

Background for Commanders

Vietnam: External Aggression, Not Revolution*

The non-Communist commitment of the great majority of the people of South Vietnam is often confused by the exaggerated importance given to the so-called National Liberation Front. Statements are made that what is going on in South Vietnam is a purely internal revolt against an unpopular government by a discontented population represented by this Liberation Front.

Before 1960 no one had even heard of the National Liberation Front. It was in that year that Hanoi radio announced its formation.

The Geneva Agreement of 1954 separated North and South Vietnam by a 5-mile demilitarized zone. The northern part, with its capital at Hanoi, was under the control of the Communist Viet Minh, while Saigon became the capital of what had been central and South Vietnam—internationally recognized by more than 5 other governments. The two separate entities were obliged not to interfere with each other until agreement could be reached between them on when and how they could be unified.

What We Learned

We have since learned quite dramatically that Ho Chi Minh's government in Hanoi never had any intention of allowing the South Vietnamese freely to choose their own government and run their own affairs until agreement could be reached on unification. There were areas of South Vietnam nominally under Communist Viet Minh control at the time of the 1954 Agreement. These Viet Minh were ordered by Hanoi to hide their arms and to do what they could to frustrate the attempts at administration made by the South Vietnamese Government. Ho Chi Minh was reasonably convinced that the South Vietnamese Government would easily crumble with the help of the subversion he directed.

The South Vietnamese Government refused to participate in a rigged version of the free reunification elections called for in the Geneva Agreements between the North Vietnamese and the French. South Vietnam continued to make progress and to strengthen its position. By 1956 Ho realized that he would be unable to subvert the Saigon-led government without military action.

Southern-born Vietnamese who had gone North for intensive training and political indoctrination were returned to South Vietnam to serve as the hard core of the so-called "indigenous force" of the Viet Cong.

By 1959-60, Hanoi had built up a military capability in the South which enabled them to step up their actions considerably beyond small-scale guerrilla activity.

At the Third Lao Dong (Communist) Party Congress in Hanoi in September 1960, Ho Chi Minh said that the

North must "step up the national democratic people's revolution in the South." The Party Congress called for the formation of a "National United Front" in the South.

In December 1960, Hanoi radio announced the formation of a "Front for Liberation of the South." This is the origin of the so-called "National Liberation Front" (NLF) in South Vietnam.

It was then, and still is, a pure creature and tool of the North Vietnamese regime. Its so-called leadership contains not a single nationally-known figure. It is as faceless to the outside world as it is to the Vietnamese people. Thus it is not a "National Front" and it is certainly not a "Liberation Front" for its purpose has nothing to do with "Liberation"—quite the opposite.

The NLF and the Viet Cong

The NLF has little or nothing to do with the command of the Viet Cong, especially the main force, or regular Viet Cong battalions and regiments in the South. These main force units and other Viet Cong elements are supported, supplied, and controlled from Hanoi, and only Hanoi can direct them to cease their aggression. The NLF is purely the political facade or, as the name plainly states, the political front for Hanoi.

The movement of military personnel from North Vietnam into the South became so flagrant after 1960 that it was publicized by the Legal Committee of the International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICC), composed of India, Poland, and Canada, with only Poland objecting, in 1962.

At the time of this ICC report there was not a single American combat soldier in Vietnam or elsewhere on the mainland of Southeast Asia.

From 1959 to 1961 the North Vietnam regime infiltrated 10,000 men into the South. In 1962, 13,000 additional personnel were infiltrated. And by the end of 1964 North Vietnam may well have moved over 40,000 armed and unarmed guerrillas and cadres into South Vietnam.

Today there is reason to believe that, in addition, at least 12 regiments of regular North Vietnamese forces are fighting in organized units in South Vietnam. The first of these was introduced prior to the air action against the North.

Our whole involvement in South Vietnam is thus based on the fact that the Viet Cong is not an indigenous revolt. It is as much a case of outside aggression as if Hanoi had boldly moved those 12 regiments in marching formation across the 17th Parallel. That is the heart of our involvement.

* Excerpts from address by Deputy Under Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson at Dyess Air Force Base, Abilene, Texas.