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**VIETNAM:
IF THE COMMUNISTS WON**

P. J. Honey

SOUTHEAST ASIAN PERSPECTIVES

WILLIAM HENDERSON
Editor

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by P. J. Honey

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PEKING, HANOI, AND GUERRILLA
INSURGENCY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

by Justus M. van der Kroef

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Preface

In the protracted debate over United States policy and the Vietnam War, one of the central questions has been the probable fate of the people of South Vietnam in the event of a Communist victory. Whatever one may think of our involvement in that interminable struggle, there can be little doubt that we now have a special responsibility for the future of the millions of individuals—soldiers, government officials, administrators, school teachers, and their families — who have fought, or otherwise been counted, “on our side” over the years of bloody conflict with the Communists.

What would happen to these people—would anything “bad” necessarily happen—if the withdrawal of American forces results in a fairly rapid Communist takeover in the South? Would these millions of soldiers and committed civilians, with their wives and children, receive the treatment due at the end of a war to honorable, if defeated, combatants? Or would they be exposed to violent retribution, a “bloodbath” of revenge and execution at the hands of the victorious Communists?

The argument has raged for years; and the plain fact is that, here as elsewhere, we can never know the future with absolute certainty. But this does *not* mean that we cannot make a reasonably valid forecast as to what would *probably* take place. For governments and their leaders, like people and institutions everywhere, leave a telltale record of their acts upon this earth. And while the record of past policies does not fully ordain the present—much less the future—course of governments, Communist or otherwise, it does offer persuasive evidence of how they are *likely* to behave when roughly comparable circumstances obtain again.

In the monograph that follows, P. J. Honey presents a chilling analysis of the historical record of how the Vietnamese Communist

Party, the Hanoi government, and their principal leaders have dealt with the political opposition in circumstances where the Communists have gained the upper hand over the latter. His account begins with the earliest political activities of Ho Chi Minh in China, including his betrayal of the respected Vietnamese nationalist leader Phan Boi Chau to the French authorities; and carries through the grisly massacres perpetrated by the Communists in the city of Hue during the infamous Tet Offensive of 1968.

The reader may, of course, draw his own conclusions as to the validity of this analysis for the future of South Vietnam under Communist rule. Honey's own forecast is based upon his reading of the harsh and inescapable facts of history: "Calculated on the basis of past Communist deeds," he concludes, "and given the size of South Vietnam's population, the minimum number of those to be butchered (by the Communists) will exceed one million and could rise to several times that figure."

Mr. Honey is the first British scholar to have specialized exclusively on Vietnamese affairs. He has lived in both North and South Vietnam, and is fluent in the Vietnamese language. Formerly a Lecturer in Vietnamese at the London School of Oriental and African Studies, he is now Reader in Vietnamese Studies at London University. His two books, *Communism in North Vietnam* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1963), and *Genesis of a Tragedy, The Historical Background to the Vietnam War* (London: Benn, 1968), are standard references.

William Henderson

June 1971

Vietnam: If The Communists Won

by P. J. Honey

1. Vietnamese Communism — The Formative Years.

Communism in Vietnam was the achievement of a single individual, Nguyen Tat Thanh, better known to the world by the alias he later adopted, Ho Chi Minh. He learned his trade of professional revolutionary at the University of the Toilers of the East in the Soviet Union during the early days of the Stalin era, and first applied his newly acquired skills in Canton, where he worked on the staff of the Russian Consul Mikhail Borodin. There, under cover of his consular appointment, Ho created the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth Association, the forerunner of the Vietnamese Communist Party, and selected and trained the lieutenants who would later serve him in the titanic struggles he undertook. To understand Ho's political philosophy and methodology, one must begin by examining his thinking at that time and the techniques he employed, for he inculcated both into his disciples by word and example.

From the start, it was apparent that Ho had acquired in the Soviet Union an unshakable belief, which he retained to the end of his days, in the two basic principles of Stalinist orthodoxy:

- (1) The dictatorship of the proletariat must be achieved in two stages: the bourgeois democratic revolution; and, later, the Communist revolution.
- (2) Only workers can provide good revolutionary leadership, while peasants and others can never be more than "long term allies."

It was the first of these principles that determined the whole course of Ho's political activities from the 1920s to the 1950s. Un-

like so many other Communist revolutionaries, he resisted the temptation to move directly towards the establishment of communism. He evidently believed implicitly the warnings he received from his Russian teachers concerning the dangers of too great haste, and carried with him the lesson he learned from the Soviet experience that revolution can be successfully accomplished only if it is undertaken in two stages. All his efforts were, therefore, directed to the achievement of a bourgeois democratic revolution in Vietnam in the first instance. Since that required the active cooperation, not only of the worker proletariat, but also of the bourgeois classes, Ho cultivated members of these classes from the very outset, resisting the temptation to denounce them as class enemies of communism. But while he regarded them as essential to the accomplishment of his ultimate aims, as tools to be used, allies even, in the last resort they were enemies of communism. For that reason, he viewed them as temporary allies only, persons with whom circumstances obliged him to work, useful but politically dangerous. Only through them could the bourgeois democratic revolution be brought about; but they must not be allowed to seize power, or else the Communist revolution could never materialize. Ho never forgot the second Stalinist principle that the worker proletariat alone could provide the necessary leadership for that; and it generated in him a profound suspicion of all nonproletarians, even those who served him loyally for many years.

Long afterwards, in 1967, one of the founder members of the Vietnamese Communist Party, Hoang Quoc Viet, who was by that time one of the most important leaders of Vietnamese communism, spoke at length to a South American Communist leader and explained to him the reasons for the success of the Vietnamese revolution. The latter's notes of the conversation make interesting reading; they tell how Ho Chi Minh recognized that the whole Vietnamese people not only should, but had to, be used in order to ensure the success of Vietnam's bourgeois democratic revolution. "The national bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, the intellectuals, and the peasants," explained Viet, "are all revolutionary classes. Each of them, admittedly, has weaknesses, but all have useful qualities which must be exploited. The intellectuals, for example, are better educated than the workers, better able to think and express themselves, and they are susceptible to feelings of patriotism. They can be motivated by

nationalism and are invaluable for commencing the revolution as propagandists, demonstrators, and agitators. Their weakness lies in their inability to withstand counterrevolutionary pressures applied by the authorities and they succumb too easily, but they are nevertheless essential in the early stages." It is plain from all Hoang Quoc Viet said that Ho Chi Minh's beliefs had been imparted to, and accepted by, his lieutenants, who were doubtless impressed by their efficacy. They are still held by Vietnam's Communist leaders today.

The bourgeois classes were never regarded as anything more than temporary allies of communism, necessary for the accomplishment of the first, or bourgeois democratic, phase of the revolution. Their role was to serve under a Communist leadership and preferably remain unaware that they were doing so, which is why communism was carefully concealed from the revolution's supporters in the opening years of the Vietnamese revolution. Bourgeois classes were never, under any circumstances, to be allowed to assume political power. Such members of the bourgeoisie as already held positions of leadership, or were even believed to possess the qualities which might make them leaders at some future time, had to be eliminated as early as possible. No serious rival to Vietnamese communism could be tolerated. Ho Chi Minh's conduct as the founder and head of the Revolutionary Youth Association exemplifies this latter principle.

At the time of Ho's arrival in Canton during 1925, a Vietnamese independence movement already existed in southern China, organized and led by the greatly respected nationalist leader Phan Boi Chau. This organization would have proved a formidable rival to Ho's intended Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth Association, not least because Chau's fame and prestige far overshadowed that of Ho. The latter therefore resolved to liquidate the movement together with its illustrious leader, and did so in the following way. Having arranged with the French Security Service to deliver Phan Boi Chau for a reward of one hundred thousand piastres — a very large sum indeed at that time, Ho invited Chau to a meeting in Shanghai. The unsuspecting nationalist leader, who had failed to remark that the meeting place was just inside the boundary of the French Concession,¹

¹ An area within Shanghai formerly administered by the French authorities under the old "unequal treaty" system.

went to the house and was immediately arrested by French police. Ho's ally in this plot was Phan Boi Chau's own representative in Hong Kong, Nguyen Cong Vien, who was at that time using the name Lam Duc Thu, and the two divided the reward equally. Chau was brought back to Vietnam, tried, and sentenced to death for his revolutionary activities.

Some of Ho's followers subsequently reported that he had given them the following reasons for his act of treachery:

- (1) Chau was too old to be of any further use to the revolution.
- (2) The upsurge of patriotism that would inevitably follow Chau's trial and condemnation, would create a favorable revolutionary climate in Vietnam.
- (3) The reward money would help to finance the training of new recruits.

The first of these reasons is an obvious attempt to minimize Ho's guilt, but the second and third reasons provide a revealing insight into the callous pragmatism that was to become the hallmark of Ho's later political activities. The ruthlessness, the total disregard for human life and suffering, were always present in Ho's actions, though he frequently disguised these characteristics behind gentle words and a benign exterior.

Ho again used Nguyen Cong Vien to subvert and destroy Phan Boi Chau's nationalist movement. It was the practice of the movement to bring young Vietnamese patriots to China for revolutionary training, and the young men selected were required to send two photographs of themselves to Nguyen Cong Vien before their departure. Those of them who, during their political and military training at Whampoa Academy,² had shown themselves receptive to Ho's communism and had joined the Revolutionary Youth Association were returned secretly to Vietnam. The rest, who rejected communism and remained faithful to the nationalist cause, were arrested when they crossed the frontier into Vietnam by a French Security Service official, who invariably possessed a copy of

² The military academy established by Chiang Kai-shek in 1924 to train politically-minded officers for the Kuomintang Army.

the photograph they had sent to Hong Kong. Nguyen Cong Vien, when informed by Ho of the impending return of an "unsuitable" student, provided the French Consulate at Hong Kong with details of the route and a photograph, for which he received a monetary reward. The arrested nationalist students were imprisoned, so that contact between the nationalist movement in Vietnam and its organization in Canton was progressively weakened and ultimately broken altogether. Those nationalists whose suspicions were aroused by the unflinching arrest of "unsuitable" colleagues did not dare to return to Vietnam, but instead enlisted in the Kuomintang Army.

These early examples of Ho Chi Minh's working methods illustrate the extent of his dedication to the accomplishment of his ultimate goal, and the extreme nature of the measures he was prepared to use. The goal he had set himself, even at that early date, was unquestionably the establishment of a Communist regime in Vietnam. Convinced that he must first bring about a bourgeois democratic revolution before proceeding to the Communist revolution, he took considerable pains to conceal his ultimate aim from all but his fellow Communists; for communism would certainly have failed to attract support from those bourgeois elements essential to the realization of the first stage. Nevertheless, he remained ready at all times to destroy any non-Communist person or group, however much these might have supported him in the past, should he consider them a threat to the success of his future plans. The two classes of persons he was most concerned to eliminate were potential enemies of communism, and potential rivals who might at some future time attract to their own political movements supporters who would otherwise have accepted Ho's own leadership.

2. *The Bourgeois Democratic Revolution.*

At a later stage of his revolutionary progress, in August 1945, Ho Chi Minh was present inside North Vietnam as the leader of the Viet Minh movement he had himself created. At his disposal he had a small military force, weapons supplied by the World War II Allies, and a network of Communist Party cells throughout the

country. The Japanese occupation forces had imprisoned all French troops on March 9th; and, when Japan capitulated to the Allies on August 15th, her soldiers adopted an attitude of neutrality while they awaited the arrival of Allied troops who would disarm and repatriate them. Thus the Viet Minh movement was virtually unopposed after August 15th, and moved swiftly throughout all parts of Vietnam to make itself master of the country. Within ten days it had, to all intents, accomplished this objective; and on August 29th, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

The very great majority of Vietnamese knew little or nothing about communism or the Viet Minh. But all were perfectly well aware that the French were in prison, that colonial rule had, for the moment at least, ended, and that a Vietnamese government was once more in control in Vietnam. Popular rejoicing was nationwide. Ho and his Communist comrades, who were unquestionably masters of both the Viet Minh and the Provisional Government, were everywhere regarded as liberators and patriots. It is instructive, therefore, to observe Ho's actions on assuming power because, although the Communist Party was then smaller, less experienced, and less organized than it now is, little change has taken place in the top leadership and there is no reason to suppose what the Party's behavior pattern at that time was markedly different from what it would be today.

Firstly, the political groups which had collaborated with the Japanese in the hope that they might prevent the return of French imperial power to Indochina, the Dai Viet Party in particular, were outlawed and their leaders arrested. Simultaneously, the Viet Minh seized control of all information media, requisitioning the radio station at Bach-mai, all printing and publishing houses, and all stocks of paper. Almost at once, it published its own newspapers and took direct control of all broadcasting, thus acquiring a monopoly of news dissemination. Then the revolution commenced in earnest. The following is a description of what took place, published in the book *Histoire du Viet-Nam de 1940 à 1952* by Philippe Devillers,³ a French writer well-known for his sympathetic attitude towards the Vietnamese Communists:

³ Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952.

"In the villages and towns, (Vietnamese) notabilities and officials in their hundreds were singled out, molested, arrested, and even massacred by unrestrained groups led by agitators who were frequently unknown (locally), without provoking any reaction from the populace, itself generally terrorized but, on occasion, consenting. All the prisons, all the jails, thrown open at the same time, poured out on the country political and common law prisoners drunk with the thought of freedom and revenge . . .

"People soon gave up counting the numbers of beatings, seizures, extortions of money, and 'confiscations of goods belonging to bourgeois fascists and counterrevolutionaries,' arbitrary arrests, and assassinations after (or even without) a farcical trial by hastily assembled 'peoples courts.'

"Footnote: The Communists gave the impression of coolly executing a systematic program of eliminating those who would eventually oppose them. That is the reason why they were to execute numbers of well-known people belonging to conservative classes or simply to political parties offering an alternative to the Indochinese Communist Party. One could name, among so many others, Pham Quynh and Ngo Dinh Khoi,⁴ both arrested and executed by order of the Liberation Committee on August 23rd close to Huc . . .; the Trotskyist leader Ta Thu Thau, executed in Quang-ngai while returning from Hue to Saigon; the elderly Bui Quang Chieu of the Constitutionalist Party; the leader of the Independence Party, Ho Van Nga. Others suspected of sympathy for the 'colonialists,' that is to say of 'treason,' were to be imprisoned or interned and condemned, men such as Nguyen Tien Lang, the protégé of Governor Robin, etc."

The above extracts, it should be pointed out again, were written by a man widely known over many years for his sympathetic attitude towards the Vietnamese Communists, and who still supports their cause with the spoken and written word today. The eyewitness accounts of these events given to the present author by Vietnamese who lived through them are even more detailed and horrifying. How-

⁴ The older brother of Ngo Dinh Diem, who later became President of the Republic of (South) Vietnam.

ever, the point has been made by Devillers, and there is no necessity to enlarge further.

Although the scale of the campaign of assassinations and arrests during the latter part of 1945 was greater than what had transpired earlier, the difference was one of degree only. For example, the betrayal of Phan Boi Chau to the French police, in the certain knowledge that he would be sentenced to death, is not fundamentally different from the assassination of the Trotskyist leader Ta Thu Thau. Both acts were performed in order to achieve the same objective, the elimination of a political leader who might constitute a rival to the Communist Party and capable of attracting to the movement he led Vietnamese who might otherwise have joined the Communists. The young nationalist patriots who were betrayed to the French authorities or obliged by fear of disclosure to remain in exile constituted elements of potential resistance to any future Communist regime established in Vietnam. Their removal parallels the massacre of such persons as Ngo Dinh Khoi, Pham Quynh, and others in 1945. A consistent line of Vietnamese Communist conduct towards non-Communist compatriots already existed and was apparent even at that early date.

A year later, in mid-1946, the Communists had disposed of all the organized resistance to their regime in North Vietnam with the sole exception of the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (VNQDD, the Vietnamese Nationalist Party). In July, General Giap moved his forces against these remaining opponents, and the following extract from the same book of Philippe Devillers describes the action:

“After bloody clashes, its (that is, the government’s) forces retook control over the towns of Vinh-yen, Viet-tri, and Phu-tho, completely clearing the Phu-tho—Tuyen-quang—Ha-giang axis. In the Cao-bang—Lang-son region they consolidated their positions. Their successes were less clear-cut in the Red River Valley; Lao-kay, on the frontier, was nevertheless occupied.”

“But it was in Hanoi that the great blow was struck. A succession of police raids on VNQDD centers during July 11th, 12th, and 13th led to the arrest of about 120 people, and to the seizure of arms, documents, and materials for forging money. The offices of the newspaper *Viet Nam*, principal organ of that party, at 80

Grand Bouddha Street, were taken; far from being suspended, the newspaper reappeared six days later, but under new management and under the control of the censors . . .”

“At the end of July, therefore, the Viet Minh Government had consolidated its strength. It had practically eliminated its rivals. It no longer faced adversaries capable, without external help, of overthrowing it.”

Thereafter, the ascendancy of the Communist-controlled United National Front was unchallenged, and Ho Chi Minh was able to lead the movement into a war against the now returned French on December 19, 1946, with the approval and support of the great majority of the Vietnamese people. From then until the end of 1950, the resistance movement conducted its “anti-imperialist” struggle relatively harmoniously and with only minimal internal dissension. At the beginning of 1951, however, the Communist leadership decided the moment was opportune to shift to the “antifeudal” phase of the struggle, that is to say, to change the objective of the revolution from simple overthrow of colonial rule to the twin objectives of defeating colonialism and establishing communism. The Indochinese Communist Party, ostensibly dissolved in November 1945 lest non-Communists be dissuaded from supporting the resistance, reappeared under the changed name of Dang Lao Dong Viet Nam, or Vietnamese Workers Party. A new slogan was adopted, “The anti-imperialist and antifeudal fights are of equal importance;” and communism became the overt controller of the revolutionary movement.

It is interesting to note in passing that the strategy of two-phase revolution was also employed in South Vietnam. The People’s Revolutionary Party, the new title adopted for the Southern segment of the Communist Party, was announced to the world in 1962 and was described as the “vanguard party” of the revolution, the same term used to describe the Lao Dong Party at the time it was proclaimed. On this occasion the Communists miscalculated, for they had reckoned on a shorter struggle without armed participation by the United States. Since it has become apparent that the Communists would not achieve their early victory, the People’s Revolutionary Party has been mentioned less and less.

3. *The Communist Revolution.*

During the years 1951 and 1952, Communist Party control over every area of activity in the resistance zone was strengthened and consolidated in preparation for a campaign that might strain the Party to the utmost but which would eliminate, once and for all, the possibility of further internal challenge to the Communist regime thereafter. That was the agrarian reform campaign, an operation of some complexity for which minute and careful preparations had to be made. In February 1953, when both peasants and traders had been reduced to a state of penury and debt by the impossibly high taxes imposed on them, a campaign of terror was unleashed by order of the Communist Party Central Committee. It lasted for fifteen days, two terrible weeks in which no single person was safe from denunciation, torture, arrest, or assassination, when indiscriminate violence raged unchecked and the Party authorities made no move to intervene. After the campaign had ended, as abruptly as it had begun, by personal order of Ho Chi Minh, every citizen was aware of, and overawed by, the might of the Party. But the two weeks of terror proved to be no more than a demonstration of what the Party could do. It imbued all with the desired dread of the Party and ensured instant compliance with Party wishes, but much worse was to follow.

The land reform proper commenced only in 1954, but had to be halted during the three hundred-day period allowed by the Geneva Accords for movement between the two zones of Vietnam so as to avoid an even greater exodus of refugees than actually occurred. It was resumed after North Vietnam's frontiers had been closed once more and escape was no longer possible. Ostensibly aimed at the eradication of exploiting landlords, the campaign was designed to eliminate all people who might conceivably offer hostility to the Communist regime at some future time, together with their families, to kill them in the cruellest possible fashion, and to involve the entire population of North Vietnam in a shared guilt for the atrocity. If the objective of the Communist leaders had been simply to acquire ownership of the land in order to redistribute it more equitably, or to create agricultural cooperatives, nothing would have been easier than to promulgate a decree confiscating all land. By insisting on the creation of "people's courts," however, whose members were

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themselves too terrified to do anything other than agree to pass the frightful sentences demanded of them, the Communist authorities obliged the whole people to accept responsibility for these atrocities. Moreover, lest anyone should entertain any doubts about what was being done, all executions were carried out in public and everybody was obliged to be present to witness them.

The campaign instilled into all North Vietnamese a boundless fear of the Communist regime; but at the same time, it linked them inescapably to that regime. Were it ever overthrown or replaced by another, the people could scarcely expect to escape blame for the terrible crimes committed, since the whole populace had approved the sentences and witnessed their execution. Immediate compliance with the regime's future demands would thus be assured, and the people would feel impelled to do all in their power to ensure that this regime was not replaced by any other liable to exact punishment for the crimes. Some idea of the scale on which the murders were carried out is apparent from the disclosure by Nguyen Manh Tuong, in his address to the National Congress of the Fatherland Front⁵ in October 1956, that the slogan used by the Communists throughout the campaign was, "It is better to kill ten innocent people than to let one enemy escape." No official figure has ever been divulged by the Communist authorities of the total number killed during this orgy of butchery, and none is ever likely to be; but Gerard Tongas, a French history teacher who continued to work in Hanoi until 1959, claims to have acquired accurate information on this point. He states that the campaign resulted in a hundred thousand deaths — more than double the total of American deaths in the entire Vietnam War to date. The Vietnamese author Hoang Van Chi, who himself witnessed the earlier stages of the campaign, believes that this figure is not an exaggeration.

Persons living in the West are often puzzled by the extreme suspicion with which the Vietnamese Communists regard their non-proletarian compatriots, usually because they can discover no parallel phenomenon in the more familiar East European Communist states. On occasion, they tend to disbelieve or ignore the historical evidence

⁵ A front organization established by the North Vietnamese Communists in 1955 and designed especially to appeal to South Vietnamese dissatisfied with the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem.

of it and express the hope that non-Communist Vietnamese will be allowed to live free and unmolested once the present war has ended. Yet the stark fact is that those inhabitants of North Vietnam whose class origins are nonproletarian and who have distinguished themselves from the impoverished and uneducated mass of the people through education, wealth, position, ability, or character, have always been the objects of suspicion and hostility. Even those of them who have loyally served the interests of Vietnamese communism for long periods do not escape. But it is not only Westerners who are so puzzled; some Vietnamese also fail to understand the reasons, even though experience obliges them to recognize the phenomenon. Dr. Nguyen Manh Tuong, in the same speech to the National Congress of the Fatherland Front cited above, had the following to say:

"Intellectuals who joined the resistance . . . were bitterly disillusioned when they realized that the Party had no confidence in them despite the many sacrifices they had made for the Party. Have they been too demanding? Have they asked to be made ministers or ambassadors? No, they have not. The majority of the intellectuals are not ambitious and would willingly give those positions to politicians and Party members. They simply wish to give the benefit of their qualifications and experience to the service of the people and to safeguard their honor and freedom of thought, which they believe to be essential to the dignity of the intellectual."

The true explanation could be found only inside the mind of Ho Chi Minh himself, for such paranoid suspicion was first discernible in him and was transmitted by him, as was the entire content of Vietnamese communism, to his disciples. Ho is now dead; and since he never disclosed his reasons, these cannot now be ascertained with any degree of certainty. Several Vietnamese who knew Ho intimately, however, have stated that the underlying cause of his suspicion was to be found in Chiang Kai-shek's sudden change of attitude towards his former Communist allies in 1927. A massacre of Communists was carried out on the orders of General Chiang, and Ho was enabled to escape from Canton with the Soviet advisory group only because he possessed a Russian passport. These traumatic events, which undermined the whole position of the Chinese Communist Party and might have destroyed it completely, would seem to have impressed deeply on Ho's thinking the enormity of the dangers to

communism arising from allowing any power to rest in the hands of outsiders, however these may cooperate with communism at any given moment of history. The explanation appears plausible and could well be the reason why Ho, who undeniably regarded the taking of human life as a permissible political action in the furtherance of Communist interests, was responsible for the deaths of so many Vietnamese non-Communists.

Whatever Ho Chi Minh's reasons may have been, more than a quarter of a century of experience convinced very large numbers of Vietnamese of the extreme dangers that threatened non-Communists—in particular, those non-Communists belonging to institutions or organizations regarded with suspicion by the Communists, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the nationalist parties, and the like—in circumstances of unchallenged Communist domination. The 1954 Geneva Accords legitimized such domination by the Communists in North Vietnam, which is why a million North Vietnamese availed themselves of the opportunity to flee to South Vietnam. Such evidence as is available suggests that the numbers of those leaving North Vietnam at that time would have been very much greater if the Communists had honored the terms they accepted at Geneva and permitted all who wished to do so to leave the country unimpeded. In the event, however, they prevented large numbers from going, which forced some of those whose intentions were frustrated to resort to such desperate measures as putting out to sea on flimsy, hastily constructed bamboo rafts. A few were picked up by passing ships, but the numbers of those who drowned or starved can never be known.

The mass exodus from North Vietnam following the Geneva Accords was a very important propaganda setback for the Vietnamese Communists, because it proved to the watching world the falsity of their claims to the support and approval of the Vietnamese people as a whole. The refugees undoubtedly caused grave offense to the Communists. If they already believed themselves in danger from the Communists in 1954, and believed it firmly enough to abandon their homes, lands, and ancestral graves, they are convinced that the danger is still greater today. That is why the North Vietnamese who have settled in South Vietnam are inflexibly opposed to a Communist military victory, a coalition government in which

some portfolios are held by Communists, or the establishment of any Communist bridgehead in South Vietnam. These people have learned from bitter personal experience how a numerically tiny Communist Party can, by dint of its disciplined organization and total ruthlessness in pursuit of its objectives, impose itself on a whole people.

4. *South Vietnam.*

South Vietnam remained a secondary theater throughout the First Indochina War, the main action taking place in the North. No great victories were won in South Vietnam and no Communist fief was created in any populous area there. Consequently, in 1954, the South Vietnamese people had very little direct knowledge of the Vietnamese Communist regime. For the vast majority of them, the First Indochina War was, from start to finish, an anticolonial struggle for national independence. French promises of independence were not believed by them, and the "nationalist" governments formed from Vietnamese prepared to work with the French failed to win their respect or support. The hapless political figures who entered these governments—and some of them did so from the highest motives, believing this to be the least painful and least costly means of achieving independence for Vietnam—found themselves publicly humiliated again and again by the French, and left with neither the power nor the resources to become an effective government. Many of these figures despaired; one man committed suicide, several resigned office and retired from politics, while others used their positions to acquire wealth with which to provide for themselves and their families when the government was overthrown. Easy targets for Communist accusations of treachery and corruption, they were disliked and reviled by the people at large. The resistance forces, in sharp contrast, were viewed in South Vietnam as courageous patriots struggling for Vietnamese independence against an enemy stronger and better armed than they. This image of the resistance fighters persisted in South Vietnam after the fighting was finally ended.

Consequently, when the Communists resumed the war in the southern half of the now divided but independent Vietnam, the insurgents were at first regarded with some tolerance by the majority of the South Vietnamese people. Certainly the guerrillas exploited their favorable image in South Vietnam, and the myth of Communist invincibility that derived from the defeat of the French Expeditionary Corps. Only the government of Ngo Dinh Diem and the North Vietnamese refugees recognized the new threat for what it was; but the latter were still occupied in establishing themselves in South Vietnam, while the government lacked the resources to counter the insurrection effectively. The United States had equipped and trained a South Vietnamese army along conventional lines so that it would be prepared to face an armed attack from the North across the truce line of division, as had happened in Korea. But a conventional army is ill-suited to fighting against light guerrilla forces operating in widely scattered locations and usually in remote country districts. Its organization lacks the necessary flexibility, and its soldiers are prevented by their heavy arms and equipment from operating far from roads or railways. President Diem ordered his army to crush the insurrection; but its ponderous large-scale operations, frequently accompanied by tanks and heavy vehicles, caused more damage to the predominantly farmer civil population than it did to the insurgents. Destruction of crops and property was unavoidable in such military operations, as were the delays and inconveniences caused by searches, interrogations, and the interruptions to the flow of goods. People grew increasingly angry at the inconvenience and loss resulting from the army's counterinsurgency measures; and in the course of time, their anger was increasingly turned against the government that had ordered the measures, not against the Communist-controlled guerrillas who made them necessary.

But the insurgents in South Vietnam failed to find an emotive cause which would persuade the local people to support their movement wholeheartedly as they had earlier done in the war against the French. Hanoi had somewhat unconvincingly tried to describe the insurrection as a struggle against colonial rule, with the Americans now cast in the former role of the French. Because the number of American personnel in Vietnam during the early phase of the insurgency was very small, and because the American role was purely advisory, Hanoi's contention appeared ludicrous. If the people of

South Vietnam knew little about the Communist regime, they were far from ignorant of French colonial rule, and they knew that things were now very different. Few, apart from Communist sympathizers, were moved by Hanoi's claims. While people were willing to tolerate the insurgents, they did not go out of their way to help them with food, money, or men. The insurgents, for their part, were largely dependent on South Vietnamese assistance. Since this was not offered voluntarily, they were obliged to take what they needed by means of armed force or terrorism. At first they employed selective terrorism, killing or abducting officials, educated persons such as teachers, and men of influence. When they wished to assassinate someone publicly, as an exemplary punishment designed to cow others into submission, they tried to select victims whom they knew to be unpopular or corrupt. As the fighting spread, however, and their needs became greater, the insurgents resorted more and more to indiscriminate violence. Hanoi recognized that this would inevitably prove counterproductive, and large numbers of captured documents bear strictures along these lines from Hanoi to commanders in South Vietnam. These criticized their political indoctrination campaign for its ineffectiveness, and pointed out that armed terrorism would antagonize the South Vietnamese people at a time when their willing cooperation was desperately needed. Other documents, sent from South Vietnam, argue that the political cause was itself too weak to motivate people; and since cooperation was essential, there was no alternative to enforcing it by terrorism. In the course of time, the brutality and cruelty of Viet Cong methods progressively antagonized the South Vietnamese.

But the South Vietnamese government, too, became increasingly unpopular because of its destructive military operations and the ever more rigid security regulations enacted by Ngo Dinh Diem against the growing insurgency that his army was patently unable to stamp out. Ultimately, it was the government of President Diem that was overthrown, not by the Communist insurgents, but by its own army acting with the enthusiastic support of the South Vietnamese people. It is not without significance that the successor government established in Saigon was no less anti-Communist than that of Diem, and that it continued to resist the Communists. By this time the South Vietnamese people had at last acquired some understanding of the nature of Vietnamese communism, experience of Communist meth-

ods, and an awareness of what had taken place in North Vietnam. It became clear at that time that the people of South Vietnam would not accept communism of their own free will.

But the overthrow of the government had created political instability, which was worsened by the inexperience of the new rulers and by the ambitions of rival claimants to power. During 1964, coup d'état followed coup d'état and government succeeded government. While South Vietnam's leaders quarrelled among themselves, the Viet Cong used the opportunity to spread their control throughout large areas of the countryside. Not until early 1965 was political stability restored in Saigon. But by that time, the military situation had so deteriorated that only outside help could restore it. It was then that President Lyndon B. Johnson took the momentous decision to commit American troops to the fighting in the South and to commence a systematic bombing of North Vietnam. During the remainder of 1965 and throughout 1966, American assistance enabled the military deterioration to be halted and the situation to be stabilized. In 1967, the Communist forces were committed again and again to large, set-piece battles in which they suffered very heavy casualties because the Allies were able to bring to bear their superiority in manpower and firepower, and their monopoly of air power.

5. The Tet Offensive and Its Consequences.

By the end of 1967, it had become clear to the Communist leaders in Hanoi that their military strategy was disastrously wrong. If persisted in, it would lead to the early destruction of their forces fighting in South Vietnam. A change had to be made, and this took the form of massive surprise attacks on all the cities and towns of South Vietnam simultaneously. Not only would armed assaults be mounted, but every effort would be made to induce the South Vietnamese people to abandon their own government and proclaim support for the Viet Cong. Surprise would be achieved by commencing operations during a period of truce agreed to by both sides for the occasion of the lunar new year, or Tet. To assemble sufficient troop strength for the execution of such a grand offensive, known

now in the West as the Tet Offensive, the Communists were obliged to denude the countryside of cadres. In the event, total surprise was achieved, but the rest of the plan went hopelessly awry. The Communists had completely misunderstood the mood of the South Vietnamese people, failed to bring about any popular uprising against the government, and were eventually driven out of all the places they had entered, suffering huge losses in the process. Had it not been for the wildly inaccurate and alarmist reporting by the foreign press corps in South Vietnam, the Tet Offensive would have been an unrelieved failure for its authors. As it was, the panic of the press correspondents was communicated to the American public, which brought irresistible pressure to bear on the President to change his policy in Vietnam. In response, President Johnson first restricted, and then ended, American bombing in North Vietnam in return for Communist agreement to participate in talks to be held in Paris. Thus, the only advantage to accrue to the Communist side from the Tet Offensive came, not from their own efforts, but from the hysteria their attacks induced in the American and other foreign correspondents. Rarely in the history of modern warfare has any nation been so ill-served by its own press.

Yet it was the Tet Offensive that finally destroyed Vietnamese Communist hopes of military victory in South Vietnam. In cities and towns throughout the nation, the brutal killing of defenseless civilians by the Communist soldiers dispelled any expectation, still nurtured by some individuals, that they might contrive to reach an acceptable accommodation with the Communist side. From that time onwards, it was clear to all that the Communists were not prepared to consider individual cases but would deal only with categories and classes, seeking to eliminate those they imagined to stand between them and their ultimate objectives. Generally speaking, the Communists failed to seize and hold for any appreciable time the targets of these attacks, but the behavior of their troops in the course of the fighting was such as to inspire abhorrence and dread in the civil population.

The one exception to the general military pattern was the Central Vietnamese city of Hue, which was occupied by the Communists for more than three weeks. Because the Communists controlled Hue and its population for this period, their conduct during these weeks must be examined closely.

6. *The Tragedy of Hue.*

The importance of what took place in Hue cannot be exaggerated, because it provides a scale model of what would follow a decisive Communist victory in South Vietnam. The conduct of the Communist soldiers occupying that hapless city, it is true, diverged in no important respect from earlier Communist behavior patterns. But in Hue, it was subsequently possible to investigate their actions immediately after they had taken place and in the fullest detail, as well as to question eyewitnesses who watched them from beginning to end. This writer was present in Hue during September 1970, and was able both to inspect the locations where the events unfolded and to question witnesses of them. This is what happened.

A Communist force of twelve thousand soldiers, most of them North Vietnamese regulars, attacked and occupied the city of Hue on the night of January 30, 1968. The Communists remained there for 26 days before finally being driven out. Numbers of South Vietnamese, soldiers and civilians, were killed in the course of the fighting, their bodies being readily identifiable as battle casualties by the wounds or the circumstances of death. Others were deliberately assassinated on the orders of 150 civilian cadres who concerned themselves with the civil population of Hue while the soldiers were occupied with their military duties. Because no Communist official would dare to execute such a methodical preplanned campaign without authority, it may safely be assumed that these 150 men carried out an action program expressly ordered by their Communist Party superiors. Not all of them entered Hue with the soldiers, for some were already living in the city as part of the Communist infrastructure there. The majority of the 150 were locally born men, natives of Thua-thien Province, and well acquainted with the city and its inhabitants.

During the first days of the occupation, the cadres rounded up numbers of residents, whose names and addresses were contained in lists prepared before the Communist attack, and brought them before "kangaroo" courts. The "trials" lasted about ten minutes each, and all the accused were found guilty of being "enemies of the revolution." Sentence—always execution—was carried out at once, and the bodies were either buried or returned to their families. The victims were civil servants, military officers and NCOs, teachers,

doctors, and religious figures; in fact, the leading members of Hue's citizenry. Once these individually named individuals had been eliminated, the cadres commenced a second roundup, this time working from a list of professions, occupations, organizations, groupings, and social classes, not of individual names. The second purge was patently designed to eliminate those whose social class, occupation, or association rendered them, in Communist eyes, a potential opposition to communism in the future, which is why so many non-political persons—even children and students—were killed. Because of its nature, the second purge eliminated some who, though they belonged to suspect groups, had been active supporters of the Communist cause in Hue. Some two thousand people were eliminated in this campaign.

Throughout the final week of the Communist occupation of Hue—they were driven out on February 24th—the cadres arrested and marched away many hundreds of citizens after first informing them that they were being taken for political indoctrination. Sometimes those arrested were known to the cadres and were addressed by name, but at other times the arrests appeared to be haphazard, as when the four hundred persons sheltering in a Roman Catholic church in Phu-cam district were marched away *en bloc*. There has since been speculation that those arrested during the closing days of the occupation were taken because they were in a position subsequently to identify the cadres of the local Communist infrastructure, and therefore had to be eliminated. But this is no more than speculation, and several other possible explanations would equally well fit the circumstances. At any rate, the people were arrested and were not seen afterwards. Relatives and friends continued to hope that they were prisoners of the Communists and still alive.

Two days after the expulsion of the Communists, seventy bodies were discovered in the grounds of Gia Hoi school. In the ensuing months, eighteen further burial sites yielded another 1,030 bodies. A year later, more mass graves were discovered accidentally at Phu-thu, some miles from the city, and were found to contain 809 bodies. Not until late September 1969 was another mass grave found, this time in the inaccessible Da-mai Valley, as a result of information supplied by Communist defectors. By then the bodies had decomposed so much as to be unrecognizable, but 250 skulls

were discovered. Altogether the city of Hue lost 5,800 citizens dead or missing in the successive purges. By no means all of these have yet been found, and more graves may still come to light. Hope that the missing who are still unaccounted for may yet be alive has now been abandoned.

These happenings took place within the space of 26 days in a city from which the Communists had always known they would be expelled. The arrests and killings were carried out on orders from the Communist leadership, coldly and deliberately, in accordance with prearranged plans. Any possibility that some terrible mistake had been made, that the local cadres had erred or exceeded their orders, was dispelled by subsequent references to the events made by the Vietnamese Communist press and radio. Typical of such comment was a broadcast on Communist Liberation Radio on April 26, 1968, while the mass graves were still being uncovered. It stated that those killed were "hooligan lackeys who owed blood debts to their compatriots, and who were annihilated by the Southern armed forces and people in the early spring." There was no word of regret.

7. Communist Views of Hue.

The prevalence of famine, disease, and flood in many parts of Asia has made premature, violent death all too common a phenomenon, and engendered in the people a stoical acceptance of what cannot be avoided. The fatalism of Asians in the face of frightful disasters never fails to amaze Westerners. But despite this inbred tolerance to adversity, the systematic and unfeeling massacre of so many ordinary residents of Hue struck horror and revulsion into the people of South Vietnam. Those Hue citizens questioned by this writer professed, in addition, incomprehension; they simply did not understand how Vietnamese people could behave in so brutal a fashion to their compatriots. For them, the massacre provided incontrovertible proof that the Communist insurrection had abandoned all pretense of seeking to liberate the people of South Vietnam, and was undisguisedly attempting to establish an oppressive and intolerant Communist dictatorship. Defectors from the Communist side

were not similarly puzzled, though they encountered considerable difficulty in explaining their reasons to a person who had not experienced years of regimented existence under a Communist regime, isolated from outside contacts and subjected daily to the psychological pressures of Party press and radio. Two of the most lucid former Communists interviewed by this writer were senior army officers, Colonel Tran Van Dac, who defected to the government side in April 1968, and Colonel Nguyen Thanh, who defected in May 1970. Neither had participated in the events at Hue, but both had taken part in the attack on Saigon during the 1968 Tet Offensive. Being military men, they could tell only of their own state of mind conditioned by their experiences as Communist soldiers serving in South Vietnam.

Life in any army is subject to constant discipline—obedience to regulations, to orders from one's superiors, compliance with established procedures, drills, and so on. One's reflexes become conditioned over a period of time, and one's actions become instinctive, almost automatic. But in the Vietnamese Communist armed forces, there is another dimension, another area which is largely ignored in Western armies, namely, political indoctrination. Perhaps the most important branch of the Vietnamese Communist Army is the political branch, whose cadres conduct an incessant campaign of indoctrination, of criticism and self-criticism. Communist soldiers regularly have to confess their shortcomings before an assembled group, and to listen to similar confessions from other members of the group. They confront one another with criticisms concerning every aspect of behavior. Long experience of these procedures creates inside the human brain what, for want of a better expression, may be called a self-censor. Because the acceptance of criticism is always painful, and sometimes severely distressing, the mind develops its own warning system against words or actions liable to result in criticism. In time, the soldier instinctively avoids everything that does not comply with the accepted norms, which are always determined by the Communist Party. It is not the presence of the Party cadre which makes him do this but his own instinct, for all of his colleagues are themselves conditioned to report and criticize any departure from the norm. Because Communist soldiers in South Vietnam do not mix with the population, but are quartered in remote bases where they encounter only their colleagues, they soon become unaware of the

activity of this self-censor. Living as they do in communities whose every member accepts and follows the same norms, they readily come to regard their own behavior pattern as normal, since it conforms in every way with that of the rest of the community. Disobedience of an order is the fault most certain to attract criticism, so that the very thought of disobedience ceases to exist. If, therefore, soldiers thus conditioned receive orders to find and kill persons whose names appear on a list provided by a Party political cadre, or to execute persons brought to them by a political cadre, their compliance would be automatic and would not be impeded by normal human emotions.

The colonels both accepted that their behavior during the years of military service appeared horrific in retrospect, that they had been living in an unreal, nightmare atmosphere created by the Party; but both strongly affirmed that they had remained unaware that this was so. Both men also stated that if they had massacred civilians, even needlessly, they would not have been punished by their superiors. Should the bloodshed subsequently be judged unnecessary, or even damaging to the Communist cause, they would have had to confess that their judgment had been faulty, and promise to make efforts to improve their understanding; but they would have received no punishment. If, on the other hand, they had avoided a massacre of civilians for humanitarian reasons and thereby failed to accomplish their mission, they would equally certainly have been denounced for "sentimentality," for "lacking a solid political base," and for indiscipline, and they would have risked serious punishment.

When these explanations by the two officers were later put to a group of North Vietnamese defectors who had lived for many years under the Communist regime in North Vietnam, some of them serving in senior and responsible positions, all were readily accepted by them as being true. No single one of the group would own to any surprise over the events that had taken place in Hue, regarding them as a foretaste of what would transpire in the wake of a Communist victory in South Vietnam. The further question about what they imagined would take place in South Vietnam should the Communists gain control of the country produced a lengthy discussion. All the defectors—they included men such as Dr. Pham Thanh

Tai, a former Professor of Political Science at Hanoi University; Vo Thanh Tong, a specialist in banking; Captain Le Phat Nguyen, who earlier worked in the General Staff Headquarters in Hanoi; Vo Ngoc Co, an intelligence agent; and so on—cited precedents and official Communist statements to support their unanimous conclusion that a massacre would be inevitable. Members of successive South Vietnamese governments, civil servants, military officers, policemen, religious figures, intellectuals, politicians, and professional men would be among the first to be killed. All political parties would be destroyed, and the office holders in them executed. Nor was there any disagreement over the elimination of the refugees who had fled from North Vietnam, or of defectors from the Communist forces including, of course, the speakers themselves. Disagreement did arise over the fate of the bourgeois classes—the businessmen, landowners, shopkeepers, and so on. While it was generally agreed that all would be arrested, tried, and sentenced to death, not everybody agreed that all would necessarily be killed immediately. Some of the speakers felt that only the more prominent of them, especially those who were either very popular or very unpopular, would be put to death in the first instance. Some recalled how the Chinese practice of sentencing people to death, and then postponing execution for as long as they worked hard in factories or farms, had been spoken of approvingly in North Vietnamese political meetings. It was possible, they believed, that the same practice would be applied in South Vietnam. People already sentenced to death would be permitted to postpone execution by working hard at some allotted task. If they continued to work hard, they would be allowed to survive until overtaken by natural death; but should any of them slacken their efforts, they would be executed as a warning to others. Such a system could contribute greatly to badly needed production.

But it is not only Communist Army officers and senior officials who have defected to South Vietnam that say a decisive Communist victory would result in a bloodbath. The tightly controlled information media of North Vietnam have been saying it for several years. Hanoi Radio, to cite one typical example, in a broadcast on September 18, 1969, cited the following words of Politburo member Truong Chinh: "It is absolutely necessary for the people's democratic dictatorship to use violence against counterrevolutionaries and exploiters who refuse to submit to reform. Therefore, we must

pay continuous attention to consolidating the repressive apparatus of the people's democratic state, the people's army, the people's police, the people's control institute, the people's tribunal, and so forth." The same radio station, broadcasting on March 21, 1968, said: "All citizens are bound to take an active part in denouncing counterrevolutionary elements, in providing dictatorial organs with evidence and documents, in supervising punishment . . . of counterrevolutionary elements." North Vietnamese press and radio have referred to all in South Vietnam who have opposed the Communist insurrection as "hooligans," "lackeys," "exploiters," "counterrevolutionaries," and the like, and have repeatedly mentioned the "blood debts" such persons have incurred. Solemn promises are constantly made that full payment of those debts will be exacted. Historical precedent and recent example make it impossible to doubt that the Communist leaders intend to keep their word.

8. Conclusion.

Should the Vietnamese Communists win undisputed control of South Vietnam, either by military victory or through a "coalition government" in the fashion of some countries of eastern Europe, they will act exactly as they have done in the past. They will seize control of all South Vietnamese information media and use them for their own purposes. They will expel the foreign press corps and all other foreigners, and will then close the frontiers of the state. Once all non-Vietnamese witnesses have been removed, they will proceed to exact payment of the "blood debts." In a deliberately created atmosphere of terror, they will establish thousands of *ad hoc* "people's courts," before which will be arraigned all those individuals and groups the Party has decided to eliminate. Those unfortunates will be accused of "crimes" which have no existence in civilized societies. They will face charges of being "counterrevolutionaries," "enemies of the people," "exploiters of the people," and a host of similar meaningless things, and they will be found guilty by jurors too terrified to do anything but obey the orders of Party cadres. All believed to pose a threat, real or potential, to the Communist

regime will be killed at once, and some of the remainder may be permitted to postpone execution as long as they continue to work as unpaid slave laborers. Calculated on the basis of past Communist deeds, and given the size of South Vietnam's population, the minimum number of those to be butchered will exceed one million and could rise to several times that figure. While the massacre is in progress, the outside world will know nothing of it, for foreigners will have been expelled and no mention will be made by the Communist information media. Because the battles will be over and the big guns will have ceased to fire, peace will be said to have returned once more to Vietnam.

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