national reunification.
"The front must carry out its work in a very flexible manner in order to rally all forces that can be rallied, win over all forces that can be won over, neutralize all forces that should be neutralized, and draw the broad masses into the general struggle against the US-Diem clique for the liberation of the South and the peaceful reunification of the fatherland.

"The revolutionary movement in the South plays a very important role in relation to the reunification of the country. Simultaneously with the effort to build the North and advance toward socialism our people must strive to maintain and develop the revolutionary forces in the South and create favorable conditions for peaceful national reunification...." 203/

Ho Chi Minh, in his speech at the Congress, attributed the "victory of the Vietnamese revolution" in part to the "whole-hearted assistance of the fraternal socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union and China." He identified the DRV with the world "forces of peace" and stated that "the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is a member of the big socialist family headed by the great Soviet Union." 204/ Giap's speech at the Congress cited the example of the August, 1945, general uprisings, noting that victory came because "our party kept a firm hold on the national democratic revolutionary line," and paid appropriate attention to preparing the people for their tasks. Le Duan's address stressed that:

"The southern people's revolutionary struggle will be long, drawn out, and arduous. It is not a simple process but a complicated one, combining many varied forms of struggle -- from elementary to advanced, legal and illegal -- and based on the building, consolidation and development of the revolutionary force of the masses. In this process, we must constantly intensify our solidarity and the organization and education of the people of the South... and must uphold the revolutionary fighting spirit of all strata of patriotic compatriots." 205/

Le Duan also called for a "worker-peasant-army coalition bloc," and a "broad national united front against the US-Diem clique."

In a policy-cycle similar to that of 1957 -- strategy announced around September, followed by international exposure and confirmation at Moscow in November -- the DRV obtained at the "Conference of Representatives of Communist and Workers' Parties" held in Moscow in November, 1960, fairly explicit endorsement of its line of action in South Vietnam. As in 1957, the Moscow Declaration distinguished between war in general and anti-colonial wars, noting that "national-liberation revolutions have triumphed in vast areas of the world" and emphasized that:
"The complete collapse of colonialism is inevitable. The downfall of the system of colonial slavery under the impact of the national-liberation movement is a phenomenon ranking second in historical importance after the formation of the world system of socialism."

"The United States of America is the chief bulwark of present-day colonialism...."

"...the working class of many capitalist countries, by overcoming the split in its ranks and achieving unity of action of all its detachments, could deliver a heavy blow to the policy of the ruling circles of the capitalist countries and force them to step up preparations for a new war, repel the offensive of monopoly capital, and ensure satisfaction of its vital everyday and democratic demands."

"....The Communist Parties, guided by Marxist-Leninist teaching, have always been against the export of revolution. At the same time, they resolutely struggle against imperialist export of counter-revolution. They consider it their international duty to call on the peoples of all countries to unite, to mobilize all their internal forces, to act vigorously and, relying on the might of the world socialist system, to prevent or decisively rebuff the interference of the imperialists in the affairs of the people of any country who have risen in revolution."

"The Communist Parties reaffirm the propositions of the 1957 Declaration concerning the question of the forms of transition of various countries from capitalism to socialism."

"In conditions when the exploiting classes resort to the use of force against the people, it is necessary to bear in mind another possibility—that of nonpeaceful transition to socialism. Leninism teaches, and historical experience confirms, that the ruling classes do not relinquish power voluntarily. In these conditions the degree of bitterness and the forms of the class struggle will depend not so much on the proletariat as on the extent of the resistance of the reactionary circles to the will of the overwhelming majority of the people, on the use of force by these circles at one or another stage of the struggle for socialism." 206/

It is interesting, in the light of the foregoing, to read the Communist Party history, written in South Vietnam around 1963 and captured on Operation CRIMP in 1966 (see Tab 2, p. 51 ff.). While such a history must be regarded with caution—Soviet historians have not yet to establish that the Bolsheviks overthrew the Czar—the CRIMP history, consistent with other captured documents and prisoner interrogations, dates the insurgency in South Vietnam from the Lao Dong Party conclave of May, 1959:
"...Particularly after 20 July 1956, the key cadres and Party members in South Vietnam asked questions which demanded answers:
Can we still continue the struggle to demand the implementation of the Geneva Agreement given the existing regime in South Vietnam? If not, then what must be done?" A mood of skepticism and non-confidence in the orientation of the struggle began to seep into the party apparatus and among some of the masses.

"At the end of 1956 the popularization of the volume by Comrade Duan [Le Duan] entitled 'The South Vietnam Revolutionary Path' was of great significance because the ideological crisis was now solved. After analyzing the character of the South Vietnam society, the character of the American-Diemist enemy etc., the volume outlined a new strategic orientation for the South Vietnam revolution, a strategic mission in which everyone could have some confidence: It is necessary to continue the national democratic revolution in South Vietnam and it is necessary to use force to overthrow the feudalist imperialist regime in order to establish a revolutionary democratic coalition and create the conditions for the peaceful reunification of the Fatherland.

"After the Resolution of the Fifteenth Conference of the Central Committee was issued all of South Vietnam possessed a clear and correct strategic policy and orientation. The Resolution of the Fifteenth Conference of the Central Committee clearly delineated the general responsibility of the Vietnam revolution, analyzed the special characteristics of the South Vietnam situation, clearly spelled out the revolutionary tasks in South Vietnam and at the same time outlined the path which the South Vietnam revolution should take.

"Thanks to this correct and clear delineation of the strategic orientation and path, the South Vietnam people and party clearly understood the aims and enlightened path to follow....The volume 'South Vietnam Revolutionary Path' and the Resolution of the Fifteenth Conference of the Central Committee provided the cadres and Party members with a pair of wings with which to fly and lamps to shine upon the path ahead, a feeling of encouragement and confidence, a determined will because the goals were clear and the path bright....

"Since the end of 1958, particularly after the Thu Loi Massacre, the situation truly ripened for an armed movement against the enemy. But the leadership of the Nam-Bo Regional Committee at that time still hesitated for many reasons, but the principal reason was the fear of violating the party line. The directive of the politburo in May 1959 stated that the time had come to push the arms struggle against the enemy. Thanks to this we closely followed the actual..."
situation in order to formulate a program which we felt would be essential, and in October 1959, the armed struggle was launched.

"Was the armed struggle slow in coming? We realize that it was not possible to launch the armed struggle too soon, before the situation had ripened. At any rate, a short period of time was lost because although many areas were engaged in armed propaganda (terror-backed persecution) up to this time, it was limited to armed propaganda and insufficient strength existed to maintain continued opposition to the enemy. Although slow in coming, it was not too slow because there was still time to transform the situation into one where the proper conditions existed. However, if the change had been even slower, even more difficulties would have been encountered and the change in the movement would not have been as easy."

"The Resolution of the 15th Conference of the Central Committee officially and concisely specified the responsibilities and strategic aims of the South Vietnam revolution.

"But problems still existed: how were these responsibilities, aims, and progress of the South Vietnam revolution to be implemented? What must the main forms and procedures of the struggle be? Although the Resolution outlined some of these factors, at the time of the Conference, the details of the South Vietnam movement as well as revolutionary experiences of friendly nations were not sufficient enough for the Conference to formulate a precise program. Only 2 years later, were there sufficient factors available, based partly on the experiences of Laos but mainly on the experiences of the South Vietnam revolutionary movement, the Central Committee was able to formulate a clear and concise program concerning these problems...."

The latter reference is to a January, 1961, Resolution of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party, which directed concentration on peasant problems, stressed political action—"The political aspect is truly the basic one," said the CRIMP history—and warned against "revisionism." The Lao Dong newspaper carried an editorial, broadcast by Radio Hanoi on 13 January 1961 which described the 1961 Resolution as a document which:

"Reaffirms and sheds more light on the thesis of the Declaration of 1957 concerning the forms of transition from capitalism to socialism in different countries and clearly points to the lines and methods of struggle of the communist parties of capitalist countries...."

"As for the colonial countries, the statement points out that the struggle for national independence should be waged through armed struggles or by non-military methods, according to the specific conditions in the country concerned. The working class, which plays a major role in the national liberation struggle, is determined to
carry through the tasks of the national and democratic revolution against all schemes of reaction to hinder progress of society...."

"The Declaration of the Conference of Representatives of Communists and Workers' Parties in Moscow in 1957, and the new statement are a profound summary of the experiences of revolutionary struggle and of building a new life of our time. They represent a development of Marxism-Leninsim for the new conditions of history." 207/

But none of the communist statements—neither the Moscow Declaration of 1957, nor that of 1960; neither the Lao Dong Resolution of September, 1960, nor that of January, 1961—attracted much attention in the West. Neither did the Manifesto of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, proclaimed in December, 1960, seemingly in response to the Lao Dong Third Congress Resolution. But N. S. Khruschev made news with his 6 January 1961 "wars of national liberation" speech. Khruschev's remarks were actually little more than a precis of the Moscow Declarations of 1957 and 1960; nonetheless, they shocked the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., in his "A Thousand Days," declared that Khruschev's "elaborate speech...made a conspicuous impression on the new President, who took it as an authoritative exposition of Soviet intentions, discussed it with his staff, and read excerpts from it aloud to the National Security Council....Underneath the canonical beat of language, the oration sounding a brutal joy over a world where democracy was everywhere on the retreat and communism everywhere on the march." 208/ The President and his principal cabinet officers returned to this speech again and again in their explanations of Administration policy. 209/

Khruschev offered an analysis of the world situation as it appeared at the beginning of the 1960's and declared that, as of that moment, "the prevention of a new war is the question of all questions." He described three categories of wars: "world wars, local wars, and liberation wars or popular uprisings." World wars, he declared, were unlikely. Local wars were also improbable. But, he said, "liberation wars and popular uprisings will continue to exist as long as imperialism exists...such wars are not only admissible but inevitable...an example...is the armed struggle of the Vietnamese people...." He asserted unequivocally that "the communists support just wars of this kind whole-heartedly and without reservation and they march in the van of the peoples fighting for repression." But Khruschev's speech notwithstanding, by 1961 the strategic course of the DRV was well set, and the new President was already at war in South Vietnam with the DRV.