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CONTENDERS AND OBJECTIVES

Pike: War, Peace and the Viet Cong - 1969

Although some are more important than others, eight separate forces are responsible for the current Vietnam scene, and all eight must be taken into consideration in accounting for present-day Vietnam or anticipating its tomorrow. Each impinges on the other seven, and the permutations of the relationships are enough to make the mind boggle. It is precisely for this reason that Vietnam, the most complex condition of the twentieth century, defies simplification.

The eight forces are: the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF), including its armed force now called the People's Liberation Armed Force (PLAF); the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) or Communist Party of South Vietnam;¹ the newly created Vietnamese Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces (referred to throughout this book as the Alliance); the Democratic Re-

¹ These two, the NLF and the PRP (or three if PLAF is considered a separate entity), generally are what is meant by the term *Viet Cong*. This is an imprecise term but one, rightly or wrongly, which now is in wide and permanent use. *Viet Cong* is a contraction of *Viet Nam Cong San*, meaning Vietnamese Communist. As was the case in my first book, *Viet Cong*, I have employed the term in the title so as to indicate what the book is about, but I have not used it in the text; in both cases, *Viet Cong* has the broadest possible definition.

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public of Vietnam (DRV), that is, North Vietnam and its armed force, the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN); Communist China; the Soviet Union; the Republic or Government of Vietnam (GVN) and its armed force (RVNAF); the United States and the Allied or Pacific Ocean powers with troops in Vietnam, namely, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand.

We begin by examining each of the eight in terms of composition and specific objective, that is, the *who* and the *what* of the Vietnam war contenders.

The National Liberation Front

The National Liberation Front of South Vietnam² is a front organization in the technical sense but one that, unlike most front organizations elsewhere, has a military structure. The front itself is composed of some twenty socio-political organizations and has a membership, as of early 1969, of about 300,000 (of whom some 40,000 are full-time cadres). The civilian organizations within the NLF are of two basic types, administrative and functional. The administrative liberation association is conceived as a quasi government, a hierarchy running from the national NLF Central Committee down through a series of intervening central committees to the village liberation association committee. The functional liberation association exists essentially only at the village level. The major ones are the Farmers' Liberation Association, the Workers' Liberation Association

² The most commonly employed form of the term by both sides. In Vietnamese it is *Mat Tran Dan Toc Giai Phong Mien Nam Vietnam*. Literally it means "Front of Racial Nationals for the Liberation of the Region That Is Southern Vietnam." Frequently it is encountered in print as National Front for Liberation of South Vietnam or NFLSV.

(chiefly in the rubber tapper villages), the Women's Liberation Association, the Youth Liberation Association, the Student Liberation Association, and the Cultural Liberation Association (chiefly schoolteachers, religious figures, and such intellectuals as exist in the village). In addition there are two kept political parties, the Radical Socialist Party and the Democratic Party of South Vietnam; a series of special-interest (*van hoi*) groups, such as veterans' organizations or the Patriotic and Democratic Journalists' Association; and finally, externally oriented groups, such as the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Committee. The paramount member of the NLF, as it states in its own publications, is the People's Revolutionary Party (considered later). The administrative liberation association structure is elite, tightly disciplined, and relatively easy for cadres to control. The functional liberation association structure is more broadly based and more sociopolitical than governmental. The front formed by these groups, however, predates the groups themselves. The NLF thus reversed the usual order for the formation of a united front — as, for example, the Popular Front of Europe in the 1930's — for instead of beginning with the organizations and creating the front, the NLF began with the front and created the organizations. When the NLF was founded, on December 20, 1960, it was correctly labeled by the world as a phantom edifice, for it existed only on paper. But as the months passed, the dephantomizing process went forward, the skeleton was fleshed out, and the NLF became a reality.

The People's Liberation Armed Force, prior to 1966 known as the Liberation Army of the NLF, consists of two elements, a Full Military Force and a Paramilitary Force. The Full Military, usually referred to as the Main Force, or "hard hats" (because of the fiberboard Viet Minh hel-

mets worn by the troops), numbers about 60,000, while the Paramilitary or guerrilla force numbers around 180,000 persons including women. The Paramilitary Force is of two types: the Regional or Territorial Guerrilla unit, the classic sort of guerrilla band, living in a remote area, making its forays, supported by villagers in the area; and the Local Guerrilla, also of a classic type, the part-time fighter who farms by day and blows up bridges by night.

Political power, all the political power if possible, quite clearly represents the NLF's objective. It regards itself as the sole, genuine, legitimate representative of the South Vietnamese people and labels the Saigon government "rebel" and illegitimate. The language it speaks, although militant and sloganized, is the language of government and politics. In its most authoritative pronouncement of objective, a 7,500-word document issued as a program in 1967,³ the NLF listed its four major planks as: (1) to save the nation (that is, save it "from the U.S. aggressors"); (2) to work for reunification of the fatherland; (3) to build an independent, democratic, peaceful, neutral, and prosperous Vietnam, and (4) to apply a foreign policy of "peace and neutrality." Plank number three was broken down into fourteen "concrete policies":

1. To establish a progressive government.
2. To develop the economy.
3. To institute land reform.
4. To promote education, culture, science, technology, and public health.
5. To improve working conditions.

³ For a discussion of these policy pronouncements see Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1966).

6. To develop the armed forces.
7. To provide veterans' benefits.
8. To provide social welfare benefits.
9. To establish equality of the sexes.
10. To integrate minorities.
11. To guarantee religious freedom.
12. To implement an amnesty program.
13. To protect the rights of absent Vietnamese.
14. To protect the rights of foreigners in Vietnam.

Ho Chi Minh has described the aims of the NLF in these terms:

The program of the South Viet Nam National Liberation Front clearly specified its principal aims. These are: to struggle against aggressive U.S. imperialism, to liberate the South, to achieve independence, democracy, peace, and neutrality, and advance step by step toward the reunification of the country. The South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation is an organization of the patriotic movement, set up by the mass of the people. The front is the leader, the organizer of the South Vietnamese people's struggle against U.S. imperialism to recover national independence. The Front is the only genuine representative of the South Vietnamese people. It is the sacred duty of the whole people of Viet Nam to support the South Vietnamese people's liberation struggle, waged under the leadership of the National Front for Liberation. We [DRV] respect the policies of the Front and hold that the two zones must take their respective characteristics into account, understand each other, restore normal relations between them and gradually achieve national reunification. Viet Nam is one. The Vietnamese are one people. Our entire people have the duty of opposing foreign aggression and defending the Fatherland.⁴

⁴ An interview with a London *Daily Worker* correspondent as reprinted in the North Vietnamese magazine *Viet Nam Courier*, July 15, 1965.

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The basic characteristics of the NLF are these: use of the united-front organization as a means of establishing a mass base of support; heavy use of communication of ideas to foment social strife; harnessing of the energies of the people through the use of a social myth; utilization of the divisive Marxist class struggle theses; and employment of specialized military action, usually selective in nature and psychological in intent. The NLF, as of early 1969, had about 750,000 hardcore supporters out of a nation of 18.9 million; this includes the 300,000 civilian members of the various NLF organizations as well as the members of the PLAF. At one time it was supported by many more Vietnamese, with its pinnacle of popularity reached in mid-1963 when President Ngo Dinh Diem was locked in combat with Vietnamese Buddhist organizations. At that time perhaps half the population of South Vietnam at least tacitly supported the NLF. But the rise of militant Buddhism broke the monopoly of government opposition that the NLF had held, and for that reason as well as others its popularity began to decline. As of late 1968, political observers in Saigon believed 10 to 15 per cent was the most support that the NLF could claim, which included the hardcore supporters as well as sympathizers. The support that the NLF has known in the past, however, has been not for ideological, but for social reasons. Social pressure caused a young man to join the ranks of the NLF Army. For a long period, social pressure caused him to remain loyal. Parts of rural Vietnam have been under tight NLF control for a generation.⁵ In these villages the local leaders originally were obeyed and even protected. The NLF in the past several years has steadily lost the close identification with the people that

⁵ And before the NLF, the Viet Minh.

marked its earlier days in Vietnam. These people, mostly villagers, became disenchanted with the cause because of the compulsory draft, which takes young men far from their home villages; increased and never-ending financial demands; a growing coerciveness in the system; and inability of the PLAF to defend them against attack. Increasingly stringent NLF regulations also have alienated villagers. Without doubt, the leaders' paranoid preoccupation with "spies" has had a deadly effect. When Allied troops have freed prisoners from NLF "jails," they have heard bone-chilling stories of "justice" in the villages. Cadres are now authorized to shoot villagers on the spot. There is widespread use of a new institution in South Vietnam NLF-controlled areas: the thought-reform session. Although NLF-villager relations have deteriorated to the point where the average villager's attitude ranges from strong dislike to outright hatred, the Front continues to be supported by the villagers and receives from them money, food, group labor, or young men. The villagers supply the NLF because of threats and coercion. The size of the unwilling support group may range as high as 40 per cent of the total rural population. Therefore, the NLF, despite growing hostility, remains viable. The explanation of why this is so, why support comes from basically hostile people, lies in the fact that the NLF's strength through the years has been organizational. It became a power not because of the attraction of communism (or some variant of Marxism-Leninism, such as Maoism), not because of grievances against the Government of Vietnam, not because of frustrated aspirations, not because of poverty. Although all of these conditions exist to some degree in Vietnam, none serves to explain the power of the NLF. Only superb organization at the lowest level can account for its strength. That there is no great ideologi-

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cal force behind the NLF should not be difficult to grasp. An organization such as the French Foreign Legion, in its day a highly effective fighting force, had no ideological engine driving it ahead. The secret of the NLF is superb organization.

The NLF represents a political process — perhaps political weapon would be a more apt term — new in degree if not in kind to the world of political activism. It is a powerful technique blending politics with violence. Its essence, more organizational than doctrinal, is old-fashioned only in that it is directed toward the orthodox goal of political control or political power. Many terms have been used in assembling definitions and descriptions of this phenomenon: revolutionary guerrilla warfare, united frontism, national salvation struggle, protracted conflict, creative violence, Maoism, and wars of national liberation. Despite superficial appearances, it is chiefly a *political* process, with the entirety being far more political than military. Yet even this distinction, between military and nonmilitary activity, is misleading, for one of the unique characteristics of the NLF is the blurring of the line between the political and the military, between war and peace. It rests on the assumption that it is necessary to ignore traditional political roles, that new paths in politics must be cut, new types of political behavior developed, and that the past must not be built on but must be ignored. There is a totality about it not usually associated with the word “politics.” It demands undivided involvement. It is a way of life. Since it seeks not to adjust the political machine but to smash it, the NLF is in tune with the nihilism of the second half of the twentieth century, the spirit of rebellion for its own sake, the blanket condemnation of all Establishment, the drive to harness the alienated,

and the injection of violence into the forefront of political change regardless of cost.

What the NLF would do substantively if it achieved power remains a moot question, one that even a candid leader probably cannot answer with much specificity. During the past eight years the leadership has been preoccupied with doctrinal problems—how to come to power rather than what to do with power once achieved. When an ex-NLF member is asked why he fought, his answer invariably is cast in terms of political virtues: to achieve justice, democracy, and economic opportunity, to end corruption, to “return the government to the people,” and so on. He believes in these virtues and wants political power in order to make them reality. The NLF’s public pronouncements, such as the stated objectives cited earlier, are almost meaningless for political assessment because they are the goals of the GVN as well; for that matter, what government anywhere in the world does not claim to stand for progress, economic development, promotion of education, culture, science, technology, public health, and so on? In policy as well the NLF seeks to define the enemy in the narrowest terms possible. Its agit-prop cadres speaking in the villages offer appeals far more bourgeois than proletarian: landlords are not evil as such, but are divided into “oppressive” landlords and “patriotic” landlords (the difference being whether they are willing to cooperate with the NLF). In any case the NLF, regardless of the war’s outcome, will be dominated by Northerners with never a chance to exhibit their true selves. The Southerners no longer direct the organization, nor have they since the “regularization” or comunization of the Front was completed in 1964. Control now is in the hands of the Tonkinese or Northerners. About

half of the 40,000 civilian NLF cadres previously noted are so-called "pure" Northerners, as opposed to the "regrouped" Southerner (that is, the Southerner who went North during Operation Exodus in 1954) or the Cochinese Southerner; a "pure" Northerner is a person from North Vietnam who plans to return to North Vietnam, whose family is in North Vietnam, whose career is bound up with North Vietnam, and who therefore is basically loyal to the Northern objective of unification rather than the NLF objective of political power. If the NLF ever were to win in South Vietnam, it would be these Northerners who would assume the actual mantle of power, and their subsequent decisions would be made on the basis of DRV interests rather than Southern interests.

The year 1968 saw a sharp reduction in the importance of the NLF in the struggle in the South. With one exception (the Tet offensive) all the major battles of the year were fought by PAVN troops, not NLF troops. The battle of Khe Sanh, for example, involved three PAVN divisions; there were no NLF troops as such at Khe Sanh, although some NLF "fillers" were there in PAVN units. The NLF also came to count for less politically during the year, its monopoly on "legitimacy" broken by the creation of the Alliance (see p. 18); no longer could it claim to be the "sole legitimate representative" of the South Vietnamese people.

The People's Revolutionary Party

Until January 1962 the Communist Party in South Vietnam was known as the Southern Branch of the Vietnam Workers' Party (*Dang Lao Dong*), but at that time it was decided to abolish the Southern Branch and replace it

than simply a member of the NLF. Originally the PRP's stated role in the NLF was somewhat limited. It would assert, for example, that it was the "engine of the Revolution," the "vanguard" of the NLF, the "soul" of the NLF, also that it had no official ties with Communist parties or governments elsewhere beyond the "fraternal ties of communism." In short, the PRP claimed that it was the leader and the central organ of the NLF, which also included non-Communists, and that it was a Vietnamese nationalistic Communist organization. In 1965 this changed. A typical new characterization of the PRP came in an article in the North Vietnamese theoretical journal *Hoc Tap* titled "The Vietnamese People's Revolutionary Party and Its Historic Mission of Liberating the South":⁷

The partisans of Marxism-Leninism are in fact the soul of the NLFSV. . . .

The experiences of the world and our country's revolution have shown that in order to win the greatest success the national democratic revolution must be led by a workers' revolutionary party. . . . The partisans of Marxism-Leninism in the South have clearly noted the need for a thoroughly revolutionary party to act as a vanguard force for the southern revolution. . . .

The PRP is a revolutionary party of the working class in South Vietnam, a Marxist-Leninist Party. It has applied in a creative manner the principles of Marxism-Leninism to the concrete situation of the South in order to set forth correct revolutionary policies, lines and methods. . . .

The PRP maintains that the revolutionary struggle of the southern people must necessarily use the revolutionary violence of the masses to . . . advance toward smashing the reactionary government and replace it by a genuinely revolutionary government. . . . Straying from this path can lead only to a failure.

⁷ Hong Vu, "The Vietnamese PRP and Its Historic Mission in Liberating the South," *Hoc Tap* (Hanoi, January 1966).

The PRP began not only admitting but vaunting both its Communist nature and the paramountcy in the NLF. The PRP does this within Vietnam, even in public statements, but not externally. Prior to about mid-1966 the PRP structure ran from a central committee down to and including the district level, but not into the village as an organizational structure. In 1966 the *apparatus* was extended all the way to the village by order of a PRP Central Committee directive that overhauled basic PRP-NLF relations. The order had the effect of putting Communists, as Party members, into positions of direct overt control of the insurgency. While regularization or communization of the struggle had been underway for several years, the order completed the process. Its objectives were to build up the numerical strength of the Party — and the leadership seemed more interested in numbers than quality — and to push the individual Party cadre and Party member forward into stronger, more prominent leadership roles. Membership in late 1968 was estimated at about 75,000, including members of the PRP Youth League, the junior organization. Almost all of the 40,000 NLF cadres mentioned earlier also are PRP members, and, as noted, about half are Northerners. Among the practical results of the changes were an increased importance of the PRP and a corresponding decline of the NLF. Quite probably, future historians of the Vietnam war will record as one of its most important milestones the rise of the PRP and the shift to overt Communist leadership. It was a decision made because it was forced. The leadership became convinced that only by this means could the Front remain viable. The need was for a tighter, more centralized organization, more effective leadership, more dedicated cadres, and for the discipline, experience, and knowledge

that only the Party could supply. Also needed was more ideology, something to explain events to the faithful and provide them with a sense of certitude. Probably the changes in the directive did yield some of the results that the leadership sought. Perhaps the changes were beneficial as far as the Party members were concerned. But they had a strongly negative effect on indigenous Southerners in the NLF, especially the old-time cadres. Arriving *hoi chanh* began to tell interviewers that the "revolution has been betrayed," and for that reason they left the NLF ranks.

Organizationally the PRP employs directives and other official instructions from the Lao Dong or North Vietnamese Communist Party; it issues few documents in its own name.

Its official platform, issued at its founding in January 1962 and widely distributed throughout South Vietnam, listed ten points for which it stood:

1. We will overthrow the Ngo Dinh Diem government and form a national democratic coalition government.
2. We will carry out a program involving extension of democratic liberties, general amnesty for political detainees, abolition of agrovilles and resettlement centers, abolition of special military tribunal law and other undemocratic laws.
3. We will abolish the economic monopoly of the U.S. and its henchmen, protect domestically made products, promote development of the economy, and allow forced evacuees from North Vietnam to return to their place of birth.
4. We will reduce land rent and prepare for land reform.
5. We will eliminate U.S. cultural enslavement and depravity and build nationalistic progressive culture and education.
6. We will abolish the system of American military advisers and close all foreign military bases in Vietnam.
7. We will establish equality between men and women and among different nationalities and recognize the autonomous rights of the national minorities in the country.
8. We will pursue a foreign policy of peace and will establish

diplomatic relations with all countries that respect the independence and sovereignty of Vietnam.

9. We will re-establish normal relations between North and South as a first step toward peaceful reunification of the country.

10. We will oppose aggressive wars and actively defend world peace.

In April 1962 the PRP Central Committee issued what might be considered its foreign policy platform. It denounced the United States for "waging aggressive war" in South Vietnam; it thanked the Soviet Union, Communist China, and the bloc nations for supporting its cause; it urged all "peace-loving peoples" of the world to support the Vietnamese revolution; it urged the American people to demonstrate opposition to their government's policy in Vietnam; it denounced the British government for its stand on Vietnam; and it hinted that unless the Americans left Vietnam, it would call on the DRV, China, and the Soviet Union to come to its aid.

The objective of the PRP members is the more or less stated objective of Communists everywhere, namely the advancement of communism, which admittedly can be variously defined.⁸ A PRP cadre training manual, dated October 1965, described the PRP's policies and goals thus:

The Party [objective] . . . is to overthrow imperialism, colonialism, and feudalism, to build a life of peace, prosperity, and happiness without oppression and extortion. . . . Once indepen-

⁸ The average PRP member would agree that "the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of the class conflict." And he would say he believes in historical determinism, even if not sure of the term, that inevitably feudalism gives way to socialism phasing into communism, the key word being "inevitably." Even in this day of Communist polycentricism it seems safe to assert that most Communists throughout the world regard the class conflict and historical determination doctrines as being bedrock Marxism-Leninism and to deny them is to deny communism. See Chapter Five, pp. 176-177.

dence is obtained, the next step is unification, constructed and consolidated in every way to make the country powerful and rich, a stronghold of peace. Then will come the social reorganization, along Socialist-Communist principles, without land demarcation, cooperating in rural electrification, re-education of individuals, nationalization of private property, cultural and scientific education for everyone, progressing day by day to better and better things in all fields. . . . To prevent a return of parasitism and laziness that characterized the old regime, we will follow the Socialist principle of rewarding each according to his ability. We shall all live together intimately in the great Socialist family. . . . Once Vietnam is reunited and Socialism created, the Party will then continue to lead the people toward the establishment of communism. Communism will be practiced as it is in the Soviet Union. Factories, mines, fields, and all other land will be the common ownership of all the people. . . . Also, helping other small weak countries to struggle against imperialism and rid the world of conflict and to help provide everyone with freedom, legality, warmth, food, and happiness.

Something of the nature of the PRP is indicated by the PRP Party Pledge:

With the aid of Party members I have come to understand that the Party exists to achieve a national democratic revolution to pave the way to a Socialist and then Communist society. The Party's mission is to serve the proletariat, always struggling for their rights and privileges. It is the proletariat's destiny to be the vanguard of the Revolution, in both thought and deed. The Party strives to serve the people and their aspirations. *Kiem thao* [self-criticism] sessions strengthen our class consciousness, our solidarity, our will to fight.

I understand these things. I know and subscribe to the principles, directives, and purposes of the Party.

I hereby petition to become a member of the Party and pledge I will accept Party discipline and pay Party dues.

I expect to receive Party education so as to be able to advance the Revolution and fulfill the missions entrusted to me by the Party. I recognize the honor bestowed by admission to the Party

and stand willing to sacrifice all for the Party and the Revolution. In making this pledge I enhance my own life.

Once a Party member I pledge:

To be faithful to the Party and respect its many achievements.

To follow Party directives all designed to ensure the success of the Revolution.

To study Marxism-Leninism to strengthen my revolutionary consciousness and logic.

To strive to complete every mission assigned to me by the Party.

To engage in *kiem thao* sessions so as to improve my relations with the proletariat, strengthen the Party, and improve myself.

To protect the Party's honor and good name.⁹

The Party is particularly insistent on loyalty to the objective of unification and has made faith in this goal a requirement for all comrades. It appears to have been successful. Only Communist *hoi chanh* describe geographic regionalism in Vietnam (see the discussion in Chapter Two) as "bourgeois sentimentality," although some admit to interrogators that they have had difficulty in exorcising the attitude.

PRP cadres, especially in earlier years, were told to mute the Socialist-Communist nature of the organization where it was appropriate, as for example in an area with a heavy concentration of Catholic Vietnamese. Strangely, however, in outer trappings such as flags, the Communist imprint is firm. The PRP flag is a red field with a white hammer and sickle in the center; the PRP Youth League flag is a red field with three yellow stars in the center and a white hammer and sickle at the upper right. The PRP is a Janus-faced organization. In the South it insists to the Vietnamese people

⁹ This is the so-called "blood oath" of the PRP, often signed with solemn ceremony; the oath text often varies slightly. The one cited here is circa 1966.

that it is not Communist but Marxist-Leninist, indicating philosophic but not political allegiance and implying some sort of national communism. And it asserts internal control of the NLF. Internally and in the North the DRV characterizes the PRP as a vanguard Marxist-Leninist organization, indicating that it is in the mainstream of the world-wide Communist movement, both spiritually and materially connected to the North Vietnamese, the DRV government, and the Lao Dong. This is alliance communism. Regardless of its ideological image, there now is no ambiguity in the NLF-PRP relationship. The NLF is dominated by the PRP as an organization, by PRP goals, and by PRP cadres. So long as their two objectives — political power as the objective of the NLF and unification of the two Vietnams as the objective of the PRP — run parallel, the NLF-PRP machine will remain viable. But once the crossroads of choice are reached, then a rupture within the NLF is virtually inevitable. The size of the breakaway NLF force will be determined chiefly by the success of PRP cadres between now and the day of the future split, in weeding out potential deviationists.

The Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces

The PAVN-NLF Winter-Spring Campaign of 1967-1968 spawned a host of new political and quasi-military organizations in South Vietnam, all integrated, in varying degrees, into the NLF and the PRP. For a few months after the launching of the lunar new year (or Tet) offensive in February 1968, the proliferation of these groups was overwhelming. Alliances, regional fronts, "uprising" committees, political associations, revolutionary councils, federations of "peace-loving Buddhist soldiers," all churned out a welter

of manifestoes, communiqués, action reports, “solemn declarations,” and so on, as if the intent were chiefly to confound and bewilder foreign correspondents, academic researchers, and intelligence analysts in Saigon.

Gradually these NLF-sponsored organizations began to sort themselves out. One cluster, it was clear, consisted of proselyting organizations (called *binh van* in NLF terminology) designed to contribute to the Tet military campaign. A second cluster called People’s Revolutionary Councils were designed to administer towns and cities temporarily after victory, employing a commune concept like the original Paris commune or the Shanghai commune of the 1920’s. The third cluster was made up of negotiational front organizations.

The first cluster, the proselyting groups, employed various communicational, psychological, and political devices to induce — at the maximum — desertion by South Vietnamese soldiers or defection by GVN civil servants or — at the minimum — a lowering of the soldiers’ will to fight or of the civil servants’ dedication. This was a direct auxiliary contribution to the military offensive.

The second cluster was designed to be the precursor of a new revolutionary government, a bridge to facilitate the eventual amalgamation of the Southern and DRV administrative structures. These did not last in the cities after the Tet offensive, of course, because the PLAF could not prevail there; but they did continue to appear, at least in public reference,¹⁰ in the more remote areas where they were

¹⁰ In June 1968 Radio Liberation claimed that some 600 of the village councils had been created (out of a total of 2,500 villages in South Vietnam), which was approximately the same number of villages under NLF control. Radio Hanoi broadcasts at the same time, however, were using the figure of 100 village councils.

known as People's Liberation Councils or People's Liberation Committees, or collectively as People's Administration. After the failure of the PLAF to seize and hold the cities, the leadership decided to use the mechanism of the newly created people's council structure in overhauling administration in the NLF-controlled areas. Village administration was reorganized, and some village officials were replaced, but essentially it was a case of old wine in new bottles. Most of the changes were semantic. The relationship of the people's council to the NLF administration liberation committee was left deliberately vague, as was its relationship to the Alliance system. In any event the dominant force within the village remained the PRP, working either through the people's council or the NLF committee.

The third cluster was the most important one and the only one fully to survive the test of time. It did so by merging the various other groups into one general matrix that became known as the Alliance of National and Democratic Peace Forces of Vietnam.¹¹ Initially, the Alliances were urban-based, in Hué, Saigon, Da Nang, Nha Trang, and briefly in Dalat. First public reference to them came in a Hué area radio broadcast on the night of January 31, 1968; *Nhan Dan*, the major newspaper in Hanoi, took note of them on February 2. The Hué Alliance distributed leaflets during the Tet attack, the first week in February, informing the population that it stood for: "(1) the overthrow of the Thieu government; (2) regaining national sovereignty, ending this unjust war and forcing withdrawal of all U.S. and satellite troops; (3) restoration of peace and building of an independent, democratic, peaceful and neutral South Viet-

¹¹ The Vietnamese name is *Lien Mien Dan Toc Dan Chu va Hoa Binh a Viet Nam*.

nam;¹² and (4) negotiation with the NLF to achieve these objectives.”

In the rural areas the Alliance idea, as originally conceived, was a lesser part of the Revolutionary Council arrangement — a sort of village- and district-level negotiational front group. When the seizure of power failed, the leadership was faced with the choice of either quietly disbanding the Alliance system or turning it into new channels. It chose the latter and assigned the Alliance new tasks, both external and internal. The external task was to offer itself to the world as the “third force” in Vietnam, standing somewhere between the NLF-PRP power contenders and those in Saigon. The internal task was to upgrade itself and secure a political foothold; in the cities this, at best, would be tenuous and, of necessity, deeply covert; in the rural areas it involved incorporating the Revolutionary Council idea, not for administrative reasons but in an effort to develop a political base for the Alliance and prevent it from being dismissed by the world simply as another Vietnamese political tendency — with nothing to offer beyond its good offices. Hence, the Alliance increasingly sought to portray itself as an important, authentic, non-Communist, political force in South Vietnam with its own followers, its own programs, and its own political power:

I hope that you understand the history and the nature of the Alliance. The United States and the Thieu-Ky traitors drove the people to death and devastated the land. In the face of this miserable situation, the intellectuals, the younger generation, the progressive bourgeoisie, and the progressive elements of various political parties and religious groups sought measures to restore peace. These non-Communist nationalists and patriots, who do

¹² The DRV version of this statement, published in *Nhan Dan*, February 2, 1968, omitted the word “neutral.”

not belong to the Liberation Front . . . decided to cooperate with the NFLSV in order to achieve peace. The National, Democratic, and Peace Forces in various districts have inaugurated revolutionary committees or revolutionary organs of power to control administrative work in the newly liberated areas. For instance, revolutionary committees were formed in almost all the villages and hamlets in Thua Thien Province during the heroic resistance in Hué for a month by the Liberation forces at the time of the Tet offensive (1968), revolutionary committees were formed in 170 villages in the Delta district. Thus, revolutionary committees are being formed one after another throughout the country under the guidance of the National, Democratic, and Peace Forces.¹³

The result has been that the Alliance has assumed a dual image, or schizoid personality, as an alternative to the NLF or at least as a neutral middleman between the two forces, and as an integral part of an *apparatus* that includes the NLF, PRP, and DRV. For example, shortly after its formation the Hué Alliance broadcast this message throughout Central Vietnam:

Compatriots: The revolution we waited and yearned for has broken out. The heroic Saigon people and the revolutionary armed forces are launching attacks against the Independence Palace and other main offices and organizations of the Thieu-Ky puppet regime. A splendid spring is blossoming throughout our country. The aforementioned, resounding victories once again mark the unavoidable collapse of the Americans and puppets who are at the end of their trail. Let our compatriots . . . continuously rise up to smash all the bandits' puppet and wicked organizations, level off all the remaining strategic hamlets, chop to pieces the strategic highways, dismantle all war bases, wreck bridges and incessantly coordinate with the armed forces to stand up with a general uprising spirit. . . . Forward! Victory will be ours!¹⁴

¹³ *Tokyo Yomiuri*, a two-part article, July 6 and 7, 1968, based on an interview with an Alliance press spokesman in Paris, by the Yomiuri Paris Bureau.

¹⁴ An "Appeal of the National Leadership Committee of the Alliance

This is hardly the language of a good-offices middleman seeking to negotiate differences between two contending forces. However, when the purpose of the Alliance later became to convince the world that it could mediate between the NLF and, primarily, the Americans (rather than the GVN) and bring peace to Vietnam through coalition government, its tone became more reasonable. Compare the preceding message, of February 1968, with this statement by an Alliance spokesman in July 1968:

The Alliance consists of South Vietnamese nationalists. Their greatest task is the restoration of peace. The Alliance hopes that Vietnam will become an independent, neutral, prosperous, democratic country. Furthermore, South Vietnam will be a democratic, non-Communist, neutral country, independent of North Vietnam, for the time being after the restoration of peace. . . . The Alliance is completely independent of the Liberation Front. The Alliance calls for democracy, neutrality, and noncommunism. The political platform of the Liberation Front will not force communism on South Vietnam. The Alliance has decided to cooperate with the Liberation Front just because the platform is compatible with the desires of the South Vietnamese people. The alliance will become the sole political medium to create a peaceful political system on the basis of military power of the Liberation Front. Meanwhile, the Liberation Front will aid the Alliance with its military power for the restoration of peace.¹⁵

The national Alliance (as opposed to the various city Alliances) was formed at a "founding congress" held April 20-21, 1968, at a rubber plantation outside Mimot, Cambodia. A manifesto issued at this time outlined its objectives:

1. The South Vietnamese people are very eager for peace, but peace in honor and freedom. The Vietnam Alliance of National,

of National and Peace Forces," broadcast by Radio Liberation in Vietnam, February 2, 1968.

¹⁵ Yomiuri interview, *op. cit.*

Democratic, and Peace Forces advocates winning back South Vietnam's independence and sovereignty and demanding that the U.S. Government end the war, withdraw U.S. and allied troops from South Vietnam, abolish all U.S. military bases, and respect Vietnam's independence and sovereignty, as specified in the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam. South Vietnam's national independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity must be recognized and respected by all governments throughout the world. The Vietnam Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces is ready to discuss these problems with the U.S. Government.

2. The South Vietnam National Liberation Front, a patriotic force, which has greatly contributed to the mobilization, organization, and leadership of the struggle against foreign invasion during past years, cannot be excluded from settlement of all problems in South Vietnam. We advocate contacts with the South Vietnam National Liberation Front to win back national independence, restore peace, reconstruct the country, and establish conditions for our people to lead to a life of happiness in freedom.

3. The political regime in South Vietnam will be a Republic. The people will live in true freedom and democracy. Such rights as freedom of speech, press, religion, movement, congregation, organization, foreign travel, and so forth, will be guaranteed. There will be no difference whatsoever in the treatment of individuals. All organs of state power will be elected by the people through just and honest elections. People of all walks of life, men as well as women, and all nationalities and religions will be represented in those organs of state power. All Vietnamese will be equal in all respects. The rights of our people living abroad will be cared for, and the legitimate rights of foreigners living in Vietnam will be respected. The economy of South Vietnam should be independent and prosperous. Agriculture should be developed, and business, industry, trade, and transportation should be encouraged in order to make the country prosperous. Workers' rights and those of people of all walks of life should be respected. An agrarian reform program should be carried out correctly in South Vietnam to form a basis for agricultural development and improve living conditions and purchasing power of our peasants and contribute to over-all development of the national economy.

When peace is restored, the immediate measures to be taken are to heal war wounds and build and develop the economy. South Vietnam appeals to all countries that are not bound by any political conditions to assist her in terms of capital, technical aid, and specialists. Vietnam will try by all means to get rid of all the bad influence of the degrading culture and foster long-standing national traditions. Activities of social interest and education and examination systems should be fostered. Our compatriots belonging to ethnic minorities living in South Vietnam and old people, children, women, wounded and sick soldiers, and the disabled should be cared for.

4. South Vietnam will be an independent country with full sovereignty, observing the policy of a nonaligned country having relations with all countries regardless of their political systems, provided that those countries actually respect the independence and territorial integrity of Vietnam. South Vietnam has highly respected its friendship with the neighboring Cambodian and Laotian countries.

5. Concerning the problem of national unification: national unification is the earnest aspiration and social duty of all our people. In actuality, there are now two different political regimes in the two zones of our country. The problem of national unification cannot be settled at a moment's notice. Therefore, the two zones must discuss and negotiate between themselves on the basis of equality and respect for each other's characteristics with a view to advancing toward achieving national unification through peaceful means. Pending this unification, there must be relations between the two zones in the fields of economy, culture, correspondence, free movement, and so forth. Southern compatriots, regrouped in the north, will be free to return to the south in accordance with their desires. Conversely, Northern compatriots who went south will be free to return to the north.¹⁶

Important persons associated with the national Alliance were these:

Trinh Dinh Thao, sixty-eight, is a long-time radical close

¹⁶ Radio Liberation in Vietnamese to South Vietnam, April 25, 1968.

to being eccentric. He was born in North Vietnam, and is a Confucianist. He studied law in France, where he embraced Trotskyism, then returned to practice law in Hanoi and later in Hué and Saigon. He served as Minister of the Interior (that is, Justice) in the 1945 Tran Trong Kim Cabinet during the Japanese occupation. In 1954, 1959, and 1965 he was arrested by the GVN, the first two times for activities connected with "peace movements" (in association with NLF Central Committee Chairman Nguyen Huu Tho, who also was at that time a Saigon lawyer), and the third time during a Buddhist demonstration; but he was released after each arrest. Although he has not actively practiced law in recent years, he has been active in fringe-type left-wing movements, including one that stands for repartition of Vietnam (into the three former divisions of Annam, Tonkin, and Cochin China), with Central Vietnam or Annam becoming a neutral buffer state between the other two, and with Bao Dai returning as Emperor of Annam. His wife is from a well-to-do Southern family; one son is a Saigon lawyer, and a daughter is married to a successful Saigon jeweler. In February 1968 he left Saigon. He is chairman of the Alliance.

Lam Van Tet, in his late fifties, is an old-line Southern maverick radical, having been active most of his life in off-beat dissident political movements. A surveyor (or, according to his description, an engineer) by profession, he made a large amount of money (some sources say he is a millionaire) in land dealings in the Saigon area. A student Trotskyite, he was jailed at least twice by the French. In 1963-1964 he was a member of the largely honorary Council of Notables, set up by the Duong Van Minh government after the overthrow of the Diem regime to act as an official advisory body to the ruling Military Directorate. In 1966

he ran for the Senate, but his slate was defeated. He has religious connections in the Cao Dai and was chairman in 1964 of the All Religions Citizens' Front, composed of representatives of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Buddhists, and Catholics (represented by Reverend Hoang Quynh), which sought ways to make relations among the various religious groups in South Vietnam more amiable. He is vice-chairman of the Alliance.

Thich Don Hau, in his early forties, is a militant Mahayana Buddhist monk from Hué, associated with Hué's prestigious Thien Mu temple (where worships, among others, ex-Emperor Bao Dai's mother). Although closely associated with, and perhaps even the heir apparent at one time to, Vietnam's most famous militant Buddhist, Thich Tri Quang, Don Hau was not a political activist until 1966 when he entered the Buddhist Struggle Movement. His behavior at that time led some Vietnamese to label him a "sleeper" Communist; on the other hand, there was speculation in Hué in early 1968 that he was an involuntary supporter of the Alliance. Radio Liberation throughout 1968 broadcast several statements in his name. He is a Centerite, and has been listed by the Alliance as a vice-chairman.

Ton That Duong Ky, in his mid-thirties, is a history professor of royal blood from Central Vietnam. An active lay Buddhist, his moment of fame came in 1965 when he was arrested with two other persons on charges of "advocating false peace" and marched across the Ben Hai River bridge into North Vietnam, a scene recorded by a battery of television cameras. Hanoi quickly moved him on to Paris, from which he made his way, apparently with GVN knowledge, back to Saigon a year later. Considered highly intelligent although somewhat unstable by persons who knew him while he was teaching at Saigon and Hué

Universities, he has what probably is the most powerful position in the Alliance, that of secretary-general.

Le Van Giap, at sixty-one, is *éminence grise* of the Alliance, a former (and perhaps still) member of the French Deuxième Bureau. Born in North Vietnam, the son of a mandarin, he served French intelligence through the 1940's, switching sides to the Viet Minh in 1950, and switching again (apparently) in 1954 when he moved south to Saigon. He taught at Jean Jacques Rousseau high school in Saigon, where he earned a reputation for being strongly pro-French; he was active in French intellectual and cultural circles in the south. His official position is chairman of the Saigon-Cholon-Gia Dinh branch of the Alliance.

Dr. Duong Quynh Hoa, forty-two, is a French-educated obstetrician believed by Vietnamese police to be a member of the Communist Party (the only person in the Alliance leadership so labeled). While studying in France, she became engaged to a French Communist, who died shortly thereafter; she returned to Saigon and set up practice, becoming well-to-do in the process but never marrying. In 1961 she was arrested by the GVN after a Communist defector told the police she was a member of an important Communist cell in Saigon; later she was released for lack of corroborating evidence. Her brother, a lawyer in the mountain town of Dalat, was set upon, robbed, and murdered in the early 1960's, apparently by a gang of thugs, although she told friends later she thought the killing was government-ordered. A Southerner, she is assistant secretary-general of the Alliance.

Le Hieu Dang, in his mid-twenties, is a skilled agit-prop worker active in 1965-1967 in the Saigon Student Union, which he served as deputy chairman and chief of the propa-

ganda department. A militant Buddhist from Central Vietnam, he is considered highly idealistic by former friends who knew him as a law student at Saigon University. He is editor of the Alliance newspaper, *Save Our Land (Cuu Lay Que Huong)*. His position is assistant secretary-general of the Alliance.

Thanh Nghi, in his mid-thirties, is a Saigon journalist and the son of Hoang Thong, a well-known Southern artist. Well educated by the French, he is the author of a French-Vietnamese dictionary. His writings tended to be pro-NLF and were strongly pro-French.

Others in the Alliance's Central Committee include: (1) *Nguyen Van Kiet*, a French-educated Southerner and a Buddhist from Can Tho, former Saigon University French literature professor, and ex-GVN Ministry of Education official in the field of primary education; (2) *Tran Trieu Luat*, a Southerner and An Quang Buddhist, an ex-student radical who had been vice-chairman of the Saigon Student Union in 1964-1965, editor of the magazine *Student*, and an active member of the university autonomy movement; after graduation from Saigon University in 1967, he accepted a university position as instructor in the education faculty; (3) *Huynh Van Nghi*, a former teacher from the Mekong Delta, active at one time in the Hoa Hao sect.

In the Hué Alliance the most prominent members were: Chairman *Le Van Hao*, former ethnology professor at Hué University, an active lay Buddhist whose family at one time was closely connected with the Ngo Dinh Diem family; Vice-Chairman *Mrs. Tuong Vy*, former principal of the Dong Khanh girls' school in Hué whose two daughters are married to prominent GVN officials; Vice-Chairman *Thich*

Don Hau (described earlier); and Secretary-General *Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong*, a protégé of Don Hau and an active Buddhist militant from Central Vietnam. *Ho Huu Nhat*, about whom little is known, is listed as secretary-general of the Alliance branch in Saigon.

Certain characteristics of the leadership are worth noting. Virtually all the leaders of the Alliance have close, active identification with religious organizations in Vietnam, and the Alliance clearly is religious-oriented, probably as a tactic for gaining support. In addition, most of the leaders have some ties with the Vietnamese educational establishment. Thus much of the Alliance output is directed at the devoutly religious and at the student-intellectual, with the themes aimed at the former being chiefly war horror and peace at any price, while to the latter the appeals are idealistic, nationalistic, and anti-Establishment. It also appears that a disproportionate number of the leaders have a French education or other unusually close ties with the French. There definitely is a disproportionate number of Centerites in the movement, the ratio of Southerners to Centerites to Northerners being 2:4:1 (compared with the national South Vietnam ratio of 10:5:1). Beyond this, more subjectively, the leadership has an aura about it of lost causes, dilettantism, and amateurism in politics (except for Ton That Duong Ky and Le Van Giap).

The Alliance, through 1968 inside Vietnam, tried to generate a spirit of enthusiastic support for its program; but even among the Vietnamese at whom the movement was primarily directed — the devoutly religious, the disaffected student and intellectual, and the war-weary city dweller — the Alliance was not taken seriously, nor did its appeals have much impact even though the sentiments they ex-

pressed are widely held in Vietnam. The GVN did appear to take the Alliance more seriously. On July 21, 1968, the ten members of the Alliance Central Committee were tried *in absentia* on treason charges, found guilty, and sentenced to death, and all of their property was confiscated.

The Alliance maintains an extraordinarily close relationship with the NLF, the PRP, and the DRV, far greater than — in an outsider's view — prudence or judgment would dictate. The DRV, the Soviet Union, and the Communist bloc nations became its most vocal supporters; its public pronouncements were carried exclusively by Radio Liberation in South Vietnam and Radio Hanoi; and its information offices in Paris were in the NLF headquarters. In fact, DRV and NLF representatives around the world spoke publicly and authoritatively on all sorts of internal Alliance matters. All this had the distinct effect of blurring the image of the Alliance as a "third force."

The Alliance as a front for a front might be new, but the technique is old and orthodox in Vietnamese politics. One could almost write the past four decades of Vietnamese history in terms of front mergers. The special genius in this art of organization juggling is Ho Chi Minh. In the 1930's and 1940's he created a series of front organizations, one engulfing the next like the famous cartoon of a line of fish each about to be swallowed by a larger fish swimming behind it. With great skill he created, developed, and then merged a series of united-front organizations, each sizably larger than its predecessor, yet at all times under his control: the Indochinese Communist Party (which itself was a merger by Ho Chi Minh of three Communist parties) was merged with other organizations into the Viet Minh. This was merged with a group of organizations creating the

Lien Viet, which in turn was merged with still other groups into the Fatherland Front. One is left with a sense of *déjà vu* about the Alliance.

*The Democratic Republic of Vietnam*¹⁷

Since its creation in 1945 the DRV leadership has relentlessly and undeviatingly pursued one objective: the control and governing of all Vietnam under the Communist banner, or in its parlance, "the liberation and reunification of the Fatherland." Ho Chi Minh pursued this goal long before there was a DRV. A sampling of his thinking on the subject of unification, typical of the DRV leadership:

Peace has been restored in Indo-China on the basis of recognition of independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia; peace has been brought to us by the 1954 Geneva Conference. It cannot be consolidated as long as our country remains partitioned by the provisional demarcation line at the 17th parallel. . . . Thus peace and national reunification are our main demands for the time being.¹⁸

¹⁷ North Vietnam covers an area of 63,344 square miles and is slightly smaller than South Vietnam. Its 1968 population was estimated at 18,900,000, about 90 per cent of whom live in the Red River Delta and the adjacent coastal plain to the North. Lao Dong Party membership is about 800,000. PAVN, in mid-1968, was composed of about 500,000 men, of whom approximately 100,000 were in South Vietnam and 40,000 in Laos. PAVN had about twelve divisions of 12,000 men each, an organic military infrastructure, a 3,000-man Air Force, and a 2,500-man Navy. In addition, it has an estimated 250,000-man Regional Militia Force divided into five military zones across North Vietnam and a 28,000-man quasi-military Armed Public Security Force. Backing up those regular and regional military forces is a Self-Defense Force, a paramilitary organization of some three million men and women; members of this organization receive military training, perform local security missions, act as production workers where required, and serve as a backup reserve for PAVN.

¹⁸ Speech at the Tenth DRV National Day Anniversary, September 1955. Published in a booklet entitled *For a Lasting Peace, for a People's Democracy* (Hanoi, December 1955).

The North is the foundation, the root of the struggle for complete national liberation and the reunification of the country. That is why everything we are doing in the North is aimed at strengthening both the North and the South. Therefore to work here is the same as struggling in the South; it is to struggle for the South and for the whole of Viet Nam. . . . The North is being increasingly consolidated to become a firm support, a strong base for our entire people's struggle.¹⁹

The National Assembly has discussed the question of national reunification. . . . 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.²⁰

Our Party's immediate task is to lead the people to intensify the emulation to increase production and practice economy to build Socialism in the North in order to serve as a firm base for the struggle for national reunification.²¹

We are resolved to drive away the U.S. aggressors and to defend the freedom, independence and territorial integrity of our Fatherland. . . . The government of the DRV solemnly declares its unswerving stand: to resolutely defend Viet Nam's independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. Viet Nam is one, the Vietnamese people are one. . . .²²

We should strive to defend and build North Viet Nam into a stronghold and wholeheartedly assist the liberation of South Viet Nam. . . . Again we say to President Johnson . . . the problem

¹⁹ Letter to South Vietnam cadres regrouped in the North, June 1956. Quoted by Bernard Fall, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution: Selected Writings, 1920-66* (New York: The New American Library, 1967), pp. 272-273.

²⁰ Report on the Sixth Session of the National Assembly (First Legislature), February 15, 1957. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 278.

²¹ Speech at ceremonies commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the Founding of the Lao Dong Party, January 5, 1960. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 308.

²² Address to the National Assembly, April 1965. *Viet Nam Courier*, April 15, 1965.

of reunification Viet Nam must be settled by the Vietnamese people themselves without foreign interference. . . . Long live a peaceful, reunified, independent, democratic and prosperous Viet Nam.²³

The objective was within DRV grasp in 1954. The Viet Minh had defeated the French, at least psychologically, and all of Vietnam was theirs for the taking; they had achieved victory, only to be deprived of its fruit by their erstwhile allies; "sold out" perhaps would be not too strong a term. The Soviets, as part of a deal to scuttle the European Defense Community, and the Chinese, then pressing Nehru's *panch shila* (coexistence) and what was soon to be called the "Spirit of Bandung in Asia," convinced Ho Chi Minh and his fellow Politburo members to settle for temporary partition, using the argument that all the country soon would be theirs. This hope was soon dashed.

Nevertheless, the DRV continued to search for a means of unifying Vietnam, and its efforts to date easily can be traced. From about 1954 to about 1958, it sought to achieve unification by relying on French diplomacy, hoping that Paris would be able to implement the Geneva Accords. In 1959 there began a more direct route, which was to encourage through the instrument of the NLF the rise of social pathology or simple anarchy in South Vietnam, hoping that out of the chaos there would come into power in Saigon a government agreeable to the idea of unification. A great deal of anarchy was thus created, but the DRV did not achieve its objective. Then in 1964 there began a third effort, a direct military one: the dispatch of PAVN soldiers into South Vietnam with orders to achieve unification by pure military force. None of these three means — diplomacy,

²³ A Speech to the National Assembly, April 1966. *Viet Nam Courier*, April 28, 1966.

proxy struggle, or direct military—is mutually exclusive. Abandonment of any one may be temporary. The effort does suggest a high level of rationality in DRV thinking and indicates, if nothing else, that the leadership has no hesitation about abandoning one method or policy when another appears more promising.

Communist China

Communist China has had an active interest in the Vietnam war since its inception and since 1965, at least, has been an important participant in the war. As of late 1968 some 80,000 to 100,000 People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops were on duty in North Vietnam.²⁴ Many of them were noncombatant, such as railway battalions, warehouse and petroleum depot troops; but some were combatant, for example, antiaircraft crews. Because North Vietnam has no full-scale armament factories (as opposed to assembly plants), all of its weapons and ammunition must be imported. The bulk comes from China. Estimates on the amount and value of this military hardware, admittedly difficult to determine, ranged in 1968 from a conservative low of U.S. \$250 million per month to three times this rate. By all estimates the Chinese contribution is at least double that of the Soviet Union. Other economic relations also are close: from 12 to 15 per cent of the rice eaten in North Vietnam comes from China along with an estimated 25 per cent of the consumer goods.

The Chinese engage in a great deal of sideline cheering

²⁴ However, in late 1968 there were persistent reports out of North Vietnam that the Chinese were reducing their troop strength in North Vietnam. Probably the level of support, although increasing or decreasing according to need, will continue at an adequate level unless Hanoi turns, in Chinese eyes, in the direction of revisionism.

but indicate considerable reluctance to go beyond a training and quartermaster role. If one judges by official Peking pronouncements over the past three years, the Chinese leadership believes that the DRV and the NLF are fighting the war in the wrong way, in fact, are doing virtually everything wrong.²⁵ China would like to see North Vietnam and the NLF pursue a protracted conflict as self-sufficiently as possible, bleeding and humiliating America but giving it no excuse for striking harder at North Vietnam or at China. It would also like to see revolutionary fervor if not turmoil in Asia maintained and *détente* between the United States and the Soviet Union prevented or hampered. Most Sinologists whom the author knows—not only American but Chinese, British, Japanese, and Vietnamese—seem agreed that China will not dispatch PLA troops into South Vietnam unless its leaders perceive a direct threat to China, which is not the case under American rules of engagement as of late 1968. The chief significance of Communist victory in Vietnam to the Chinese—beyond the mystic benefits of proving the power of a people's war—would be a diminution of U.S. military prowess in Asia. But the full meaning of Vietnam to China goes beyond ordinary twentieth-century foreign policies. The Chinese world view contains the conviction that China has an *inherent right* to monitor the destinies of the peoples on its perimeter, those around the Middle Kingdom, and that these peoples have an *obligation* to defer to China, never to make a major governmental move, for example, without first clearing it with Peking.

²⁵ For example, if one reads the famed Lin Piao article "Long Live the People's War" (September 1965) as if one were an NLF cadre, what Lin seems to be saying is that *everything* the NLF does violates "people's war" principles. See *Jen-minh Jih pao*, September 2, 1965; also see William E. Griffith, *Sino-Soviet Relations, 1964-1965* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1967), Document 30.

This attitude of suzerainty — actually not so much an attitude as a highly ethnocentric unquestioned assumption — is far older than communism in China, virtually as old as China itself. But in this age of ultranationalism, in which each subgroup of human beings around the world is supremely conscious of its own identity and separateness, such a demand amounts to disassociation from reality, something that bothers the Chinese not a whit. This Chinese view of Vietnam will last far beyond the present war.

For its part, the NLF regards China as a big brother, older, wiser, stronger and a source of great support. A clandestine NLF newspaper published in the Mekong Delta in late 1966 declared:

We strive to learn from the Chinese People's Liberation Army about a transcendental, valiant, fighting spirit; about advanced techniques and strategy; about the art of people's war; and about the patterns of building internal ranks. We are determined to apply creatively their valuable experiences . . . in our anti-U.S. national salvation struggle. The South Vietnamese people constantly receive great, sincere, generous, steady, and efficient support and aid from the Communist Party, the government, and the people of fraternal China. . . . In addition to their full support in the political and moral fields, the fraternal Chinese people have constantly supported and helped the South Vietnamese people in an efficient and many-sided way in the material field. . . . The Southern Liberation Armed Forces are determined . . . not to allow the United States to use South Vietnam as a springboard for launching crimes against the Chinese people. This is our sacred obligation toward . . . the brother Chinese People's Republic.

A propaganda leaflet widely distributed in the South declared:

Workers everywhere in China have doubled and tripled their factory output to help Vietnam under the slogan: Every meter of cloth produced is a meter of skin taken from an American,

and every yard of cotton is a yard of American nerve fiber. . . . Thus the 650 million Chinese have demonstrated their sincere friendship for Vietnam [and] are bound together [with its people] under the hammer and sickle flag of International Communism. . . .

The relationship of the Chinese Communists to the Vietnam war is a highly dynamic one, always in tension and steadily in flux. The fact of the war is never as important to the Chinese leaders as are those internal events in China collectively described by that vague term "Cultural Revolution," which is here defined as the political, ideological, and personal struggle between the ideologues (or Maoists) and the pragmatists (whose nominal symbol is Liu Shao-ch'i but whose real strength is the generals of the People's Liberation Army). Neither is the war in Vietnam as important to the Chinese leaders as are the maneuvers and battles in the Sino-Soviet struggle, and in those instances where the leadership has been forced to choose between serving the struggle against the Russians and serving the Vietnamese, the former purpose unfailingly has prevailed. Thus any full analysis of China and the Vietnam war would require discussion both of internal events in China and of the Sino-Soviet dispute. Such, obviously, is beyond the scope of this book. The hopes of China, as opposed to her specific goals, seem reasonably clear: diminution of American military prowess in areas adjacent to China, preferably under humiliating circumstances; reaffirmation of China's moral and spiritual dominion over rimland barbarian countries; and assumption by governments in such countries of a deferential posture toward Peking in all major matters. The finite goals of China are much less easily discerned. It appears to be the consensus of the China watchers and other Sinologists whom the author consults that, in oversimplified terms, this is the

situation: In the struggle between the ideologues and the pragmatists, eventually the pragmatists will win, must win.²⁶ This is not to say that Mao Tse-tung himself necessarily will lose but that the policies within the Cultural Revolution for which he stood — bypassing the Party apparatus to establish a new power base called the Red Guard or the establishment of the “constant revolution” (life at the bottom of a malted milk mixer, as one Hong Kong Chinese put it) — will not endure and will gradually be relegated to history’s dustbin. The pragmatists and the ideologues differ sharply in their view of the Vietnam war. The pragmatists ask themselves what exactly is there in the war for China, and the answer for the most part is negative. The ideologues, on the other hand, don’t even ask the question. They *know* that the war has great meaning, mystical and indefinable perhaps, but nevertheless real. The support it generates will continue, unless, of course, Hanoi turns “revisionist.” Thus, if this assessment is correct, that ultimately at least the pragmatists will win in the struggle with the ideologues and when victorious, because of their very nature, will diminish rather than increase Chinese involvement in the Vietnam war, then obviously the Chinese role in Vietnam counts for less and less. Of course, there are too many variables to make this idea more than a useful hypothesis in evaluating news from China.

The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union’s influence in Vietnam has varied considerably over the years. It was relatively strong in 1960 to

²⁶ In fact, they have won, according to some China watchers. See Robert Elegant, “China’s Next Phase,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (October 1967), pp. 137-150.

mid-1963, then dropped off sharply until early 1965 when the DRV found itself desperately in need of certain sophisticated weapons such as MIG fighter planes and surface-to-air missiles. Accordingly, the Soviet Union's stock rose since it was the only source of supply. At all times, however, the Soviet influence has been considerably less than that of the Chinese, although neither has been excessive. Ironically, the North Vietnamese are offered a great deal of military assistance along with a quantity of advice by both the Russians and the Chinese, and because of the Sino-Soviet dispute, they can take the aid from both and the advice from neither. Thus neither side has much leverage.

The Soviet Union's chief and overriding interest in the Vietnam war appears to be a negative one, ensuring that the conflict does not get out of hand and turn into a nuclear war, which inevitably would involve the Soviet Union. Some Kremlinologists, especially in Europe, argue that the Soviet Union genuinely wants peace in Vietnam, as a means of achieving *détente* with the United States. From the vantage point of Saigon, however, there is little to support this contention. It is true the Soviet Union has exhibited some restraint in opening her weapons warehouses to the North Vietnamese — it has not given antiship missiles to the North Vietnamese which it has given to Nasser — but this perhaps is mere prudence.

The Republic of Vietnam

What the South Vietnamese want, quite obviously, is peace — though not at any price. Most Vietnamese feel they have fought too long and sacrificed too much simply to purchase the peace of a grave. Equally obviously, Vietnamese

want national development or modernization or nation building or whatever term one chooses to describe the expectation of the good life by ex-colonial peoples. In both dreams the people of South Vietnam consistently have been frustrated. During the Viet Minh war a certain amount of national development went on in Tonkin, under the Viet Minh. In Annam, under Emperor Bao Dai (and the French ruling in his name), there was less progress. In Cochin China, a virtual colony of France, there was no progress at all. South Vietnam, under President Diem, saw a certain amount of national development: economic rationalization, governmental reorganization, creation of a national army. But Diem, more traditional than reactionary, was only mildly interested in many of the nation-building activities (he was not particularly concerned about building basic industries, for example, preferring to keep Vietnam agrarian), and in any case the effort was interrupted by the resumption of war. But since 1966, in spite of the war and in some ways because of it, a surprising amount of nation-building activity has gotten underway. Economists in Vietnam believe that within a year or two after the end of hostilities Vietnam will be at the point of economic take-off.

South Vietnamese take an elemental view of the struggle and the objectives of their government: they want withdrawal into North Vietnam of PAVN troops now in the South, along with the Northern elements in the NLF civilian structure; they want, as the only workable way to peace, integration of the NLF members back into the society, but obviously not under circumstances in which the latter dominate (after all, that is what the war is all about to the South Vietnamese).

Foreign Minister Tran Van Do's statement on the conditions for peace in Vietnam represents both in substance and flavor the South Vietnamese attitude toward the struggle:

1. Since the war now in progress in Vietnam was provoked by Communist aggression and subversion, it is essential, first of all, that these subversive and military activities undertaken, directed, and supported from abroad against the independence and freedom of the people of South Vietnam cease, and that the principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of the two zones, a principle that was laid down in the 1954 Geneva agreement and in international law, be respected. Consequently, the Communist regime of Hanoi must dissolve all these front organizations and agencies it has created in South Vietnam under the title the Front for the Liberation of the South, Liberation Radio Station, and People's Revolutionary Party, and it must remove from South Vietnam the troops and the political and military leaders it has sent there illegally.

2. The internal affairs of the South Vietnamese people must be left to the discretion of those people in conformity with democratic principles and without any foreign interference from whatever source. That will be feasible, obviously, only when the aggression by the Communist regime of Hanoi and its campaign of intimidation to which the people of South Vietnam have been subjected have been terminated.

3. As soon as aggression has ceased, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam and the nations that come to its aid will be able to suspend the military measures in the territory of South Vietnam and beyond its boundaries that are now necessary to defend that territory against Communist aggression. Moreover, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam is prepared to ask friendly nations then to remove their military forces from South Vietnam. It reserves the right, however, to take whatever measures are necessary to see that law and order are respected throughout the territory of South Vietnam and to insure the safety of the South Vietnamese people, as well as the right to appeal again for foreign assistance in the case of further aggression or threat of aggression.

4. Lastly, the independence and freedom of the people of South Vietnam must be effectively guaranteed.²⁷

The United States and Other Pacific Nations

The United States, as of late 1968, had about 550,000 troops in South Vietnam, of whom about 15 per cent were combatant (45 per cent were engaged in what is called combat support — that is, directly supporting the fighting man — and 40 per cent were what was called administrative support). Other Pacific Ocean powers with troops in Vietnam were: the Republic of Korea, Kingdom of Thailand, Republic of the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand, for a total troop strength of about 90,000 men.²⁸

Listing the objectives of the United States in Vietnam presents a major problem in distinguishing that which is paramount, immediate, and directly germane to Vietnam and that which is primarily relevant to the domestic U.S. scene. The approach here, perhaps somewhat parochial, attempts to confine itself to the meaning of Vietnam to the United States in Vietnam only, and not to the meaning of Vietnam to the United States at home.

American objectives in Vietnam vary in degree of abstraction. Moving along the scale from the concrete to the abstract, America's objectives appear to this author as follows:

I. Withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Vietnam under

²⁷ Tran Van Do, "Conditions for a Just and Lasting Peace" (June 22, 1965) in Wesley R. Fishel, ed., *Vietnam: Anatomy of a Conflict* (Itasca, Ill.: Peacock Press, 1968).

²⁸ As of August 1968, 43 nations (excluding the United States) had given a total of U.S. \$86.7 million to South Vietnam in the form of equipment, supplies, expert assistance, and training grants. West Germany (U.S. \$21 million since 1954) was the largest. U.S. AID Press Release, Saigon, August 9, 1968.

the circumstances described in the Manila Communiqué, which stated:

(5) Removal of allied military forces.—The people of South Vietnam will ask their allies to remove their forces and evacuate their installations as the military and subversive forces of North Vietnam are withdrawn, infiltration ceases and the level of violence thus subsides.²⁹

The most finite objective, therefore, is to get the PAVN infantry divisions back into North Vietnam, along with the Northern civilian elements in the NLF.

2. Removal of all foreign forces from Laos and reinstatement to full effectiveness of the Geneva Agreement of 1962 on Laos. Laos has great relevancy for Vietnam. Many of the more astute observers of the Southeast Asia scene have long insisted that any settlement of the Vietnam war must also involve a settlement in Laos, that stability is not possible in either place unless it exists in both. As of late 1968, at least 40,000 PAVN troops were in Laos and the DRV-Pathet Lao *apparat* controlled about half the country. The Pathet Lao organization is permeated with DRV "advisers," both military and civilian; and they, rather than the Laotian Communist cadres, make the decisions, initiate actions, define doctrine, and in general keep the movement on the track and moving. A haunting specter in Southeast Asia is that of war finally ending in Vietnam only to begin in Laos. At any rate, it seems clear that a settlement of the Vietnam conflict must also involve the matter of DRV activities in Laos.

3. Reaffirmation and reapplication of the principle that there ought not to be any change on the international scene — that is, between countries — *by force*. The United States is

²⁹ Manila Summit Conference Communiqué issued in Manila, October 25, 1966.

not against unification of Vietnam per se, but it is against unification by force. This is part of a broader American foreign policy principle—the result of the trauma of the 1930's in Europe and later World War II—that those who would change the international scene by force should be stopped early because they never will desist and eventually will have to be stopped at a higher cost. This is seen by America not as a desire to become an international policeman but simply as a matter of national interest. From the American viewpoint, the question of Vietnamese unification should be decided by the people of North Vietnam and the people of South Vietnam in free-choice circumstances.

[We] deplore the partition of Vietnam into North and South. But this partition brought about by the Geneva Agreements of 1954, however unfortunate and regrettable, will be respected until, by the free choice of all Vietnamese, reunification is achieved.³⁰

4. Development of a condition in South Vietnam in which the people can exercise their right of self-determination, to decide without coercion their own political future:

We [conferees] are united in our determination that the South Vietnamese people shall not be conquered by aggressive forces and shall enjoy the inherent right to choose their own way of life and their own form of government. . . . Our common commitment is to the defense of the South Vietnamese people. Our sole demand on the leaders of North Vietnam is that they abandon their aggression. . . . The people of South Vietnam seek to resolve their own internal differences and to this end are prepared to engage in a program of national reconciliation. When the aggression has stopped, the people of South Vietnam will move more rapidly toward reconciliation of all elements in the society and will move forward, through the democratic process, toward human dignity, prosperity and lasting peace.³¹

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

This is the so-called moral obligation, an expression of American moral responsibility for the people of South Vietnam.

5. Maintenance of a credible American commitment, the honoring of treaties, legal obligations, and official understandings. This is not the same as maintenance of American "prestige" in Asia, which in itself is not worth the life of one American. But it does involve picking up the Communist gauntlet of challenge of endurance, for Vietnam above all is a test of wills.

6. Maintenance of an ideological equilibrium in the Pacific. This objective largely accounts for the presence of the various Allied troops in Vietnam. Further, it is a goal probably sought by almost all nations of Asia. Each nation, even the smaller Communist ones, sees as its national interest that no one nation — not China, not Japan, not the United States, not any country — should ever dominate the area. But instead there should be a system in equilibrium. Each also seeks a balance of power in military and economic terms, but ideology is the cutting edge. Concomitant with this, each Asian nation seeks to redress the situation when the balance is threatened. As a Pacific Ocean power, it is in the U.S. interest to contribute toward maintaining this ideological equilibrium; that was the meaning of U.S. involvement in the Korean War, and U.S. leaders see the involvement in Vietnam partly in these terms. It is the chief reason why the allied nations in the Pacific have sent troops to Vietnam:

The nations represented at this conference are united in . . . their resolve for peace and in their deep concern for the future of Asia and the Pacific. Some of us are now close to the actual danger, while others have learned to know its significance through bitter past experience. . . . At the same time our united purpose

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is peace — peace in South Vietnam and in the rest of Asia and the Pacific. . . . We are united in looking to a peaceful and prosperous future for all of Asia and the Pacific.³²

³² *Ibid.*